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Constructing Memory in Post-War Lebanese Novels
Konstruování paměti v poválečných libanonských románech

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Declaration

I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 6. května 2022

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Thesis abstract

This thesis examines how contemporary Lebanese authors construct memory in post-Civil War Lebanese novels. In other words, focus is given to novels that deal with the psychological, social, confessional, political, and economic consequences of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The core of this thesis revolves around the literary depiction of collective and individual memory in the selected works of second-generation Lebanese authors. The thesis relies alongside Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field on theoretical frameworks of psychology and sociology centered around memory, trauma, nostalgia, and their implementation in contemporary literary works.

Keywords: Modern Arabic literature, Lebanese Novel, Sociology of Literature, Literary Field, Lebanese Civil War, Collective Memory, Postwar Memory

Abstrakt

Tématem této diplomové práce je způsob utváření paměti v poválečném libanonském románu, tj. románové tvorbě zabývající se psychickými, sociálními, konfesními, politickými a ekonomickými důsledky libanonské občanské války (1975–1990). Diplomant se zaměřuje na metody literárního zpracování kolektivní a individuální paměti ve vybraných románových dílech několika druhogeneračních libanonských spisovatelů. Práce se opírá vedle teorie literárního pole Pierra Bourdieho o teoretické poznatky z oblasti psychologie a sociologie, zaměřené na výzkum paměti, traumatu, nostalgie, jakož i jejich aplikaci na moderní románovou tvorbu.

Klíčová slova: moderní arabská literatura, libanonský román, sociologie literatury, literární pole, libanonská občanská válka, kolektivní paměť, poválečná paměť

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1 Introduction

The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) was a long-lasting conflict that undeniably left its mark on many layers of Lebanese society and to this day, it remains the overarching topic in post-war Lebanese literature.¹ The ending of the war is traditionally tied to the 1990 Taif Accords, but whether the war really ended, or perhaps more precisely, whether the post-war reconciliation efforts were effective and lasting peace was achieved, is oftentimes disputed.²

“Today, in remembrance of 40 years from the ending of the Civil War, the majority of Lebanese agree on the fact that the war has not ended. The war is therefore not a memory, but still is present and needs reading,”³ wrote prominent Lebanese author Elias Khoury (*Ilyās Khūrī*) for the pan-Arab newspaper *al-Quds al-‘Arabī* in 2015.⁴

The aim of this thesis is not an evaluation of the results and effects of post-war reconstruction and reconciliation in Lebanon. When studying memory, Sune Haugbolle reminds us that “the aim of a history of remembering is not to clarify what actually happened during the war (in itself a very valuable and timely exercise) but to identify why certain frameworks for understanding the past have been accentuated over others.”⁵ Thus, the aim of this thesis is to offer insight into how second-generation authors (re)construct a memory of the Civil War in post-war Lebanese novels. As a significant part of this thesis relies on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of the literary field⁶ and Felix Lang’s⁷ application of it in post-war Lebanon, this thesis may be considered as closely connected to the field of sociology of literature.

¹ Lang, F. (2016), 2. The reasons for this will be introduced in the following chapters. Lebanese post-war cinema seems have the Civil War as its defining feature as well. For more information: Lina Khatib, *Lebanese Cinema: Imagining the Civil War and Beyond*. I. B.

Tauris, London, 2008,

² For example:

Ghosn, Faten, and Amal Khoury. “Lebanon after the Civil War: Peace or the Illusion of Peace?” *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 3 (2011): 381–97

³ Khoury, E. (2014).

⁴ The article was published on April 13, 2015, 40 years after the beginning of the Civil War in April 1975. Elias Khoury is one of the most prominent figures in the Lebanese literary field and actively participates in discussing the Civil War, its effects, and post-war reconciliation efforts.

⁵ Haugbolle, S. (2010), 10.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu’s literary field is a sociological approach to studying literary production. For Bourdieu, a social (literary) field is a relatively autonomous part of a social space governed by its own rules and structured by its system of distributing various forms of capital. Among the different forms of capital, Bourdieu works with primarily with economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (but not exclusively). Within the social field are actors in a constant dispute for the distribution of capital and key positions within the field. Actors entering the field must accept the set of rules of the field but at the same time may influence its form through their specific *habitus*.

⁷ Felix Lang is, at the time of writing, a research fellow at the Department of Arabic Literature and Culture at the University of Marburg. He finished his MA studies in Arabic and Social Anthropology at the University of St. Andrews in 2009 and completed a Ph.D. at the University of Marburg in 2014. His thesis was published two years later as *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital*.

In this thesis, I support the idea that literature is a medium of cultural memory.⁸ Literature fulfills a multitude of mnemonic functions, such as “*the imaginative creation of past life-worlds, the transmission of images of history, the negotiation of competing memories, and the reflection about processes and problems of cultural memory.*”⁹ We will later see, based on the reading of the two selected post-war novels, which of these functions are most visible in the selected works and how the authors’ various approaches to the issue differ.

Ernst Cassirer stated that human recollection (remembering) is not only a mere return of events or repetition but a “*rebirth of the past; it implies a creative and constructive process.*”¹⁰ This is one of the reasons I do not consider the title of this thesis, *Constructing Memory in Post-War Lebanese Novels*, as far-fetched. When writing a novel about the Civil War or its consequences on Lebanese society, authors cannot avoid (re)constructing a certain memory of the war which they later present through their works.

Regarding the commonalities between literature and memory, Astrid Erll emphasizes three central intersections between literature and memory. Condensation, narration, and genres. Condensation is understood as “*the compression of several complex ideas, feelings, or images into a single, fused or composite object,*”¹¹ it is a natural aspect of both literature and memory. Another typical aspect is a narration or *narrativization* of specific events, which we again find in large parts of cultural memory and contemporary literature. Simply put, “*the world of cultural memory is a world of narrative.*”¹² Lastly, Erll views literary genres, especially the traditional and strongly conventionalized ones, as an easy solution for writers to provide meaningful patterns of representation for experiences that would otherwise be hard to reflect upon and interpret.¹³

After the brief introduction on why studying memory in literature is possible and worthwhile, let us now turn back to the widely discussed issue in Lebanon, *state-sponsored amnesia*, and the role of a modern Lebanese author. Why do Lebanese post-war authors tend to stand in such firm opposition to war amnesia that they blame the state for¹⁴ (or more precisely,

⁸ As presented in Chapter VI of Erll, A. (2011). *Memory in Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan: London. By cultural memory I mean the concept promoted by Aleida and Jan Assmann. They break up Maurice Halbwachs’ traditional idea of collective memory into *communicative* and *cultural memory*. The former being the daily, mostly orally transmitted form of memory and the latter being a more materialized memory, based primarily on institutionalized symbols.

⁹ Erll, A. (2011), 144.

¹⁰ Cassirer, Ernst (1944), 74.

¹¹ Erll, A. (2011), 145.

¹² *Ibid.*, 147.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁴ This understanding of post-war Lebanese cultural production is promoted in both Lang, F. (2016) and Haugbolle, S. (2010).

the confessional elites) and actively attempt to offer a different approach to the issue in their works? After all, state censorship seems to be hardly visible in Lebanon,

*“On the one hand, there has, to the best of my knowledge, not been a single case of censorship that involved a novel by a Lebanese author since the end of the civil war. On the other hand, however, occupying the dominant pole of the Lebanese literary field, these authors have an interest in portraying Lebanese literary production as “up to world standard” – a picture in which practices of censorship do not fit very well.”*¹⁵

If Lebanese authors claim not to perceive state censorship as a barrier or reason for fighting against amnesia, then what exactly is understood by state-sponsored amnesia, if not censorship? Why do Lebanese authors continue to write about the Civil War, even more than thirty years after its formal ending? These questions will, among others, be addressed in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 is titled *The Lebanese Literary Field* and relies on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the literary field and Felix Lang’s 2016 book *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital*. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the current state of literary production in Lebanon and offer an explanation as to why the Civil War remains the primary theme of post-war Lebanese literary production to this day.

Chapter 3 *Post-War Memory in Lebanon* maps post-war collective memory in Lebanon. It begins by introducing the concept of collective memory, originally coined by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s, and then introduces the different theoretical approaches to studying memory. A section of the chapter is dedicated to the relationship between collective memory, national identity, and victimhood, all in the specific context of Lebanon. The core of the chapter may be considered subchapter 3.3., where the issue of state-sponsored amnesia in Lebanon is discussed and introduced as a widely popular and cited phenomenon. This subchapter also reveals why modern Lebanese authors tend to place themselves in opposition to what is often perceived as state-sponsored amnesia.

The chapter ends with a brief but dense subchapter 3.4. where two significant aspects of (collective) memory are introduced, nostalgia and trauma. Both these terms, especially the former, are particularly fitting in the context of the Lebanese collective memory of the war. The radical transformation of Beirut from the Paris of the East to a war-torn city of rubble naturally paved a path for nostalgic sentiment in Lebanese society, a natural craving for the past pre-war times. Nostalgia for the pre-war city of Beirut is thus commonly present in Lebanese society

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

and we will see how such sentiment is used by contemporary authors to portray and criticize the views and values of characters representing the older generation.

Finally, in Chapters 4 and 5 two selected novels by second-generation¹⁶ authors, Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan (*Janā Fawwāz al-Ḥasan*) and Rabee Jaber (*Rabī‘ Jābir*) are analyzed through the lenses of memory and present a quite fresh perspective on the role of a modern Arab intellectual, as promoted by Zeina G. Halabi.

¹⁶ The second-generation group of Lebanese authors will be explained later. The classification of post-war Lebanese authors I work with in this thesis is borrowed from Felix Lang's 2016 publication *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital*.

2 The Lebanese Literary Field

Mapping the literary field of post-Civil War Lebanese novelists writing in Arabic¹⁷, I will rely primarily on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the literary field and Felix Lang's publication *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital*.¹⁸ Originally a doctoral dissertation, this study provides a compelling insight into modern Lebanese literary production. In the first chapter, also named *The Lebanese Literary Field*, the author builds upon Bourdieu's concept of the literary field and applies it quite unprecedentedly to Lebanon. As the author himself mentions in the introduction, Bourdieu's sociological approach to studying literary production and works through the lenses of the literary field has not enjoyed great popularity in Arabic literary studies so far.¹⁹

Lang is well aware of the limited applicability of Bourdieu's theory in Lebanon, also due to its bilingual (recently even trilingual²⁰) nature of literary production and a significant number of authors living in diaspora. One of the crucial aspects of this division of the Lebanese literary field is a general disinterest in the local literary production written in other languages. In one of Lang's interviews, Ramy Zein, a Lebanese French-writing author who teaches francophone literature at Saint Joseph University, said his students "*have no knowledge of Lebanese literature whatsoever when they arrive at the university*".²¹ There is even some rhetorical rift between the francophone and arabophone literature in Lebanon. In another of Lang's interviews, Elias Khoury qualified francophone literature in Lebanon as "*'marginal and inconsequential, an essentially neocolonialist enterprise funded by French money'*", and stating that "*the last Lebanese francophone author worthy of note had been Georges Shéhadé – who died in 1989*".²² In a later interview with Lebanese francophone author Hyam Yared, Lang learns that Khoury had recommended her novel to his publisher for translation into Arabic. As Lang himself suggests, one of those younger generation francophone authors apparently unworthy of note was later personally suggested for translation by Elias Khoury based on personal relations. This shows how being aware of personal ties between what Bourdieu would

¹⁷ I have decided to focus on Lebanese novels written in Arabic. The bilingual or, in recent years, trilingual (Arabic, French, English) nature of Lebanese literature is known and is strengthened by the many Lebanese authors living and writing abroad.

¹⁸ Lang, F. (2016). *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan US.

¹⁹ Lang, F. (2016), 4.

²⁰ The third language of Lebanese literature is English, common especially among the younger generations.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

call actors in the literary field and an actor's relation to the field as a whole allows us to understand some aspects of literary production more clearly.

Pierre Bourdieu's major work on literature was his 1992 book *The Rules of Art*. This work, which encompasses his earlier ideas on the issue, examines literary production through a strictly sociological approach. This approach was often criticized, sometimes even accused of being a "*comprehensive endeavour to annex literary study under an all-embracing sociology*".²³ Nonetheless, Bourdieu's concept has proven to be applicable to not only France (Bourdieu's theory has also been accused of being francocentric²⁴) but to other parts of the world, such as China.²⁵ Bourdieu's theory of the literary field, initially restricted to a national scale, may be even helpful when studying literature on a worldwide scale using comparative techniques.²⁶

For Bourdieu, a social (literary) field is a relatively autonomous part of a social space governed by its own rules and structured by its system of distributing capital.²⁷ Within the social field are actors in a constant dispute for the distribution of capital and key positions within the field. Bourdieu's field theory can be understood similarly to a magnetic field, in the sense that it is not only the actors in it that shape the field, but the field itself influences the actors inside. „*This does not mean that external events or factors are not important for actors, but they do need to be translated to the internal logic of the field (see Swartz 1997, pp. 128, 215) – akin to the principle that the magnet may cause the field, but it is the field that has the effects on the iron filings.*”²⁸ Actors entering the field must thus accept the rules of the field. Among the different forms of capital, Bourdieu seems to work primarily with economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

„...*capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications, and as social*

²³ Ahearne, J., & Speller, J. (2012). Introduction: Bourdieu and the Literary Field. *Paragraph*, 35(1), 1, citing Jean-Pierre Martin, 'Avant-propos: Bourdieu le désenchanteur' in Bourdieu et la littérature, edited by Jean-Pierre Martin (Nantes: Editions Cécile Défaud, 2010), 7-21.

²⁴ Ibid., 6.

²⁵ Hockx, M. (2012). The Literary Field and the Field of Power: The Case of Modern China. *Paragraph*, 35(1), 49–65.

²⁶ Boschetti, A. (2012). How Field Theory Can Contribute to Knowledge of World Literary Space. *Paragraph*, 35(1), 10–29.

²⁷ Růžička, M., Vašát, P. (2011), 130.

