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*Remembering – But How?*

# *The Lebanon Rap*

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# Firstly,

Lebanon is currently experiencing one of the most difficult times in history as the country is wrestling with a dire economic situation, a global pandemic and political instability.

The Lebanon Papers series therefore aims to offer an overview on the current situation in Lebanon and provide possible solutions for a better future.

Its purpose is to prevent disinformation by ensuring sound reporting while explaining the challenges as simple as possible for the information to be accessible to as many people as possible. The paper series consist of well-founded reports on different topics using political, economic and judicial perspectives in order to achieve a comprehensive coverage.

Our last paper of the series addresses the difficult relationship of Lebanon with its past. Even though, important efforts have been undertaken by historians, civil society organisations and academia, Lebanon still lacks a collective memory. This lack of a common understanding of history has a direct impact on Lebanon today as our author rightly points out that the “question of the country's future is also a question of how to deal with its past.” The aim of this paper is therefore to provide some suggestions on how Lebanon can better tackle the question of its past in order to solve some of the challenges of today. I would like to thank Bernard Hage for providing us with some of his illustrations for this very last issue of the Lebanon Papers and of course our author Isabel Henzler Carrascal for her excellent work throughout the series.

We hope that you will enjoy reading our paper series and are looking forward to any feedback that you might have.



**Kristof Kleemann**

*Project Director  
FNF Lebanon and Syria*







**Isabel Henzler Carrascal**

## Meet the Author

I am a graduate lawyer specialised in International, European law and Human Rights. After completing my legal studies at the Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität in Munich I moved to Beirut in order to gain work experience in the region. Currently I am doing my LL.M. in public international law remotely at Utrecht University. During my studies in Munich I gained work experiences, both in law firms such as Freshfields or Beiten Burkhardt, as well as through an internship in a foundation in Bogotá. Cultural exchange, languages and the interaction of traditions and history of each country in the respective legal system, have always fascinated me. I am particularly interested in the question of how best to consolidate the principles of the rule of law. However, it is not only legal aspects that need to be considered, but also the interplay between politics, religion and society,

# Remembering – But How?

Past. Every person has one, every country has one. This past can be full of beautiful, proud, exciting moments as well as traumatic, dark, difficult experiences. How does one deal with their past? How does one remember the past? What is the significance of the past for developing a better future? Every country, every state has its own form of collective coping, of collective memory, just as every person deals with the past in their own way. This form of remembering varies due to cultural backgrounds and depends on how a country's conflict came to an end.

Taking Germany as an example, it becomes clear how difficult it can be to deal with one's history. The end of the war was brought by the victory of the Allies (Great Britain, USA, Russia, and France) over Germany. The defeated and therefore guilty party was Germany. With the Nuremberg Trials, the process of coming to terms with the past found its impetus. Nevertheless, it was a long process that might have been very different without the international interference of the US in the West and Russia in the East. Today, the 21st century is an integral part of history education in schools in Germany. Everyone has to deal with the country's past. However, different means are used to do so. But if you look at another country, this process of coming to terms with the past looks quite different. Colombia, on the other hand was marked by a 50-year-long internal civil war between the Farq and the government. The conflict came to an end after the ceasefire and the adoption of a peace treaty signed by both groups. Since 2016, dealing with the past has also been a big part of this peace treaty. Colombia is one of many examples showing the struggle of unifying and reconciling the different groups, perspectives, and interests after a conflict within a country.

Every person develops their future from their knowledge and experiences. Actions are shaped by their past. Each person has their own view of the world, their own coping mechanisms, their own individual personal way of taking action. However, these actions are shaped by a collective that surrounds that person. Shaped by national traditions, culture, and religion. In this collective, this community, this person also finds their identity.

Lebanon, plagued by a civil war from 1975–1990, a war with Israel in 2006, an explosion in August 2020, as well as countless violent incidents, has its own way of dealing with it. Due to the events of the last two years, the question of a future plays a major role. Do you stay in the country and help rebuild it? Or do you prefer to leave, as the lack of prospects takes over?

However, the question of the country's future is also a question of how to deal with its past. This requires an open dialogue. There is not ONE correct version of the past. It is characterised by a multitude of different narratives. So how can we shape this dialogue? Starting with the integration of the history of Lebanon after 1943 into the history curriculum of schools, the broadcasting of documentaries, the creation of museums, novels, films about this very past, up to the accountability of those responsible through the judiciary. But how does one approach the past in order to achieve a healing, instructive effect without opening up old wounds? How do you hold those responsible accountable when the question of guilt seems impossible due to the multitude of actors involved? How do we give future generations the necessary impetus to critically deal with the past of their own country in order not to repeat past mistakes?



1975  
–  
*Lebanese Civil War*

2006  
–  
*July War*

2020  
–  
*Beirut Port Explosion*



# I. Lebanon's Past

If you think you have understood the history of Lebanon, then they have not explained it properly to you – is a frequently used statement in relation to the civil war in Lebanon. However, in order to find an answer to the question of how the past should be remembered, a brief overview of the events that had an impact on the outbreak of the war must be provided at this point, to later demonstrate the struggles of commemoration of the past resulting from its complexity. To this day, both the outbreak and the events of the civil war are highly contested, which leads to the absence of a unified understanding of the course of the civil war. The biggest challenge coming along with commemorating Lebanon's past is the involvement of a wide range of actors in the conflict. Rather than referring to the civil war from 1975 until 1989 as a war as such, it is commonly