²⁸ Martin, J. L. (2003), 24.

capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility."²⁹

These forms of capital should not be understood as absolute and unchangeable, as they may differ in various social and historical contexts. For example, some fields, such as the academic one, may distinguish and value the rhetoric capital.³⁰ For something to be considered a form of capital, it must also be convertible into symbolic capital, which is not recognized as one of the basic capitals.³¹ Symbolic capital could be understood as explicit recognition, acknowledgement, or appreciation of an actor in the field. *"Social recognition, which acquisition is practically identical with the acquisition of power, is according to Bourdieu the final goal of all social disputes, both symbolic and open. These disputes are played – consciously or unconsciously – by all actors in all social fields."*³²

The autonomy of a social field (or the relations of forces established within it) varies according to different periods and national traditions. It is related to the degree of symbolic capital present in a specific field, as Bourdieu writes: *"It [the autonomy of a field] is related to the degree of symbolic capital which has been accumulated over the course of time by the action of successive generations (the value accorded to the name of a writer or philosopher, the statutory and almost institutionalized licence to contest powers, etc.). It is in the name of this collective capital that cultural producers feel the right and the duty to ignore the demands or requirements of temporal powers, and even to combat them by invoking against them their own principles and norms."*³³

I propose that the Lebanese literary field may be considered a quite autonomous one as described above. Of course, I do not mean that it is somehow independent of the field of power, as *"the fields of cultural production occupy a dominated position, temporally, within the field of power. As liberated as they may be from external constraints and demands, they are traversed by the necessity of the fields which encompass them: the need for profit, whether economic or political."*³⁴ I would merely like to suggest and slightly expand on Lang's thoughts

²⁹ Bourdieu, P. (1983), 16.

³⁰ Ruzicka, M., Vasat, P. (2011), 130.

³¹ Ibid., 130.

³² Ibid., 130.

³³ Bourdieu, P. (1996), 221.

³⁴ Ibid., 216.

that the Lebanese post-war literary production, headed by Elias Khoury, indeed defines itself in opposition to the Lebanese political elites as the local temporal power.

With its capital Beirut, Lebanon was traditionally known as the “‘*printing press of the Middle East*’ the haven of free speech where gathered were writers from all over the Arab world who were prosecuted in their home countries; the Beirut of Adonis and Kanafani...”³⁵ Nowadays, we might find other significant Arab novels published in Beirut that would not have been able to be published in their respective countries, such as *al-Mawt ‘Amal Šāqq* (Death is Hard Work), by the Syrian Author Khaled Khalifa.³⁶ Beirut was welcoming to a number of intellectual and artistic movements inspired by the long-lasting presence of Western influence in Lebanon. There was not a more open city in the Arab world like Beirut. The city itself shows how a cultural region may change immensely in a limited amount of time (demographically, economically, politically). These significant societal changes naturally form the foundation of exceptional literary production — many of these processes culminated with the outbreak of the Civil War.

*“Yet that wartime identity had replaced several others that Beirut had taken on in its pre-war period. That of the beguiling cultural heart of the Arab world, where the region’s intellectuals, political exiles, and journalists had moved to escape the tyrants at home. Beirut was a city, it was often said, that published books and gambled with ideas, in contrast to the dreary Arab nationalist orders ruled by officers in most other countries of the region.”*³⁷

The rising societal tensions in Lebanon shortly before the war were convincingly captured in the 1972 novel *Ṭawāḥīn Bairūt*³⁸ (Windmills of Beirut). As suggested earlier, Lebanon's cultural production, including literary production, seems to be resilient in the war and post-war times.

Close historical ties to France influence the Lebanese literary field to this day. But what does truly make Lebanese literary production unique? As mentioned earlier, pre-war Beirut was considered the Paris of the Middle East. This understanding of Beirut as a cultural hub was naturally undermined with the rising inner and anti-Israeli tensions. Nonetheless, the long-lasting and devastating conflict paved the path for the emergence of various wartime stories

³⁵ Lang, F. (2016), 15.

³⁶ The novel depicts the gruesome reality of the Syrian civil war and how a previously simple task such as travelling from Damascus to a nearby village becomes a life-threatening struggle.

³⁷ Young, M. (2021, February 23).

³⁸ Awwad T. Y. (1972). *Ṭawāḥīn Bairūt*. Manšūrāt Dār al-Ādāb, Bairūt. The novel was translated in 1976 to English under the title *Death in Beirut* by Leslie McLoughlin.

that became the basis and starting point of modern Lebanese prose. Authors producing novels inspired by the Civil War put the Lebanese personal experience of conflict and significant changes to good use when writing. Themes of collective memory, amnesia, trauma, or nostalgia naturally emerged in post-war novels. The emphasized absence of an overarching narrative of the war by the government supports the idea of the importance of writing and documenting the Civil War and showing its effects on society and individuals. All these points resonate in Lebanese society. The specificity of the Lebanese literary field lies, and regarding this, I side with Lang, in its homogenous nature. The Lebanese post-war literary field became a relatively small and uniform field. Its overarching topic was the Civil War, and its defining factor became opposition to what is often described as state-sponsored amnesia.

The larger the symbolic capital an author acquires throughout his career, the more heard his voice will be and the more impact his words have. Concerning Lebanon, the conversion of social capital is of great importance for the acquisition of symbolic capital.³⁹ In other words, interpersonal relations between the actors in the Lebanese literary field (authors, journalists, reviewers, publishers, and many more) play an important role in how recognized or acknowledged an author will be. This is visible in the non-existence of negative reviews, “[...] *young journalists will always be eager to try and increase their standing by writing flattering reviews [...] In the eight months of going through three major Lebanese papers on a daily basis, not once did I come across an article containing an unfavorable judgment of a work by a Lebanese author.*”⁴⁰

Lebanese literary production since the 1980s (which has been centered around the novel) has been largely equaled with civil war literature.⁴¹ In other words, the war remains the primary theme of post-war Lebanese literature. Other focal points of academic interests regarding Lebanese literature include the Lebanese contribution to Nahda (*al-Nahḍa*) writing and the Mahjar writers surrounding Khalil Jibran (*Khalīl Jibrān*).⁴²

When discussing the homogeneity of the Lebanese literary field Lang mentions the aspect of a *moral imperative to remember past violence* that resonates throughout both first- and second-generation authors and compares it to a post-holocaust concept of memory.⁴³ This aspect is closely related to trauma and Freud’s psychoanalysis, or to the repression of traumatic

³⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 30.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴² Ibid., 2.

⁴³ Ibid., 5.

memories and the need to analyze them. Holocaust memory is a widely studied phenomenon and we will later see how some of its theoretical concepts (such as M. Hirsch's *postmemory*) may be applied to post-war Lebanon as well.

But Lang views this popularly held explanation of authors *needing* to write about the Civil War in order to relieve trauma as insufficient. In a less psychological and perhaps more sociological approach, Lang relies on Bourdieu's concept of the literary field and argues that "*writing about the war has become the principal mode of what Bourdieu calls 'legitimate' or 'serious' literature.*"⁴⁴

Writing a novel about the Civil War thus becomes a way to gain recognition in the Lebanese literary field and is supported among the social circle of Lebanese authors. How people who control daily newspapers' cultural pages, literary prizes, and translation programs operate with notions of literary value lies at the heart of the continuing importance of civil war writing in Lebanon.⁴⁵ Writing about the Civil War becomes a way for the new actors (authors) in the literary field to accept the rules of the literary field and accumulate capital. A novel's translation and its publication with a Western publisher, or the author's recognition by Western academia and literary criticism confer on him or her an amount of symbolic and economic capital.⁴⁶ Furthermore, winning prizes such as the IPAF⁴⁷ usually secures a translation.⁴⁸ This is especially important for Arabic written literature, as a translation is the only way for a work to be internationally recognized. Lebanese French and especially English written literature do not need to secure such translations as the original works are written for a broader, worldwide readership.

*"At the time of my fieldwork, virtually all writing on the war came from authors who were firmly settled in what could roughly be described as a secular upper middle class."*⁴⁹ In effect, the Lebanese authors form a to some extent homogenous social circle and may explain why the basic principles (opposition to government, creation of a secular democratic state) remain the same even throughout the two generations. More so than generations, the language preferences of authors seem to constitute supposed borders between the authors.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁷ International Prize for Arabic Fiction

⁴⁸ Ibid., 22-25.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 7.

Lang reminds us several times throughout the book to be wary of producing grand statements about society or the creation of a national collective memory through reading and analyzing local literature. In his own words, “*first and foremost, literature is relevant for those who work with it: those who write it, those who read it, those who buy it, and those who sell it; those who build lives, careers, and reputations by it*”.⁵⁰ Reading or writing civil war literature does not provide us with an all-encompassing overview of the collective memory of a nation on the issue of the Civil War. It does not even provide us with a rudimentary form of national collective memory, but rather a collective memory of the upper-middle class Lebanese intellectuals, who assert their position as speakers of the general populace in opposition to the establishment.⁵¹

Lang distinguishes two generations of Lebanese civil war authors. The first generation, headed by Elias Khoury⁵², witnessed the war as adults. The works of the first generation are characterized by “*a rejection of objective truths and the deconstruction of narrator and narratives*”.⁵³ He describes the early post-war novels of the first generation as having a deconstructionist meta-narrative.⁵⁴ The ideas of postmodernity are deeply embedded in these works and deconstructing or rejecting nationwide metanarratives is quintessential to postmodern thought. Jean-Francois Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* writes: “*The grand narrative [metanarrative] has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation.*”⁵⁵ Metanarratives in their nature suppress other ideologies and annihilate whatever is different or in opposition to its system and in postmodern understanding, they are ought to be replaced by minor narratives that are relative, local, and reject unitary truth.⁵⁶

The second generation, while still adhering to the basic principles of the first generation (such as opposition to state-sponsored amnesia and the need to reflect on the war) adopts a slightly different approach. While the Civil War still remains a gateway to the field of modern Lebanese literature and authors of the first generation are viewed as venerated elders with

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 206-213.

⁵² Among other authors of the first generation, we can name Hoda Barakat, Rashid al-Daif, or Hanan al-Shaykh.

⁵³ Ibid., 92. This corresponds with a general distrust of authoritative narratives. Lang proposes that their adherence to this form of relativity in their post-war novels may be the result of their disillusionment after the war and their political involvement with Marxism before and in the early stages of the war.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁵⁵ Lyotard, J. F. (1984), 37.

⁵⁶ Li, Wen-chi. (2021), 163-164.

unquestioned legitimacy⁵⁷, the focus of the second generation changes from deconstruction to the construction of memory. In Lang's own words, "*the meta-narrative of deconstruction has largely disappeared from the writings of the second generation and has been replaced by a dual narrative of trauma and archivization, which seeks to reconstruct and integrate the past in the present.*"⁵⁸ While both generations focus on the need of remembering the war, the second generation takes a more pro-active stance on the issue. Although the absurdity of war is a theme common in both generations, the second-generation narrators or protagonists tend to be deeply unsettled and disoriented, while striving to make sense of their own existence and the world around them.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the first generation focused on the rejection of a monolithic truth in their works and relativism. Ironically, this is what has come back to haunt the second-generation novelists.⁶⁰ The absence of a collective memory of the war troubled the new generation of authors. It is a conflict of which they have mere childhood or transmitted memories and is rarely discussed in schools or public debate yet has a profound effect on their lives.

Whether this quite strict philosophical rift between the first- and second-generation authors presented by Lang can be traced in the selected works for this thesis will be discussed later. Nonetheless, a small dose of foreshadowing is appropriate before we begin the next chapter. As we will later see, the two authors (Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan and Rabee Jaber) both in their selected works understand the role of a post-war author in Lebanon quite differently and apply different methods of constructing and presenting post-war memory in their novels. We will also see that the need for a collective memory is nowadays adopted by the first generation as well, especially Elias Khoury.

In this thesis, I have decided to focus on the second generation of authors.⁶¹ Both of the selected authors have been born either during or slightly before the war and have thus witnessed the war mostly as children or when coming of age. During most of the war, they could not fully perceive, comprehend, or contextualize the dramatic war events that unfolded around them. This left these authors with fragments of memories of the war.⁶²

⁵⁷ Lang, F. (2016), 128-131.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 178.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 181.

⁶¹ Specifically on the selected novels of Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan and Rabee Jaber.

⁶² Memories both direct and transmitted, we will discuss the issue of memories in the following chapter while mapping post-war memory in Lebanon

3 Post-War Memory in Lebanon

Focusing on the aspect of memory in post-war Lebanese society, we will touch upon personal and collective memory. Furthermore, we will distinguish two post-war generations of authors. The first generation is characterized by witnessing the war personally, whether in their adult life or while coming of age. These people have personally experienced the war and lived through it. Their recollection of the war is traditionally interwoven with personal memories and experiences. In terms of literary authors that have resided in Lebanon throughout the war and have written on it, we can mention the following: Elias Khoury, Rashid al-Daif, or Hoda Barakat.

For the second generation, the concept of *postmemory* as developed by Marianne Hirsch may be applied.⁶³ The term originally used in the context of remembering the Holocaust has now proven to be valuable and relevant in other areas as well. It may be understood as a form of collective memory transmitted to or among people who were not alive during the events in question (or have not been able to perceive them yet fully).

*“‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.”*⁶⁴

Postmemory is a framework that allows us to understand how second-generation authors comprehend and *channel* the events of the Civil War through their novels. Marianne Hirsch argued that postmemory can be both *familial* (inherited, vertical, and intergenerational) and *affiliative* (horizontal and transgenerational, channeled across a larger social field). They are not entirely separate, *affiliative* memory may be understood as nothing more than an extension of the *familial*.⁶⁵ In the last decades, Holocaust memorialization, across a variety of genres and media, has moved from the *familial* to the *affiliative* range of postmemory (private to public)

⁶³ The term *postmemory* was first used in her 1992 article “Hirsch, M. (1992). Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory. *Discourse*, 15(2), 3-29. “, was later developed in another article in 2008 and finally refined in the book “HIRSCH, M. (2012). *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.”

⁶⁴ <https://www.postmemory.net/>

⁶⁵ Hirsch, Marianne. (2012), 36.

with the aim of ensuring that Holocaust memory lives on beyond the second generation.⁶⁶ Second-generation Lebanese authors work around a similar concept, their aim is to preserve memory and stir debate on the Civil War through their works.

Craig Larkin in 2010 makes use of Hirsch's concept and places it in post-war Lebanon. In his own words:

*"Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, it explores the memory of a generation of Lebanese who have grown up dominated not by traumatic events but by narrative accounts of events that preceded their birth."*⁶⁷

Larkin conducted several interviews of Lebanese high school and university students in 2005-2006, not long after the Syrian military withdrawal in March 2005. He ascribes a significant part of the self-identity of Lebanese youngsters and their view on the war to the various narratives and accounts they heard, often from their parents and close family. As a Lebanese student interviewed by Larkin recalls a family story, describing a *familial* postmemory:

*"Personal memories, I have none - I was born in 1988 – but I have my parents' memory. I have heard lots of tales, like they were always running from bombs, but I have this one memory that I can really feel that I lived it, for it's pretty intense and my dad told it to me. He wasn't linked to any parties or anything, but he was getting blood for people, and he was in a car with a microphone, shouting, 'We need blood, just donate!' And he sees a car coming and there is a guy tied to that car and he [is] being dragged alive through the streets. And the party was the Syrian party called Tishrin, an important party. And he lost it and just started screaming, 'Don't drag people. No for dragging people, no for doing this!' He was really in danger, but he couldn't hold himself – and most of my uncles and aunts worked in hospitals to help people."*⁶⁸

Let us now turn to an element of the Lebanese Civil War that is widely discussed and paramount to understanding how post-war memory in Lebanon is constructed. Palestinians are closely connected to the Lebanese Civil War; their role is plentifully discussed especially when studying the outbreak and early phases of the war. The 1975 Beirut bus massacre is oftentimes mentioned when reading about the outbreak of the war, along with an emphasis on the deeper roots of the conflict that were already present in Lebanese society.

⁶⁶ Crownshaw, R. (2010), vi.

⁶⁷ Larkin, C. (2010a), 616.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 631.

*“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.”*⁶⁹ Palestinians are a staple part of Lebanese society, actively participating in local cultural and political life and the natural process of creating a national memory. Among the Lebanese, local Palestinians and their activities may be viewed differently or even opposingly, depending on a number of social, political, or sectarian factors. When studying the Lebanese Civil War, we cannot free ourselves of the Palestinian question or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole.

While some may focus on the individual experiences of their family members during the war and perhaps draw inspiration from the recounts of their heroic acts, others may simplify the conflict by cherry-picking horrific and traumatizing events. The images and events of Sabra and Shatila from 1982 remain the landmark event in the Palestinian narrative and are *“the starting point for any discussion or explanation of the war”*.⁷⁰ This is not surprising, as nationalist sentiment, in general, exaggerates the importance of specific events to fit into the overarching narrative. The Palestinian national narrative is traditionally constructed around historic failures and injustice that give a sense of shared destiny, a common past, collective suffering, and feelings of victimization.⁷¹ Even Rashid Khalidi, a prominent scholar that rejects the notion of Palestinian identity being formed primarily as a reaction to Zionism, views the events of the 1948 Palestinian exodus in his book *Palestinian Identity*⁷² as an incident that *“reinforced preexisting elements of identity, sustaining and strengthening a Palestinian self-definition that was already present”*, and that it *“brought the Palestinians closer together in terms of their collective consciousness, even as they were physically dispersed all over the Middle East”*.⁷³ The paradoxical nature of severe negative events committed against a group of people (nation) that often instead of weakening national consciousness strengthen it and promote group bonding will be discussed later in the framework of victimization.

In the Palestinian narrative, the overarching theme seems to be injustice and loss of land. This means that even severe negative events may lead to the strengthening of national consciousness. But these traumatic events must be remembered, discussed, and written about, as they are by the Palestinian and Lebanese cultural production and Palestinian authorities, but

⁶⁹ Haugbolle, S. (2011).

⁷⁰ Larkin, C. (2010a), 624.

⁷¹ Morris, B. (1998), 270.

⁷² Khalidi, R. (1997). *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 38.

perhaps not so much by the Lebanese government.⁷⁴ And this is where nostalgia and non-state actors (literary authors) come into play. As will be discussed in Chapter 3.4., nostalgic memories among other things distort negative experiences by transforming them into positive memories and may even work as a coping mechanism for past experiences.

3.1 *Collective memory*

Collective memory was coined in the 1920s by the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. It is characterized by having various meanings and definitions, but one of the recent ones promoted by Henry Roediger from the Department of Psychology at Washington University in 2015 is that collective memory “*is a form of memory that is shared by a group and of central importance to the social identity of the group’s members*“.⁷⁵ He further argues that collective memories may boost group identity and shape social and political discourse.⁷⁶

The term has, due to its wide, overlapping definition and sometimes questionable and obscure use, come under scrutiny by researchers. Collective memory can be viewed as methodologically inseparable from personal memory or a synonym for the old and widely known *myth*.⁷⁷ Other similar terms have emerged during the years, including “*social memory*”, “*collective remembrance*”, “*national memory*”, “*public memory*”.⁷⁸ The reason for the use of *collective memory* in this thesis instead of the terms mentioned above is due to its widespread use.

We will begin our mapping of the Lebanese post-war memory by focusing on collective memory. Sune Haugbolle’s theoretical framework of collective memory in Lebanon will be presented first. Then, focus will shift to the relation between Lebanese collective memory and national identity, and lastly victimhood.

Sune Haugbolle in his 2005 study *Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War* provides us with a theoretical framework on mapping Lebanese collective memory. He

⁷⁴ The issue of *state-sponsored amnesia* (as is often called in academia and journalism) will be discussed subsequently.

⁷⁵ Roediger, H & Abel, M. (2015), 359.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁷⁷ Gedi, N., & Elam, Y. (1996), 47. Or Kansteiner, W. (2002), 180-182.

⁷⁸ Kansteiner, W. (2002), 181.

differentiates between private and public memory. The former is described as shared exclusively⁷⁹ and the latter inclusively⁸⁰ through public debate.

Private memory is understood as the various family, sectarian, and street stories that emerged in the post-war period. As the author mentions, Beirut was (and still is) ridden with representations of these private memories even in public space through various banners, slogans, posters, or street graffiti even after twelve years of civil peace. The territorial aspect was visible as well, when crossing the more affluent Christian Ashrafiyya quarter to the underprivileged neighborhoods of Basta or Bashura, the atmosphere significantly changes. *“Twelve years of civil peace have not managed to bring these areas back to their former state. Instead, they have remained the rather uniform zones that the war years made them (with the possible exception of Ras Beirut)”*.⁸¹

On the other hand, the inclusive aspect of public memory aims to provide an overarching narrative about the war through public debate. As the author suggests, the downside of this effort is the need to tread carefully around the actual details of the war and therefore is as much an artful construction of silences as it is an act of positive memorialization.⁸² Through this, the author distinguishes collective, public, and private memory. Collective memory in Lebanon in Haugbolle’s terms should be constructed from both public and private memories. In other words, a grand national narrative promoted by the intelligentsia and cultural figures that overlooks the family and sectarian stories would be regarded as unreliable and unconvincing. This is why the horrendous crimes and family stories of loss and anger should not be silenced, forgotten, or shared only within a sectarian context, but implemented into an overarching narrative about the war. Haugbolle five years later in his publication *War and Memory in Lebanon* (2010) stops finely distinguishing between public and collective memory and even abandons Halbwachs’ term, at least in the context of Lebanon.

*“I use the term ‘memory cultures’ to describe the production of historical memory, because it denotes a plurality that fits the Lebanese context better than, for example, the more commonly used, and more monolithic sounding, ‘collective memory’.”*⁸³

⁷⁹ Exclusively in the sub-national groups that promote their own narratives of the war, such as the various sects and militias.

⁸⁰ Inclusively in the nationwide sense.

⁸¹ Haugbolle, S. (2005), 200.

⁸² Ibid., 202.

⁸³ Haugbolle, S. (2010), 8.

Sune Haugbolle decided to shift the focus from the governmental/official discourse of the civil war and its effects on the collective, national comprehension of the events that are often studied in political science, to the more unofficial modes of memory transmission. Therefore, he prefers the term *memory culture*, which better captures the plurality of various memories of the war in Lebanon. Thus, he does not focus on a dichotomic government vs. general populace understanding of memory transmission, which is generally transmitted from the top to bottom and has its core interest in ideology.

Haugbolle in his 2010 book identifies two main forms of memory cultures in Lebanon. Firstly, the counter-hegemonic culture of *memory makers*, embodied by the large number of cultural figures that are occupied with questions of how to memorialize the war through artistic expression (books, graffiti, movies, architecture...).⁸⁴ The other form of *memory culture* is represented by the various political parties and groups, that produce “*hagiographic frameworks for understanding the past that were used to underpin and legitimise their political identity.*”⁸⁵ Both forms of *memory cultures* in Lebanon negate the Lebanese state’s official approach to the war, that it is best forgotten.⁸⁶ Here we see that Haugbolle still to some extent works with his previous theoretical framework of public and private memory. The political *memory culture* promotes some sort of hegemonic private memory, transmitted primarily exclusively throughout its supporters (and specific confessional groups). The artistic *memory culture* aims for a more inclusive approach, focusing on how to memorialize the war as a whole. Both forms of *memory cultures* naturally have their *memory makers* and negate the official discourse of state-sponsored amnesia. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

Collective memory remains to be of interest in scholarly debate and its understanding has naturally evolved. The different approaches to collective memory through various scholarly disciplines such as political science, international relations, sociology, or anthropology has been mentioned earlier. Its methodological ambiguity, such as its closeness to the term *myth* was touched upon as well. Jan Assmann, a German Egyptologist⁸⁷, shed light on the issue of myth and collective memory by addressing its temporal and institutional dimensions.⁸⁸ Assmann in

⁸⁴ Ibid., 8-9.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁷ Along with his wife Aleida Assmann.

⁸⁸ The *temporal and institutional dimensions* of collective memory in Assmann’s work were mentioned in Władnyak, L. (2019), 183.

his own words breaks up Halbwachs' concept of collective memory into *communicative* and *cultural memory*.

Cultural memory is an institutionalized form of memory, based on created materialized symbols or in other words things that are meant as reminders, such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions.⁸⁹ “*In order to be able to be reembodyed in the sequence of generations, cultural memory, unlike communicative memory, exists also in disembodied form and requires institutions of preservation and reembodyment*”⁹⁰. Assmann's cultural memory is much closer to the myth mentioned earlier. It is a form of collective memory that is institutionalized and transmitted by material symbols. Temporarily it spans further back in time. On the other hand, communicative memory is closer to Halbwachs' understanding of collective memory. It is non-institutional and not formalized by any forms of material symbolization and lives in everyday interaction and communication. For this reason, it has a limited time depth which normally reaches no further back than eighty years or three interacting generations.⁹¹ Communicative memory naturally recedes over time into the background and information becomes scarcer and more vague the further back one moves into the past.⁹² This understanding of memory is close to the *familial* and *affiliate* understanding of postmemory by Marianne Hirsch that was mentioned before, especially how Holocaust memory transmission has in the latest decades moved from *familial* to *affiliate*.

In Lebanon, we see an active form of post-war communicative memory. Family stories mentioned earlier are thoroughly present and transmitted in Lebanese society. What Lebanon seems to lack is a form of cultural memory of the war, institutionalized and promoted by the state. The absence of these state-built institutions will be briefly discussed in the next chapter in the framework of state-sponsored amnesia.

Authors of artistic production (the *memory makers*) whether in books, movies, or sculptures, generally avoid providing an over-encompassing narrative of the war. They stress the need for plurality and are hesitant of providing a one-sided interpretation of the war. Let us not forget the earlier discussion of public and private memory and the specifics of the Lebanese literary field discussed earlier or Lyotard's postmodernist critique of metanarratives. This insistence on plurality and relativity of truth stems from their own understanding of the role of

⁸⁹ Assmann, J. (2008), 111.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 111.

⁹¹ Ibid., 111.

⁹² Ibid., 112.

Lebanese cultural figures. A generally accepted metaphor on the issue is of the mirror. Prominent Lebanese novelists Elias Khoury and Rabee Jaber tend to use what Lang calls the mirror metaphor, indicating that their works should only be used by the readers as a mirror to the conflict, not an all-encompassing truth and that an open-ended, dialogic process is needed to understand the war.⁹³ Elias Khoury responded in a 2001 interview to the question of what role does memory play in literature in the following manner: “[...] *Literature can provide a context for rethinking and contemplation but its role is not to recollect memory or the past. Literature can only question how things are put together and how they are seen.*”⁹⁴

Nonetheless, some form of institutionalization of postwar Lebanese memory should be addressed, as political turbulence seems to repeat itself: “...*the history of modern Lebanon seems to fall in periods of around fifteen years. The years 1943, 1958, 1975, 1990, 2005 each mark political upheavals of epochal importance: independence, short civil war, long civil war, peace and the end of Syrian hegemony*”.⁹⁵ To clarify and add to Haugbolle, the end of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon in 2005 was preceded by the assassination of Lebanese PM Rafiq al-Hariri. The Year 2020, another 15 years after the Syrian withdrawal, was tragically and symbolically marked by a massive explosion at the Port of Beirut.

Collective memory, the term coined in the 1920s by Maurice Halbwachs, was introduced along with a brief overview of the more recent scholarly debates regarding the issue. Sune Haugbolle’s evolving concepts of post-war memory in Lebanon and Jan and Aleida Assmann’s concepts of communicative and cultural memory were presented as well. Now, the relationship between collective memory and national identity shall be briefly discussed.

3.2 *National identity and victim narratives*

Meir Litvak’s 2009 publication called *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity* supports the importance of collective memory in the national identities of Israelis and Palestinians:

“Moreover, while collective memory is the basis of every national identity, it seems to play a more substantial role in shaping the self-perception and culture of peoples that have

⁹³ Lang, F. (2016), 40.

⁹⁴ Mejcher-A., S. (2001), 5.

⁹⁵ Haugbolle, S. (2010), 3.

*suffered historical defeats (such as the Serbs, the Jews, and the Palestinians) than of victorious nations (such as the Americans). In the words of Ernest Renan, ‘suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort.’*⁹⁶

The notion of historical defeats and suffering may apply to the history of Lebanon as well. The long-lasting civil war, whether it was primarily the outcome of inner strife or foreign interventions, has had lasting and profound effects on many parts of Lebanese society. It is no surprise that areas riddled with conflict are prone to victim sentiment, as conflicts traditionally produce a victor and loser, who may then feel as a victim of injustice. Victimhood narratives are common in many international disputes and are not unique to the Middle East alone.⁹⁷ The available literature seems abundant on the subject of Israeli-Palestinian victimhood, some researchers even describe the process between both national identities as competitive.⁹⁸

The same cannot be said for the Lebanese Civil War or Lebanon. This may be because of the complicated sectarian nature of the conflict. We have discussed the issue of private and public memories introduced by Sune Haugbolle above. Regarding the public memory of the war, the victim sentiment is not as visible. This is due to two factors. Firstly, the grand narratives of public memory overshadow personal family and sectarian experiences of the civil war. These personal experiences are precisely where victim sentiment is most prevalent and emotional. Stories of the other side slaughtering, kidnapping, or abducting a close relative are especially heartbreaking and fit into the victimhood archetype. Secondly, as was mentioned previously, public memories are shared inclusively throughout Lebanese society. As the Lebanese War was a mainly civil conflict, the main opposing sides were sub-national. The inclusive nature of public memory would clash when placing victors and vanquished/victims among its own people.⁹⁹ This is evident in the “no victor no vanquished” (*lā gālib wa lā maḡlūb*) principle that has become quite traditional in Lebanese post-war negotiations and became widespread in 1958 after the short civil war that ended in US intervention.

“None of the rounds of communal fighting in 1840, 1860, 1958 and 1975– 90 produced a profound change in the system of feudal and sectarian power sharing. Instead, in each

⁹⁶ Litvak, Meir. (2009), 1.

⁹⁷ Many other conflicts of the 20th century have been studied as well through the lenses of victimhood, including the World Wars and the Vietnam War.

⁹⁸ One of many examples is Shnabel, N., & Noor, M. (2012).

⁹⁹ On the other hand, placing blame on the interventions of other countries and nationalities in the conflict is not uncommon. Criticizing Palestinians or the Israeli and Syrian interventions and constructing the narrative as a “war of the others” fits quite well into public memory. But it does not solve the deep inner-conflicts of Lebanese society.

postwar situation, a strategy of oblivion was imposed to let the social system in place prevail (Khalaf 2002: 150). Therefore, it was with an ironic view to history that the motto from 1958 was reintroduced in 1990. There was to be no victor and no vanquished in the civil war. All were equally guilty and should forgive one another and go on with their lives.”¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, victimhood is very well visible in Lebanese post-war private memory. As mentioned above, family, sectarian, and street stories of injustice, revenge, or martyrdom are common and reflected in the streets of Beirut. The sectarian division of Lebanon provides us with a plethora of possible narratives and victimhood stories from various sides of the conflict and we will later see how the Lebanese authors deal with the issues of a multiplicity of narratives and perspectives of the war.

3.3 *State-sponsored amnesia*

The term *state-sponsored amnesia*¹⁰¹ in the context of Lebanon is often used to describe the fact that post-war governments disregarded crimes and traumatic events of the war and in simplistic terms chose to forget them instead of dealing with them through systematic trials, education or institutions. In other words, the war was left behind on the basis of the *no victor and no vanquished* principle which became an unwritten tradition in Lebanese civil conflicts. Although such principle is effective in the short term for a quick and efficient transfer of power, it does not solve the deeply rooted problems of Lebanese society in the long term. It should be noted that what is described as state-sponsored amnesia in Lebanon is generally not considered an all-encompassing, systematic state suppression of memory. It is viewed more as a pragmatic choice of the various past Lebanese militia leaders and sectarian foremen who were and are in office. These people have often participated in the war and prefer to leave the events behind. As Haugbolle in his 2005 article points out, there has been no state-sanctioned memorial apart from a few scrappy attempts that would provide an overarching narrative (public memory) of the war.¹⁰² In Assmann’s terms, we could say that no proper state-imposed institutionalization of communicative memory into cultural memory occurred in post-war Lebanon.

¹⁰⁰ Haugbolle, S. (2010), 70.

¹⁰¹ It is a term widely used in academic literature and news articles to describe the post-war political situation in Lebanon. The phrase is also abundantly used in the case of China, especially in the context of the 1989 Tiananmen protests (but not exclusively).

¹⁰² Haugbolle, S. (2005), 197.

So how may a war victim or a victim's family cope with the fact that the state, or Lebanese society in general, has a tendency of abandoning wartime memories and forgetting the horrendous acts that were committed in hope of national reconciliation? Lebanese post-war authors naturally discuss these issues in their novels, and we will later see in Chapters 4 and 5 how they view their role as modern cultural figures. The two selected authors, although discussing similar issues, will both adopt a different stance on the role of a modern Lebanese author and present their views through the usage of various characters and narrative techniques in their novels.

Family stories similar to the one mentioned by Larkin (a father standing up to members of a Syrian militia that were dragging a man tied to a car across the streets) often are the first encounter of post-war generations with the discourse of the civil war and constitute what we understand by private memories. The discussion of the war in Lebanese public schools "*remains an untouchable topic*"¹⁰³ and is often frowned upon. This reality is coined by the use of the term *al-ahdāth* in reference to the civil war. A Lebanese student interviewed by Larkin provides his view on the matter:

*"The war is talked about all the time - the war is always on people's tongues even though we have no memory of what happened . . . Taboo - yes, in class it is just known as the al-ahdas [the events]. After 'the events,' during 'the events' – 'the events' are a big void, a nebulous concept, what's inside you don't know, but you know it's black! You know it's there, it's ominous, but you don't know what's inside."*¹⁰⁴

The politics of suppressing and forgetting the recollections of war by the Lebanese government may be also seen in the 1991 general war amnesty. It applied to crimes committed before March 1991, including "*crimes against humanity and those which seriously infringe human dignity*".¹⁰⁵ Crimes against religious or political leaders were excepted from the law, but such exceptions have mainly been applied against political leaders not in favor of the government.¹⁰⁶ This is something quite unique to post-war Lebanon. The 1991 amnesty along with the *no victor and no vanquished* policy mentioned before paved the path for past militia leaders who oversaw war crimes and other atrocities to engage in post-war politics through the

¹⁰³ Larkin, C. (2010a), 621.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 620.

¹⁰⁵ Haugbolle, S. (2005), 193, citing Nizar Saghieh, "Dhakhirat al-harb fil-nizam alqanuni al-lubnani," in *Memoire pour l'avenir, Dhakira lil-ghad, Memory for the Future: Actes du colloque tenu a la maison des nations unies, ESCWA(Beyrouth)*, ed. Amal Makarem(Beirut: Dar an-Nahar,2002), 225.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 193.

various sectarian parties and blocs. No large-scale national or international trials were held. In other words, the civil war leaders in Lebanon were never systematically brought before a court for the war crimes they oversaw. This is quite different from what happened in other similar civil conflicts, such as those in Rwanda or Yugoslavia. The abrupt ending to the war triggered by the Syrian intervention in 1990 and the ousting of Michel Aoun perhaps contributed to the lack of international criminal courts, as it is sometimes disputed whether the war really ended after the Taif Accords. It should be noted that although widespread violence ceased in Lebanon after 1990, the demobilization process of militias took much longer, and Hezbollah was fully omitted from this process.

Remembering and reminiscing about the war in post-war Lebanon was done primarily through cultural production, by which various nonstate actors disputed the ethical, political, and historical meaning of the civil war.¹⁰⁷ Thus, we can put the state-sponsored efforts of amnesia and the rich cultural production of post-war Lebanon into opposition.

As mentioned previously, Sune Haugbolle in his book *War and Memory in Lebanon* distances himself from the usage of collective (national) memory in the frame of the Lebanese Civil War. He argues that the Lebanese Civil War was not a two-sided conflict (like perhaps the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), but a multiple, changing civil war.¹⁰⁸ In other words, he underlines the plurality of different narratives belonging to numerous sub-national identities and is generally skeptical of “*grand narratives of nationalist historiography*”¹⁰⁹ (which could be more easily used in the context of for example Israeli vs. Palestinian nationalism). He even warns about the usage of overarching terms and what he calls *mnemonic manipulations* – psychological and neurological terminology like *amnesia* and *trauma* – to describe social patterns of remembering.¹¹⁰ The way these terms simplify, generalize, and perhaps even imprecisely describe the complex social dynamics in historical memory is evident and certainly discussed in the area of memory studies. On the other hand, they are plentifully used in the hands of what Haugbolle calls *memory makers*¹¹¹, and thus we cannot refrain from working with them when we study the post-war literary production in Lebanon. Even Felix Lang’s book

¹⁰⁷ Haugbolle, S. (2010), 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 9-10. Haugbolle in regard to the critique of collective memory references primarily Kansteiner, W. (2002).

¹¹¹ Memory makers are the creative class that stood in opposition to forgetting the war and sought to memorialize the war by the means of producing books, movies, articles, graffiti, and other forms of expression.

on Lebanese post-war novels has this *mnemonic manipulation* in its subtitle, *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital*.¹¹²

As was mentioned in the introduction, the long-lasting Civil War had an impact on many layers of Lebanese society, but also on infrastructure. Beirut, the previously flourishing city, was oftentimes called the Paris of the (Middle) East. After the war, the situation naturally changed. The devastating effects on Beirut's infrastructure were and still are evident. Soon after the war, especially in the 90s, there was a pressing issue that needed solving, a reconstruction of the once-thriving capital city. This is where the most prominent post-war Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri comes into play.

An abundantly discussed issue in post-war Lebanon academic literature is the Beirut reconstruction under PM Rafiq al-Hariri. The Lebanese businessman, who earned a fortune in the construction sector in Saudi Arabia, returned to Lebanon after the war as a new man with significant economic capital. He quickly became the most prominent political figure in post-war Lebanon. Rafiq al-Hariri was prime minister in 1992-1998, 2000-2004, and was assassinated in 2005. Unlike many other high-profile Lebanese politicians, he was not active in the Civil War. He was a political outsider among the traditional elites. The political party *Tayyār al-Mustaqbal* (Future Movement) carries in its name Hariri's vision of leaving the recent past behind and instead focusing on the future. The infamous Lebanese currency peg on the US dollar was set during his term in 1997, and large-scale privatization continued throughout the 90s.

The downtown reconstruction of Beirut in the hands of a single private real estate holding company Solidere (*Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction de Beyrouth*), which had close ties to al-Hariri, is widely discussed by academics and journalists alike. The two main views on Solidere's investment and reconstruction activities may be summed up in the following manner:

*“Solidere may be regarded as a real estate developer that is reconstructing Beirut Central District after the area had been victim and perpetrator of urbicide (Gavin/Maluf 1996) – or may be regarded as yet another perpetrator following up with some new purpose to kill the city, its memories, its former identities, its culture, or whatever. (Makdisi 1997)“*¹¹³

¹¹² Lang, F. (2016). *The Lebanese Post-Civil War Novel: Memory, Trauma, and Capital*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan US.

¹¹³ Baecker, Dirk. (2013), 6.

Critics further argue that “*the reconstruction process became an important means through which public resources were redistributed to former militia leaders and other power brokers in Lebanon*”¹¹⁴ and claim that “*the reconstruction in Lebanon was never aimed at rebuilding a social contract or establishing a post-conflict era rather it was part of an accumulation of social power by one faction over others.*”¹¹⁵ Architect Esther Charlesworth is sceptical about Solidere’s “City as Heart” reconstructive vision that focuses exclusively on the downtown renaissance and neglects and marginalizes the greater metropolis.¹¹⁶

Regarding memory, Solidere’s construction of luxurious offices, shops, apartments, and neighborhoods tends to be mentioned in stark contrast with the tearing down of old buildings and erasure of memory.¹¹⁷ Hadi Makarem summarizes three main negatives aspects of the Beirut reconstruction in the following manner: firstly, the reconstruction expropriated properties from its original landowners and tenants; secondly, it gated off the areas from ‘inappropriate’ elements of society; finally, it transformed central Beirut into an exclusive commercial hub which only the wealthiest class could afford visiting.¹¹⁸ In Chapters 4 and 5 we will later see how modern Lebanese authors may work with and criticize the widely discussed issue of post-war Beirut reconstruction. The newly constructed buildings and projects will be put into direct contrast with the war realities, victims, and the ‘truth’ buried deep underground.

Let us now turn from Solidere back to the general effects of state-sponsored amnesia on society. The plurality of the Lebanese conflict and the emergence of various post-war sub-national narratives is underlined by the fact that as late as 2017 there does not exist a standardized, unified history textbook for Lebanese students regarding the Civil War (and I have not found any evidence of change by the time of writing).¹¹⁹ It could be argued that the focus on the future and disregard for war memories by the government has failed to provide an overarching national narrative and paved the path toward the emergence of smaller sub-national narratives that are taught through various confessional educational institutions. In other words, the post-war governments’ disregard for creating and promoting a unified public memory of the Civil War led to the spread of exclusively transmitted sectarian (private) memories. Or we may claim while relying on Assmann’s theoretical framework of collective memory, that the

¹¹⁴ Sharp, D. (2018), 46.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁶ Larkin, C. (2010b), 435.

¹¹⁷ For example, in Battah, Habib. (2014) or Makarem, H. (2012).

¹¹⁸ Makarem, H. (2012), 27.

¹¹⁹ Hourani, R. (2017) and Kadi, Samar. (2016).

state has yet failed to institutionalize the war events in question, to transform communicative memory into cultural memory. As a result, this opened space for the actors in the literary field to assume the roles of self-proclaimed guardians of memory.

A significant milestone in the construction of Lebanese national memory is naturally the year 1943. Generally, history textbooks seem to end in this year when Lebanon proclaimed its independence from the French mandate.¹²⁰ The absence of a proper ending to the war and the 1991 general amnesty again support the creation of these sub-national narratives (private memories) and may have led to the continuation of the conflict. Exploring the causalities of Lebanese conflicts is not the matter of this paper, but a similar view is held by leading Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury. He is a leading Lebanese novelist that is interested in and outspoken about the issue of Lebanese collective memory. Khoury said in an interview in fall of 2019, on the eve of the widespread Lebanese protests:

“The dominant amnesia is not really about forgetting,’ Khoury cautioned. ‘The militia leaders now in government imposed a collective amnesia, but that doesn’t prevent each community from having its own memory. It creates separate memories that can emerge at any time and cause another war.’ [...] ‘You agree on history when you create a secular democratic state,’ Khoury said. His words to me as dusk fell on Achrafieh carried both warning and hope: ‘Every community here has its memory. When we arrive at a collective memory of the war, we’ll have a country. ‘In massing together as individuals under the Lebanese flag, the protesters not only proclaimed the end of the civil war. They also brought the prospect of a shared memory – and a new literary chapter – a step closer. “¹²¹

Elias Khoury belongs to the first generation of Lebanese post-war *memory makers* as mentioned above. His 1977 novel *Little Mountain (al-Jabal al-Ṣaġīr)* along with the French *Sitt Marie Rose* (1977) by Arab American poet and artist Etel Adnan are considered one of the first Lebanese novels of the Civil War.¹²² He is a leading proponent of the need for a public memory of the war among Lebanese authors and cultural figures.

A similar thought regarding the necessity to reconcile with the past in order to build Lebanese national consciousness is also visible in the work of prominent Lebanese historian

¹²⁰ Jaggi, Maya. (2020).

¹²¹ Jaggi, Maya. (2020).

¹²² Ibid.

Kamal Salibi. In his 1988 book on various sectarian narratives in Lebanese history (written during the last phase of the Civil War) he mentions:

*“If the various factions are to lay down their arms and live in peace and full co-operation as citizens of one country, the Lebanese will first have to reach a consensus on what makes of them a nation or political community, and this can only be achieved if they manage to agree on a common vision of their past.”*¹²³

To agree on a common vision of the recent past requires people to remember. It is generally known that memories can often be unreliable or unprecise. The complex psychological and neurological topic of memories will not be discussed. On the following pages, the topic of nostalgic memories will be presented instead.

3.4 *Nostalgia and trauma*

The term nostalgia was coined in the 17th century.¹²⁴ It was originally viewed as an illness that caused physical and psychological distress.¹²⁵ Among the many symptoms was sadness, anxiety, constant thinking about home, or fever. Over time and with the advancement of psychology in the 20th century, the understanding of nostalgia shifted.

Instead of general homesickness, the aspect of longing for one’s past was emphasized.¹²⁶ Furthermore, nostalgia began to be viewed as a bittersweet emotion rather than an illness. It started to be associated with positive, pleasurable feelings that at the same time included a sense of loss and longing (as one cannot simply return to the past).¹²⁷ Nowadays nostalgia is abundantly used in marketing but can be implemented into literary works as well. One of the reasons exploring nostalgia in literary works is beneficial is because it is a universally understood concept, meaning that people all over the world tend to agree on the core of a nostalgic experience.¹²⁸

¹²³ Salibi, K. S. (1988), 18.

¹²⁴ The term nostalgia was coined in the 17th century by a Swiss medical student Johanness Hofer. Classified as a medical or neurological disease, it originally described a pain afflicting Swiss soldiers and mercenaries who left the mountainous landscapes of their home country to the lowlands of Italy or France.

¹²⁵ Routledge, C. (2016), 4.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹²⁸ As presented in the conclusion of Hepper, Erica et al. (2014) and mentioned in Routledge, C. (2016), 14.

Regarding some main aspects of nostalgic memories, Clay Routledge in one of his works on nostalgia provides us with several interesting conclusions. Firstly, the most common objects of nostalgic memories are people, and the protagonist is typically the self.¹²⁹ The positive emotions that accompany nostalgia outweigh the negative.¹³⁰ Nostalgic memories tend to be set further back in time and geographical distance than ordinary ones.¹³¹ Nostalgic memories are common and present in all age groups.¹³² Distress among other things triggers nostalgia and thus nostalgia can be viewed as a coping mechanism for past trauma, loneliness, the need to belong, or disruptive events in life.¹³³ Nostalgic memories lead to greater feelings of optimism about the future and contribute to positive self-views.¹³⁴ Nostalgia helps people feel connected to their past and may prove vital in their effort to form and maintain a strong sense of identity.¹³⁵

One of the last sub-chapters in *Nostalgia: A Psychological Research* is devoted to the term collective nostalgia and cites a 2014 study¹³⁶ with the following conclusion:

*“In sum, the effects of nostalgia appear to extend beyond the individual. When people reflect upon nostalgic experiences shared with a group, they are more inclined to support that group and more interested in engaging that group. And the effect of collective nostalgia on ingroup attitudes appears to be driven by elevated collective self-esteem. Also, for those who highly identify with the group, collective nostalgia drives defense of the group...”*¹³⁷

With all this in mind, we can see that the highly social nature and positive effects of nostalgic memories may prove valuable in group (or perhaps national) bonding. The positive effect of nostalgia on collective self-esteem and sense of identity accompanied by general optimism about the future supports the notion that it may be a powerful tool when strengthening national identity and bonding after a devastating war.

¹²⁹ Routledge, C. (2016), 17. This means that nostalgic memories are typically social in nature and are centered on people.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹³¹ Ibid., 22.

¹³² Ibid., 23. 79 % of the participants in one of the studies reported experiencing nostalgia at least once a week.

¹³³ Ibid., 27-35.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 73-74.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹³⁶ Wildschut, Tim & Bruder, Martin & Robertson, Sara & Tilburg, Wijnand & Sedikides, Constantine. (2014). Collective nostalgia: A group-level emotion that confers unique benefits on the group. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

¹³⁷ Routledge, C. (2016), 123-124.

As we will see, nostalgia for pre-war times may as well be criticized by the authors and is visible in the novel *Ṭābiq 99* (Floor 99). The author places nostalgia for pre-war Lebanon exclusively into the mindset of the old Maronite generation and views it as a trigger of hatred towards the Palestinians. This is in accordance with what was cited above: “*Also, for those who highly identify with the group, collective nostalgia drives defense of the group...*”¹³⁸, where the group is a family or sect, not the nation.

Let us now briefly discuss trauma. Discussing trauma or traumatic memories is inevitable when studying post-war literature. Humans frame their collective memories in narrative form,¹³⁹ but psychological studies on personal traumatic memories stress that “*Trauma is not stored as a narrative with an orderly beginning, middle, and end.*”¹⁴⁰ A breakdown of the thalamus during a traumatic event explains why trauma is not primarily remembered as a story, but as images, sounds, and physical sensations accompanied by intense emotions.¹⁴¹ As was mentioned in the introduction, memory (mostly collective, sometimes individual) tends to be stored through a narrativization of the events (hence the effectiveness of literature as a mnemonic medium) and trauma may thus be understood as a hindrance or disruption in the narrative.

Over the last years, researchers and especially journalists began abundantly using the eye-catching term *collective trauma*, one of the articles I found even had a somewhat rhyming sub-title: *A Real Roman Defeat: Memory, Collective Trauma, and the Clades Lolliana*.¹⁴² While there are areas where the term is firmly established, carefully developed, and used such as the Holocaust or the Palestinian Nakba, more recent memory studies research seems to be wary of using the terms collective or cultural trauma. Its abundant usage may be misleading, unprecise, or methodologically weak. Furthermore, the general understanding of the term trauma seems to have semantically shifted over the years. “*This task has been made more difficult than it needed to be because of the cavalier and indiscriminate use of the term ‘trauma’ to refer to more or less all painful past experiences across more or less all sorts of different scales of suffering, and because of the semantic corruptions and contradictions that have developed as a result.*”¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Ibid., 123-124.

¹³⁹ Haugbolle, S. (2010), 9.

¹⁴⁰ Van Der Kolk, B. A. (2014), 153.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 85.

¹⁴² Kerremans, B. (2018). A Real Roman Defeat: Memory, Collective Trauma, and the Clades Lolliana. *Acta Classica*, 61, 69–98.

¹⁴³ Keightley, E., Pickering, M. (2013), 4.

Sune Haugbolle identifies trauma as one of the common *mnemonic manipulations* promoted by various memory cultures in Lebanon. This raises a question, to what extent is collective trauma really present in Lebanese society (especially the second generation), and to what extent is it created and constructed as a *mnemonic manipulation* to be spread among the various sectarian masses typical of Lebanese society, instead of a collection of authentic, personal war trauma? There are naturally many variables in the equation and any precise answer to the question can hardly be convincing without further research. Researchers should, and many undeniably are, aware that it is not only the individual traumas and memories that affect the collective, but the collective affects the individual as well. In other words, to write a history of national remembering is to map shifting contours of overlapping and contradicting narratives and to observe invented traumas and idioms for political mobilization, as well as individual life stories.¹⁴⁴

*“Memory culture has a tendency to misrepresent the past by producing metaphors of, for example, psychological and neurological terminology like amnesia and trauma to describe social patterns of remembering.”*¹⁴⁵ Thus, we should be wary of using such terms dispassionately and uncritically, especially when focusing on modern Lebanese literature. Lebanese cultural figures are one of the most outspoken *memory makers* after all. I have previously introduced literature as one of the mnemonic mediums and Lebanese literary authors as actors of the Lebanese literary field and of a specific mnemonic culture. All these terms – state-sponsored amnesia, nostalgia, and trauma – can be easily used to generalize a much more pluralistic and complex political and social reality in Lebanon, especially when used in the wider, *collective* (nationwide) context. They are nonetheless terms that are abundantly mentioned and used by post-war Lebanese authors and when studying how authors construct memory in post-war Lebanese novels, we should be aware of their plentiful usage and general understanding.

¹⁴⁴ Haugbolle, S. (2010), 10.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

4 Tābiq 99 (Floor 99)

*“Has the war ended in Lebanon? The fighting is over. How can we claim that the war ended if 17 000 people were reported missing since the war, with semi-governmental secrecy over their fate? How does the war end when its symbols and warlords become leaders? This does not end a war, but merely formalizes it. Today we also have new conflicts in Lebanon and the region as a whole, the present is not much better than the past. When the Lebanese people sit together for a unified national vision, the war will end. But this seems far away.”*¹⁴⁶

This is Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan’s¹⁴⁷ answer to the question “*Why return to the war in Lebanon?*” during an interview about her novel *Tābiq 99*¹⁴⁸ (Floor 99) in 2015. The rhetoric used by the author is highly critical of post-war Lebanese reconciliation and strikingly similar to Elias Khoury’s understanding of the issue (as presented in two interview extracts in the *Introduction* and *State-sponsored amnesia* chapters). The rhetoric is so similar I find it fitting to include the ending of Elias Khoury’s 2019 interview once more for the sake of comparison: “*When we arrive at a collective memory of the war, we’ll have a country.*”¹⁴⁹ Compare this sentence with “*When the Lebanese people sit together for a unified national vision, the war will end*” in al-Hassan’s interview. We see that Felix Lang’s understanding of the homogeneity of the Lebanese literary field and the similar understanding of the war promoted by first- and second-generation authors seem to fit almost perfectly in the case of Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan.

The author is well-aware of her second-generation status. She does not see this as a deficit or impediment in writing about the Civil War. Rather, she understands it as one of the aspects that may differentiate her works from the writings of the first generation. “*I did not live through the war, that is, I did not store it in my memory. I know it from the various family stories. What I know is the current situation and that it is one of the many consequences of the war, or perhaps the continuation of it. I also have stories about life during the war and the malformations the war left in people we know. Such people are present in almost every Lebanese household.*”¹⁵⁰ Al-Hassan positions herself as an author of the second generation, and

¹⁴⁶ al-Hujairi, Ru’a. (2015).

¹⁴⁷ Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan is a Lebanese journalist and novelist born in 1985 in rural Northern Lebanon. Growing up in a conservative Christian background left a mark on her works, and *Floor 99* is not an exception. She moved to Beirut in 2009, the same year her first novel *Forbidden Desires (Raḡabāt Muḥarrama)* was published. Her other two novels, the 2012 *Me, She and the Other Women (Anā, Hiya wa ’l-Ukhrayāt)* and 2014 *Floor 99 (Tābiq 99)* were both shortlisted for the International Prize for Arab Fiction (IPAF).

¹⁴⁸ Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan. (2014). *Tābiq 99*. al-Jazā’ir: Manšūrāt Dīfāf

¹⁴⁹ Jaggi, Maya. (2020).

¹⁵⁰ al-Hujairi, Ru’a. (2015). The underlining in the text is my own.

during her writing works primarily with the various family stories (*ḥikāyā al-muqarribīn*) she heard, which is very close to Marianne Hirsch's term *familial postmemory*.

As we will see, the author's critique of state-sponsored amnesia (government secrecy, warlords becoming leaders) and other issues closely connected to post-war memory in Lebanon (nostalgia, trauma, coping with the past, perpetuation of conflict) are interwoven throughout the novel.

The novel *Ṭābiq 99* (Floor 99) by Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan follows the relationship between Majd and Hilda (*Hīldā*), two Arabs of different backgrounds who both live in the United States. Majd is a Muslim Palestinian, born and raised by his parents in the refugee camp of *Ṣātīlā*. Hilda comes from a Christian *katā'ib* (phalangist) family. These two characters of opposite backgrounds become a couple in New York, where they both live and work at the turn of the millennium. The novel guides us through the life of Majd after Hilda decides to return back to Lebanon for a long family visit. Shocked by her decision, Majd soon after her departure cuts all communication with her. He does not fully understand Hilda's decision to return to her home and family, partially because he is void of both (he does not really consider Palestine his home and both his parents passed away).

On the following pages, we uncover the past of not only Majd and Hilda, but their closest friends and family. Most chapters of the book are named by year and place, as the author guides us through two time periods, around 2000 and 1982. The common episodes into the past introduce us to the main characters, their backgrounds and to some extent even help us understand their behavior. The novel allows us to gain insight into the lives and hardships of Lebanese civil war emigrants to the United States, but the topic that resonates most throughout the book is coping with the past and its inescapability.

Majd's pregnant mother was killed during the massacre of Sabra and Shatila (*Ṣabrā wa Ṣātīlā*) and he himself barely escaped thanks to his father. Although he survived, the war left its marks. Throughout his life, he lives with a maimed leg and a visible scar on his face. Hilda on the other hand, as a daughter of a phalangist foreman, never really understood the war and went to study dance in the United States. Her perspective on the war changes after her time spent abroad. Hilda's family led by her father, who she confronts at the end of the book during her stay in Lebanon, are proud phalangists bubbling with resentment towards the changing demographic and political situation in Lebanon. All these characters provide us with different perspectives on the Civil War.

Majd seemingly represents a victim archetype. Traumatized and maimed by the war, he emigrates with his father to America from despair. Overcoming childhood bullying and hardships (the unappealing scar and limping leg accompanied by the lowly status of an immigrant) and through education and hard work, he builds a successful career and comfortable life. Some might say he achieved some variation of the American dream. From his office on the 99th floor of a skyscraper in New York, things seem almost too good to be true. But as Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan reminds her readers multiple times in her book, the past can hardly be cut off from our lives and forgotten.

Majd refuses surgery and cosmetic procedures to get rid of his limping and the scar. “*What is forgetting but a temporary closure of wounds?*”¹⁵¹ Hilda’s decision to depart back to Lebanon reopened these wounds and unresolved issues that he carried within, “*I had succeeded in forgetting, or pretending to forget, for a long time... before Hilda came and changed everything.*”¹⁵²

Both these quotes remind us of the issues introduced in Chapter 3 regarding post-war memory in Lebanon and state-sponsored amnesia. Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan through her work presents her stance on the importance of dealing with the events of war and actively facing and coping with one’s past instead of abandoning it. For the author, wounds should not be simply forgotten, but resolved and healed. Al-Hassan’s wordplay between *forgetting* (*al-nisyān*) and *pretending to forget* (*al-tanāsi*) is a reference to what we earlier defined as state-sponsored amnesia and how forcibly forgetting or leaving the past behind does not solve the deeply embedded problems of Lebanese society.

This is underlined by the end of the book, where the focus unexpectedly shifts from Majd to Hilda. In the last chapters, we follow Hilda’s return to her family in Lebanon. Confronted with the reality and visible differences between her beliefs and the beliefs of her father, tension swiftly rises. The emancipated young woman from a conservative Maronite background, who is unbeknownst to her father dating a Palestinian Muslim in New York, comes back home. The clash of values is evident. In the past, Hilda never talked back to her father. Returning from the United States, she is a different woman. We witness several arguments as she confronts the beliefs of her father and uncle. One of them evolves as follows when her uncle contemplates the old days of Maronite political and demographic rule over Lebanon.

¹⁵¹ al-Hassan, J. F. (2014), 11.

¹⁵² Ibid., 27.

“-Those days...

-What with those days? Were those days pleasant?

-We were strong, we thought that we would never be defeated. Our dreams, our Greater Lebanon.

-What is now left from all of this?

-We ruled this land, we will build its glory.

-Through war?

-War is necessary, all of this is sometimes necessary.”¹⁵³

Her father and uncle in this book exemplify the conservative environment in which the author spent her early life. The author’s decision to include these to some extent cliché dialogues is a personal critique of such views. Nostalgic memories in *Ṭābiq 99* are exclusively connected with the older Christian generation and are overwhelmingly understood as triggers of anti-Palestinian sentiment.

From reading this novel, her stance on the role of an Arab author seems to be closer to the one promoted by Elias Khoury. It is the one expressed by Zeina G. Halabi¹⁵⁴ in her 2017 book *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual*. In Halabi’s eyes, the traditional image of an Arab author or poet, proposed by Elias Khoury or Mahmoud Darwish, is close to a prophet or embodiment of change and progress.¹⁵⁵ In other words, it was a venerated role of someone who stands firmly in opposition to tyranny. We will later see how, based on the reading of this novel, Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan’s stance slightly differs from the one provided by Rabee Jaber.

The difficult return of a person who comes back to his traditional Arab family after spending some time abroad in the West is an occurring theme in Arab literature. One of the strongest parts of the novel unfolds subsequently when Hilda’s uncle confronts her and asks why she even returned in the first place if she is so dissatisfied with her own family and their beliefs.

“... You returned to make your father confess, you lured us into confession. I see this in your eyes, the questions and condemnation. Do you wish to know how men we have killed? Do

¹⁵³ al-Hassan, J. F. (2014), 247.

¹⁵⁴ Zeina G. Halabi is at the time of writing an Associate Professor of Arabic Literature at the American University of Beirut and in 2017 published *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual*.

¹⁵⁵ Halabi, Z. G. (2013), 2.

you want us to count the bodies? Would that please you? My family, the war criminals. Will you return to New York and complain about the tyranny of your family? What do you want? We are your blood, girl. If you leave, it will hurt you, not us."¹⁵⁶

The issue of confession and memory will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapter discussing Rabee Jaber's novel *al-I'tirāfāt* (Confessions). For now, let us keep in mind that Hilda's uncle refuses to confess the crimes his family committed, even accuses Hilda of *luring* him into a confession. The uncle's view on the past is again similar to what was discussed about post-war memory in Lebanon. We see no remorse in his words, the war *just happened*, and nothing can be done about it. Hilda responds in a single sentence, "*I just want to know, that is all.*"¹⁵⁷ As we see, the contrast between forgetting (or pretending to forget) and remorse or at least interest in the events and crimes of the Civil War is an occurring theme in the book. The author's stance on the issue is clear, it is better when people study and confront the past crimes instead of sweeping them under the carpet. After all, Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan, a Lebanese author writing about the civil war, is one of those who Sune Haugbolle calls *memory makers*. She supports a similar view on the war and the need for public memory as Elias Khoury and promotes these ideas clearly (perhaps unobtrusively) in her novel *Ṭābiq 99*.

On the last pages of the novel, the emancipated New York woman returning to Lebanon admits in front of her family the reality of having a Palestinian boyfriend. Just as she waits for a reaction at the dining table, a knocking on the door interrupts the tense atmosphere. Her father's name is present in the forming of a new cabinet. Howls of joy echo around the house. Oblivious to the political achievements of her father, Hilda decides to grab her luggage and silently depart as celebrations begin. She is now a different woman than before, unable to adjust to or even comply with the presence of her family's beliefs. Her attempt to chase memories of her family and homeland ends quite bitterly here. The confessions that she anticipated from her family regarding war crimes never came. Not only were they never achieved, but the same people who actively fought during the war later assume the highest political positions. This is the author's reference to one of the aspects of state-sponsored amnesia discussed earlier, warlords in politics. Throughout her endeavor, she was confronted with severe ideological differences between herself and her family. But we can assume Hilda returns satisfied to the

¹⁵⁶ al-Hassan, J. F. (2014), 249. The underlining in the text is my own.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

United States. Content with the fact that she chose to confront her past (unlike Majd) and received, to some extent, a proper ending.

As suggested in Chapter 3 and in Larkin C. (2010a), family stories featuring relatives who lived during the Civil War may be the first experience of after-war generations with the various narratives of the war. Similar stories as the one chosen by Larkin about a heroic act of a relative from the war help form an early self-identity of youngsters and their general view on the war. The novel provides us with a similar example and reminds us of how such stories are factually unreliable.

Hilda recollects a traditional family story told by her father about the death of her uncle during the war. He was an active soldier during the war. During an operation, he was supposedly surrounded by three Palestinians that tried to kidnap him and take his weapon. In her childhood years, Hilda was told that he had died at the hands of these three assailants. Later, the story changed. Her uncle killed the three Palestinians and later committed suicide in his house out of immense guilt, as he could not live with the reality of killing a person. She even tells this version of the family story to Majd in New York. When she returns to Lebanon, Hilda finds out that her uncle did not fend off the three assailants, but instead was successfully kidnapped. He was taken hostage, and Hilda's father had to pay a significant ransom. Her uncle was subsequently released. He returned a broken man deprived of honor. Before taking his life, he aimed his weapon at his wife, before deciding to take only his with a bullet in the head.

Unreliable and exclusively transmitted sectarian family stories (private memories) like those presented in the novel are paramount to creating a convincing collective memory of the war. Referring to the malevolence of falsifying history to fit into a presupposed narrative (heroic deeds of our side and the atrocities of the other) is a way the authors assume an uninterested role in the conflict and provide a metaphorical mirror to the past events. The mirror metaphor adopted in the Lebanese literary field was mentioned earlier in Chapter 3.

Finally, let us now briefly focus on the character of Majd. He does not feel any significant connection to his homeland. After all, Majd is a Palestinian born in a refugee camp in Lebanon currently living in New York, forced into emigration in childhood. He himself has never set foot in Palestine and all his memories of it are what Marianne Hirsch would call *familial* postmemory, transmitted to him by his parents.

But Majd does not even feel like an American. He refuses to heal his scars and limp that caused him trouble growing up and at the same time laments over not integrating into American society. He is almost stuck in a limbo state with a loose sense of identity and belonging.

Regarding his injuries, his stance is clear. To undergo surgery with the goal of hiding the scar or healing limp is comparable to “*pulling out the evil part of the story*”.¹⁵⁸ Once again, the author here stresses the need for an all-encompassing collective memory that is not one-sided or void of traumatic events, in compliance with the ‘mirror metaphor’. A working mirror does not hide any imperfections or leave out any part of the reflection.

Majd is a dreamer and idolizer who has never set foot in his homeland. Hilda is a realist choosing to confront her past directly and resolve any doubts she could have had. Through both characters, Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan projects her stance on the Civil War and the political situation. She is highly critical of what understand as state-sponsored amnesia. Hilda’s character arch, to some extent, follows Jana al-Hassan’s personal life story.¹⁵⁹ They both grew up in a rural Christian background, surrounded by anti-Palestinian sentiment. During a presentation of her book in New York she mentioned that in her social circle, Palestinians were blamed for all the bad things that happened to Lebanon.¹⁶⁰ Feelings like these and a zero-sum view of the Civil War are precisely what post-war Lebanese authors, or most actors in the Lebanese literary field, actively fight against through writing novels, newspaper articles, or other forms of expression.

Throughout Majd, the author projects the necessity of coping with the past and not covering or abandoning it. It should be noted that this projection of the author’s stance across multiple characters may come at the expense of the believability of the characters and the loss of their individual characteristics. I would like to add that opposing state-sponsored amnesia and criticizing the post-war political elite is not unique in Lebanese cultural production, as was mentioned when discussing the Lebanese literary field, *memory makers*, and quoting author Elias Khoury.

As we have seen, Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan is an emancipated female author who strives to discuss relevant political issues in her works. Contrasting conservatism with liberal values and focusing on the issues of lost identity, alienation, and memory, Jana al-Hassan succeeds in telling a love story of two Arab emigrants with opposite life stories to the US. She does this not

¹⁵⁸ al-Hassan, J. F. (2014), 174.

¹⁵⁹ Without the emigration to the US as Jana al-Hassan herself admitted to never setting foot in America before writing the novel.

¹⁶⁰ The Jerusalem Fund & Palestine Center (2018, 4:45).

by focusing on a factual description of New York or the daily struggles of US immigrants (as she has not set foot in the US prior to writing the novel), but by focusing on the psychological and inner struggles of people living abroad, choosing a sentimental and occasionally political approach to the issue.

5 Al-I‘tirāfāt (Confessions)

The 2008 novel *al-I‘tirāfāt*¹⁶¹ (Confessions) by Rabee Jaber¹⁶² tells the story of Maroun (*Mārūn*), a boy who grows up in a Maronite family during the Civil War. It was nominated for the International Prize for Arab Fiction (IPAF) in 2009 and translated into English in 2016. It is written in a form of dialogue between the narrator and protagonist Maroun and a journalist, presumably embodied by Rabee Jaber. The narrator attempts to tell and piece together his life story, similarly to a confession. This proves to be a difficult task as uncertainty resonates throughout the storytelling. Uncertainty is a significant motif in the book and the reader is constantly reminded of the unreliable and debatable nature of personal memories.

As the reader finds out, Maroun’s previous and biological family was killed during the crossing of the Green Line separating East and West Beirut in 1976. His new father Felix, a Maronite militia headman, oversaw the killing and later adopted him. He names the boy Maroun, in memory of his younger son who was kidnapped and murdered at the beginning of the war. Felix joined the militia and began actively fighting only after the traumatic loss of his younger son. The narrator became a replacement for Felix’s tragic loss, this is emphasized by the fact that a picture of his dead younger brother hangs many years later inside the house. This painful reality is kept secret from the narrator by his siblings and both parents, he learns about his true nature and life story only after his father lies on his deathbed. It seems that the narrator’s life story, which he alone does not know and is uncertain about, is generally known in the community and is somewhat of an unspoken secret. Even the *fūl* vendor Maroun regularly visited during his school years knew about his life story,

“His questions didn’t bother me, even though they were strange. He’d ask me, for example, if I loved my mother. Or who I loved more, my mother or my father. The questions themselves weren’t strange. Rather, his voice. Something in his voice would change when he asked me those questions. His tone wouldn’t change, no that’s not it, I don’t know how to explain it—words can’t explain what someone is saying, what they’re feeling. I noticed a strange gleam in his eyes when he asked me those questions. As if he were focusing his gaze on

¹⁶¹ Jaber, Rabee. (2008). *al-I‘tirāfāt*. Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, Dār al-Ādāb li-n-Našr wa t-Tawzī‘.

¹⁶² Rabee Jaber is a novelist and journalist born in 1972 in Beirut. He is known for his reclusive, shy, and hermit nature in the Lebanese literary field, which naturally provides him with significant symbolic capital as a literary author. Among his several novels, the 2009 *America (Amīrkā)* was shortlisted for the IPAF, and the 2011 novel *Druze of Belgrade (Drūz Bilgrād)* won the prize in 2012.

a single point on my face, as if he wanted to pierce me with that gaze and discover my secret. But what was the secret? ”¹⁶³

Later, the *fūl* vendor is killed during shelling and his remains are splattered over a cherry tree. Maroun admits to always looking at the tree when passing by for a long time after the events, but it later disappears from the street. This is a reference to the post-war Solidere reconstruction of Beirut mentioned in Chapter 3.3 as an aspect of state-sponsored amnesia.

“For a long time, I could not walk along this street without looking at the tree. Years passed by, shops multiplied and sidewalks widened, the nature of the neighborhood changed. Many houses remained as they were, but others disappeared, and tall buildings were erected in their place. The whole street changed. Now there are places that remain in shadow from morning to night, not seeing any sunshine. The cherry tree disappeared. I do not know when they cut it down. But I know where it was. ”¹⁶⁴

The shadows of newly constructed skyscrapers covering the streets from morning to night along with the disappeared cherry tree that bore witness to a traumatic war story fits well into the recurring theme of memory and amnesia. A shadow resides over the city long gone and the tree that bore traumatic memories of the war disappeared during the reconstruction. The disappearance of people during the war is another major topic when discussing the effects and casualties of the Civil War. It is estimated that there are still around 17 000 people who disappeared during the war, and their fate remains unaccounted for.¹⁶⁵ Projects with the aim of helping families discover what happened to their missing loved ones such as Act for the Disappeared¹⁶⁶ remain active to this day. Striving for knowing the fate of disappeared loved ones is also a significant part of the novel’s plot; the last chapter is dedicated to how Maroun embarks on a mission of finding out what happened to his biological family and whether they or his close relatives may yet still live.

The title of the novel, *al-I‘tirāfāt* (Confessions), is a reference to St. Augustine’s famous autobiographical work. To make sure the reference would not be overlooked by less attentive readers, Jaber slipped in a mention of Augustine in the text itself.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ This quotation is from the 2016 English edition by Kareem James Abu-Zeid. Jaber, R. *Confessions*. (2016), 35.

¹⁶⁴ Jaber, Rabee. (2008), 53. Translations quoted from the 2008 original in Arabic are my own. The underlining in the text is mine as well.

¹⁶⁵ Saadi, N. N. (2012), 3.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.actforthedisappeared.com/>

¹⁶⁷ Lang, F. (2016), 235. Note 10.

“At university, I studied St. Augustine (I took this course in the second semester) and read that memory is a palace with many rooms and under the palace are corridors and cellars[...]”¹⁶⁸

Augustine in Book 10 of *The Confessions* famously described memory as a “*great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds*”.¹⁶⁹ But for Augustine, these inner chambers are not simply a repository in which images of the past are preserved intact; they undergo changes in the process of placement, are reordered place ready at hand, in other words, the spacious palace of memory positions the past as it preserves the past, placement is a form of management.¹⁷⁰ Augustine occupies himself by finding God in these memories before concluding there could be no place for God in the palace of memory as he could not be placed similarly to other memories.¹⁷¹

*“Confession, then, displaces memory; it surpasses the palaces of the mind for which Augustine has become famous and refigures memory within the confessional expression itself. As such, confession renders Augustine’s absurd solution tenable: it is a way of remembering that which cannot be placed in memory.”*¹⁷²

The answer to how Augustine should seek God is then confession, both a rhetorical and memorial practice through which Augustine remembers God without placing God.¹⁷³ It seems that Maroun, the protagonist of Jaber’s novel, proceeds with the search for his true identity in a similar manner. Trying to forcibly remember causes the protagonist psychological and physical pain, and the confessional method of remembering (even if he is not confessing his own sins but rather the ones of his family) that is adopted in the novel is the only way the protagonist achieves his goal. At the end of the novel, Maroun, now a middle-aged man, sits satisfied in one of Beirut’s cafés enjoying a piece of cake. Both Augustine and Maroun find inner peace through confession. However, the circumstances are different. Augustine confesses his earlier lifestyle and creed to find divine assurance, and Maroun confesses the sins of his close family in the hope of getting hold of his real identity.

Lang reminds us that the Christian concept of confession is closely related to the folk model of trauma that is found in the thinking of both first- and second-generation novelists

¹⁶⁸ Jaber, Rabee. (2008), 83.

¹⁶⁹ Tell, D. (2006), 233 citing R. S. Pine-Coffin’s 1961 translation.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 250.

(healing through revealing, absolution through confession, presupposing a narrativization of those memories that in their threatening absurdity impair people's daily lives).¹⁷⁴ Unlike Augustine, Maroun is not confessing his sins in front of God. Maroun was a victim, he himself has no "sins" to confess and is instead confessing the sins of his father and other people actively participating in the war.¹⁷⁵ The novel itself begins in the following manner: "*My father used to kidnap people and kill them.*"¹⁷⁶

The last chapter of *al-I'tirāfāt* is dedicated to how the protagonist finds out about his life story, the killing of his biological Muslim family on the demarcation line when he was a young boy and his adoption by new Christian family. The news hit hard and Maroun starts to suffer from severe headaches, similarly to the ones his adoptive father had before dying of a brain tumor. However, Maroun's headaches are not related to cancer, they are instead caused by the medicaments prescribed to him by his doctor. We later witness Maroun's inability to navigate his palace of memory similar to how Augustine could not place God within its chambers and found absolution in confession. "*I was trying to remember who I was and whenever I tried, I forgot more.*"¹⁷⁷, "*I entered the dark palace of memory and summoned [the images of memories]. There were countless rooms, but I did not see inside them because their doors were locked.*"¹⁷⁸ The protagonist is then left to find peace through a combined rhetorical and memorial practice, by confessing the crimes his adoptive family committed to a journalist.

Maroun's personal memories were locked from him, but so were several records of the war. He and his friend Antoine after the war attempt to find information about the tragic incident. They start searching for records of a burned white car on the demarcation line in 1976. They browse the newspapers without luck, and when Antoine approaches one of his relatives who is a judge to browse the Internal Security Forces records, he laughs and responds: "*All records of the war, especially the Two-Year War, were burned. They were burned, lost, stolen, destroyed, or simply disappeared.*"¹⁷⁹ Here again we see a reference to the issue of state-sponsored amnesia. Another reference to this popular phenomenon among Lebanese post-war authors is only a few pages later when we hear a story of how during post-war construction work in Beirut, construction workers uncovered a corpse on one of the beaches. "*It was*

¹⁷⁴ Lang, F. (2016), 185.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 185.

¹⁷⁶ Jaber, Rabee. (2008), 9.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 119.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 116. The Two-Year War (1975-76) is often cited as the first phase of the Civil War and described as one of the most violent. The underlining in the text is my own.

summer, the heat was intense, and the bulldozer was clearing some space on the beach, when its blade dug up some corpses."¹⁸⁰

Corpses are arguably the most conspicuous elements of Lebanese post-war literature.¹⁸¹ Buried, underground bodies of war victims that haunt the post-war era and are hidden by newly constructed and modern buildings again act as a critique of the Solidere reconstruction and state-sponsored amnesia as a whole. Corpses buried beneath lay in stark contrast to the façade of newly constructed skyscrapers and act as symbols of the 'truth' buried within. To provide another example, in Hala Kawtharani's¹⁸² (*Hāla Kawtharānī*) novel *al-Usbū' al-Akhīr* (The Final Week) we find similar references as well, "*That night, we were in the nightclub close to where I work in Karantina*¹⁸³. *Behind it lie narrow, interconnected streets that reek of gas and trash, abandoned buildings, factories, and bodies buried beneath.*"¹⁸⁴

As mentioned earlier, the novel ends with the protagonist sitting in a café, eating chocolate cake, and embracing the fact that he will never know his true, biological family and life before the 1976 incident at the demarcation line. Because of this event, Maroun does not even know his date of birth and precise age. Nonetheless, he remains satisfied. His confession came to end, his voice was heard, and forgetting or not knowing all is a natural aspect of memory.

Rabee Jaber in his novel hesitates to provide the reader with overarching truths or a summary of real events. He mentions events related to the various phases of the war (the Two-Year War, the Hundred Days War), but never introduces or elaborates on their details or the main actors. "*He [Rabee Jaber] does not like a lazy reader and refuses to make the reading process easier for him. Rather, he wants the reader to make an effort to search for the information and get to know it himself, to complete the story for him.*"¹⁸⁵ Here we see the author's inclination to uphold the mirror metaphor mentioned before. The author's distancing from real-life events is underlined by the decision of including the following sentence: "*This*

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 126. The underlining in the text is my own.

¹⁸¹ Lang, F. (2016), 95.

¹⁸² Hala Kawtharani (born 1977) is a Lebanese second-generation author. She was chosen in the Beirut39 collaborative project (2009-2010) as one of the 39 most promising Arab writers under the age of 39. Rabee Jaber made the list as well.

¹⁸³ Karantina was the place of one of the many massacres committed during the Civil War. It took place in a predominantly Palestinian Muslim district on January 18, 1976. Therefore, the author's choice of Karantina bears deeper meaning and the corpses are presumably Palestinian.

¹⁸⁴ Kawtharani, Hala. (2006), 39. The underlining in the text is my own.

¹⁸⁵ Fahid, Tasneem. (2016 July 12).

novel is a work of fiction and any similarity between the characters, events, and places with real people, events or places is pure coincidence, an oddity, and void of any meaning."¹⁸⁶

Reading the book, one may find the following themes: Firstly, a confession is necessary for the healing of trauma (this is in line with the folk model of traumatic memories suggested by Lang). Secondly, personal memories are imprecise and often deceive us. We are reminded of this several times throughout the novel, as the narrator himself criticizes his ability to remember, and mentions various contradictions and inaccuracies in his memories. Lastly, the protagonist eventually embraces the fact that he might never know the full truth of his pre-1976 self or the full and complete story of his life events. He will never get hold of or create an overarching narrative of his life or the Civil War events. Still, after his confession, he is satisfied.

This perspective is not unique in Rabee Jaber's works. Zeina G. Halabi in 2013 published an article on *Rālf Rizqallāh fi 'l-mir'ā* (Ralf Rizqallah through the Looking Glass¹⁸⁷) in which she views Rabee Jaber as an author that departed from the "*objectification of the intellectual as the guardian of the nation's collective memory.*"¹⁸⁸ This positioning of the intellectual as a guardian of collective memory is promoted by Elias Khoury in his novels and op-eds¹⁸⁹ and, as we have seen, is visible in the novel *Ṭābiq 99* by Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan as well. One of many possible references to Khoury's need for collective memory was cited in Chapter 3.3.

Halabi and Lang view the Lebanese literary field quite differently, or perhaps even in a contradictory manner. While Lang sees continuity in the views on the Civil War between the first- and second-generation authors (Lang places Khoury into the first and Jaber into the second), Halabi interprets Jaber's 1997 novel *Rālf Rizqallāh fi 'l-mir'ā*¹⁹⁰ as a departure from this objectification and perceives Jaber as an author who breaks away from the understanding of an intellectual as a guardian of memory. This would even fit better into the common tendencies of literary fields proposed by Bourdieu, where the newer generation gains

¹⁸⁶ Jaber, Rabee. (2008), 7. Note that this statement was omitted from the English translation.

¹⁸⁷ Translation of the title is from the article by Zeina G. Halabi.

¹⁸⁸ Halabi, Z. G. (2013), 53.

¹⁸⁹ Halabi, Z. G. (2017), 65.

¹⁹⁰ The novel was published only four years after Khoury's acclaimed *Mamlakat al-Ghurabā'* and one year before *Bāb al-Shams*. This once again brings up the question of how persuasively Jaber may be placed beside other quite younger second-generation authors that started publishing at the very least after the turn of the millennium.

importance by placing itself in opposition to the older generation, which is usually venerated and actively engages in gatekeeping.

To summarize Halabi's main arguments, the novel *Rālf Rizqallāh fi 'l-mir'ā* fictionalizes the life events of Rālf Rizqallāh, one of the two prominent Lebanese intellectuals and cultural figures that died in the few years following the Civil War.¹⁹¹ Rālf Rizqallāh's death was interpreted in Lebanese literary circles as "*an allegory of the postwar politics of erasure that the Lebanese state began enforcing. The suicide of the postwar intellectual was thus perceived as an act of protest against the city's enduring appetite for violence and its endemic propensity to silence and forget its war traumas*".¹⁹² On the other hand, Rabee Jaber in his novel with heavy use of intertextuality offers a very different perspective on the death of Rālf Rizqallāh. His suicide by falling into the sea is presented as marginal and inconsequential, effectively a narcissistic act of someone who was unable to deal with personal issues and emotional vulnerability.¹⁹³ This is of course far from the idea of the role of the intellectual as a guardian of memory as promoted by Elias Khoury.

Zeina G. Halabi expands on her ideas in her 2017 book *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual*. She discusses the abandonment of understanding the Arab author/intellectual/poet as a prophet or embodiment of change and progress, that was proposed by authors such as Elias Khoury or Mahmoud Darwish. Young authors across the Arab world in the 1990s have instead become critical and cynical (but at the same time to some extent reverent) of this traditional Arab intellectual's prophecy.¹⁹⁴

As we have seen, Rabee Jaber in his novels promotes a different perspective on the issues of post-war remembering and the role of the Arab intellectual. Post-war remembering is ought to be performed ideally through confession and can hardly be performed based solely on a person's will to remember. For Elias Khoury, after Beirut's reconstruction, the literary text is the remaining space for preserving memory and thus the author is understood as someone guarding the city's memory.¹⁹⁵ "*Inasmuch as the architect rebuilds the city with stones and marble, the writer refigures the city in the literary text, which he conceives as a site of memory*".¹⁹⁶ Jaber does not focus on rebuilding memory in the literary text; memories are

¹⁹¹ The other one was Mārūn Baghdādī.

¹⁹² Ibid., 54.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 81.

¹⁹⁴ Halabi, Z. G. (2013), 2.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 70.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 70. Let us not forget that Felix Lang on the other hand views the first-generation authors in their works not as authors constructing memory, but those actively deconstructing it.

heavily imprecise, and sources are scarce. Maroun would have hardly learned of the fact that the same person who oversaw the killing of his family later adopted him as his son had his older brother, who also committed war crimes, not confessed the truth to him. One may argue that the journalist to whom Maroun is confessing in the novel is Rabee Jaber, and thus the novel supports Khoury's idea of documenting the war through literary texts. But it is much more likely that Rabee Jaber is both the interviewer and the interviewee. Not only does the character of Maroun have significant autobiographical features of the author, but we are continuously reminded throughout the book about the unreliable nature of the narrator: "*All I wanted was to remember. That's what I'd been trying to do the whole time. Didn't I tell you that I'd split in two, didn't I tell you I'd become two creatures in a single body?*"¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Jaber, R. *Confessions*. (2016), 83. The translation of this quotation is by Kareem James Abu-Zeid.

6 Conclusion

In this thesis I analyzed selected Lebanese novels that reflect on issues of memory of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Focus was given on the binary opposition between Lebanese literary authors and the state in regard to post-war memory and its many aspects in the context of Lebanon (victimhood, state-sponsored amnesia, trauma, nostalgia). Alongside Chapters 1 and 6 (Introduction and Conclusion) the thesis consists of four chapters. The first two are focused on establishing a solid socioliterary theoretical framework for the analysis of the selected works. This paved the path for a classification of the various motifs present in post-war Lebanese novels and a comprehensive analysis of the selected works of second-generation war authors through the theoretical framework of post-war memory in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 2 was dedicated to the specifics of the Lebanese literary field and the overarching topic present in Lebanese post-war literature. In this chapter, I have relied on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field and Felix Lang's 2016 publication. Firstly, the issues of the trilingual nature of modern Lebanese prose were discussed. The compactness and homogeneity of the Lebanese literary field characterized by no negative reviews in the local journals was also presented. Furthermore, the metaphorical borders in the field were identified as more linguistic than generational. In other words, the homogeneity of the Lebanese literary field transcends generations, but not the language differences (Arabic, French, English). The resilience of Lebanese literature in war and post-war times was mentioned as well.

The overarching topic in modern Lebanese literature continues to be the Civil War. Why is it so? I agree with Lang on the premise that we should be wary of answering with a simple but unprecise answer to this question: collective trauma, with which the authors deal and cope through writing. Upon closer review, such an answer unconvincingly describes the real matter. This is where Bourdieu's literary field comes into play and is most effective; it instigates us to look beyond the work or author but situate and understand him or her inside a wider context of institutions, journals, magazines, publishers, and other actors in and out of the specific literary field. The reason the Civil War is the overarching topic of modern Lebanese literature even today may then be explained not solely by the abstract and sometimes overused term of collective trauma, but by the fact that writing about the Civil War is an effective way to gain recognition, especially for the second-generation authors. "*The great majority of second-*

generation writers have indeed made their debut on the literary scene with 'war literature' in the wider sense."¹⁹⁸

Chapter 3 was focused on post-war memory in Lebanon. I began by introducing the concept of postmemory as a framework for understanding how second-generation authors comprehend the Civil War. Later, the concept of collective memory was examined along with Sune Haugbolle's research on collective memory in Lebanon: his earlier understanding of *public* and *private memory*, along with his more recent concepts of *memory culture* and *memory makers*. I argued that although the terms changed, the basic principle stays the same: two main *memory cultures* are visible in Lebanon, one exclusive and the other inclusive in the transmission of memory; both also lay in opposition to each other and *state-sponsored amnesia*. A subchapter was dedicated to the central term *state-sponsored amnesia*. It is a heavily used and widely understood term by researchers and journalists focusing on post-war Lebanon, and thus it is essential for us to be aware of its many aspects in usage among modern Lebanese authors. The 1991 amnesty, post-war Beirut reconstruction, and the absence of a unified student textbook discussing the Civil War or a state memorial were mentioned among the many aspects of *state-sponsored amnesia* in Lebanon.

Specific terms such as collective amnesia and collective trauma were discussed as well. It was argued that researchers should be wary of using such terms and should apply them only when it is most fitting, as they may easily generalize and simplify the complex post-war memory in Lebanon. Nonetheless, these *mnemonic manipulations* (Haugbolle's term) are widely used among Lebanese cultural figures and are used to explain and validate the exceptional role of a modern Lebanese author as a guardian and creator of war memory. It is not unreasonable to assume that *state-sponsored amnesia* may be one of such *mnemonic manipulations*. At any rate, the inability (or unwillingness?) of the Lebanese state to transform *communicative memory* into *cultural memory* not only paved the path for the emergence of sub-national memories/narratives (*private memories*) but enabled Lebanese literary authors to assume the previously mentioned role of guardians of memory.

Finally, Chapters 4 and 5 both consist of an analysis of the two selected novels, *Tābiq 99* (Floor 99) by Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan and *al-I'tirāfāt* (Confessions) by Rabee Jaber. Both authors belong to the second-generation post-war Lebanese authors and are distinguishable by employing the effects of the Lebanese Civil War as the overarching theme in their works.

¹⁹⁸ Lang, F. (2016), 132.

Reading *Ṭābiq 99*, we are constantly reminded of the everlasting consequences of formally ended conflicts and the necessity to remember. The author's wordplay of "*I had succeeded in forgetting, or pretending to forget, for a long time,*"¹⁹⁹ is only one of the many references to *state-sponsored amnesia*. As we have seen, the novel is intertwined with such references, mostly through the direct speech or inner monologues of the two main characters. Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan, based on my reading of *Ṭābiq 99*, understands the effects of the war similarly to Elias Khoury. When asked whether such comparisons with the works of Elias Khoury or other authors bother her, she evades the question and responds:

*"While I was writing, I was not thinking about what had been previously written about the Lebanese war. I am not able to determine whether I presented anything new. My interest in the war came later at a later stage in my life. For me, the interest arrived in what could be compared to flashes. I was not able to understand to what extent the war expands into our daily lives until after I got closer to politics through my work as a journalist."*²⁰⁰

Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan's journalist background is reflected in her work. The many references to *state-sponsored amnesia* and the need to remember and punish war crimes are to some extent unobtrusive and promoted through both main characters, despite their numerous differences. Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan is on par with Elias Khoury on the need to construct a collective memory of the war, oppose *state-sponsored amnesia*, and thus fits quite well into Lang's category of second-generation authors in Lebanon who build upon the ideas of the first-generation in their works.

On the other hand, Lang's listing of the specifics and differences between the first- and second-generation authors in Lebanon proved to not fit as precisely on the other author, Rabee Jaber. The "*dual narrative of trauma and archivization, which seeks to reconstruct and integrate the past in the present*"²⁰¹ mentioned earlier is, based on my interpretation, not so heavily present in the novel *al-I'tirāfāt*, which is a novel that Lang mentions in his book. On the issue of Rabee Jaber, I side with Zeina G. Halabi.

She views Jaber as a significant author in Lebanon who decided to turn away from the widespread idea of an author or intellectual as a prophet of progress or guardian of memory, oftentimes promoted by Elias Khoury (and visible in Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan's work as well).

¹⁹⁹ al-Hassan, J. F. (2014), 27.

²⁰⁰ al-Hajj, Maya. (2015).

²⁰¹ Ibid., 141.

Lang's listing of the specifics of the second-generation authors simply does not fit as well on Rabea Jaber as it does on Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan. Even so, Lang's 2016 book as a whole still remains an immensely relevant and well-made work that provides valuable insight into post-war Lebanese literature.

Regarding memory, the novel *al-I'tirāfāt* is distinguished by the fact that its narrative is intertwined with uncertainty through the unreliable nature of the narrator. The unreliable narrator and protagonist suffers from dissociative amnesia²⁰² in its retrograde form.²⁰³ The extensive use of retrograde amnesia at the expense of anterograde amnesia is characteristic of fiction.²⁰⁴ The protagonist Maroun who struggles to remember and piece together his life events eventually finds inner peace in confession to a journalist. Forcibly trying to remember ends with failure and is not effective, confession is key. As a both rhetorical and memorial practice, confession naturally includes a narrativization of the events, which is a natural aspect of remembering.

Let us turn back to the core of this thesis. After an overview of the main arguments, theoretical concepts, and analysis presented in the specific chapters, an answer to the original research question should be offered.

So *how* is memory *constructed* in modern Lebanese literature? To answer simply, it varies. Nonetheless, we can find several trends. As was mentioned in the introduction, in this thesis, I support the idea that literature is one of the possible mediums of cultural memory. Thus, war literature in the wider sense offers a specific memory of the war or the post-war situation. One of the distinctive aspects of constructing memory in Lebanese literature is the author's natural opposition to *state-sponsored amnesia*. Furthermore, contemporary authors naturally influenced by postmodernism use what Lang identifies as the 'mirror metaphor', indicating that their works should only be used by the readers as a mirror to the conflict, not as an all-encompassing truth and that an open-ended, dialogic process is needed to understand the war.²⁰⁵ Such distancing from providing a single objective truth is of course expected from

²⁰² Dissociative amnesia is usually associated with a stressful or traumatic event that often results in impaired access to episodic-autobiographical memories. It is mostly retrograde in nature, anterograde dissociative amnesia occurring without significant retrograde memory impairments is rare. (Staniloiu A, Markowitsch HJ. (2014)).

²⁰³ Retrograde amnesia typically affects memories that were formed before the onset of amnesia. In other words, those affected by this form of amnesia cannot recall memories that were formed before the event that caused amnesia occurred. Such events are traditionally understood as medicinal in nature (illnesses, strokes, or brain injuries). On the other hand, anterograde amnesia refers to an impaired capacity for learning and creating new memories after an amnesia-inducing event.

²⁰⁴ Bogousslavsky J., Dieguez S. (eds). (2013), 137.

²⁰⁵ Lang, F. (2016), 40.

contemporary authors, but it does not negate the effect if a literary work on one's perception or memory of specific events. Literature as a *mnemonic medium* channels not only information about the circumstances and background of specific events such as war but also emotions. In the last years, I have witnessed efforts of finding a place for art/creative expression in the scholarly discipline of conflict resolution (CR).

Anna Leander in one chapter of her book strives to find a place for art/creative expression in CR while focusing on the Syrian conflict. Along with Donatella Della Ratta²⁰⁶ she thinks of art as a form of conflict resolution knowledge in its own right and asks the reader to see the potential significance of art/creative expression as CR expertise and to equally realize its limitations.²⁰⁷ They view art as a *specific form of CR knowledge*, showing its centrality to memory, affect, and sense-making, which makes it bring out aspects of CR that are often ignored or marginalized.²⁰⁸ They both perceive art as a valuable source of information about emotions such as fear, humiliation, shame, love, and solidarity, and add that the affective reactions associated with these emotions all play a key role in CR.²⁰⁹ Further research on this topic could thus be conducted not only in the scope of literature or written arts but in visual and new media art as well.

Both of the selected novels for this thesis end in a bittersweet manner – Maroun accepts the reality he will never know his life story or true age and Hilda cuts ties with her phalangist family – yet it is this bittersweet ending that seems to fit the post-war Lebanese context perfectly and gives the readership some form of hope. The ending of a war that some claim never really ended, and the 15-year cycle of political upheavals ending with a massive explosion at the Port of Beirut (1943, 1958, 1975, 1990, 2005, 2020), both resonate within Lebanese society, whether those living in Lebanon or the majority abroad. Some may feel nostalgic for the pre-war metropolis of Beirut, some may bear severe personal trauma from the war, and others may not have even been born during the events in question. But Lebanese literary authors (*mnemonic actors*) in the Lebanese literary field (*memory culture*) through their works (*mnemonic mediums*) provide their readers with insight into the long-lasting conflict and through the world-making process of writing novels create or (*re*)*construct* a memory of the war. If we accept this understanding of literary works in regard to memory, then it indeed is worth studying whether

²⁰⁶ Donatella Della Ratta is a researcher holding a Ph.D. from the University of Copenhagen that focuses on the politics of Syrian television series. In 2018 she published a book on the visual culture and transformation of new media in the Syrian Civil War *Shooting a Revolution: Visual Media and Warfare in Syria*.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 190.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 191.

²⁰⁹ Leander, A., & Ole W. (2019), 193.

authors present mnemonic issues in their works closer to guardians of memory (Jana Fawwaz al-Hassan) or distance themselves from such roles (Rabee Jaber), even if both of their works play the same role. These works are *mnemonic mediums* that in their very nature stand in opposition to what is often understood as *state-sponsored amnesia*.

I would like to dedicate the last paragraph to the term I myself used most abundantly during the writing of this thesis. *State-sponsored amnesia* is a term heavily used in academia in the context of Lebanon, but its very definition is open to speculation. Firstly, the term itself may be misleading, “*the ‘amnesia’ of a collective usually means that a topic was not discussed, not that it was forgotten in the way that an amnesic patient would forget events. These uses might be considered broad metaphors, but as much may be lost as gained in using such terms.*”²¹⁰ Secondly, regarding the current state of Lebanese literature, the Civil War remains the overarching topic even today and institutionalized state censorship is essentially non-existent, as was discussed in the earlier chapters. Yet, when we search for state-sponsored amnesia on the internet, Lebanon tends to be listed right beside China among the top results. Nonetheless, the Lebanese Civil War experience and its post-war literature provide us with an opportunity for comparison with other regions of the Arab world and beyond. In this context, we could specifically name Syria after 2011, which shares cultural proximity and close historical ties with Lebanon.

²¹⁰ Roediger, H. & Wertsch, J. (2008), 18.

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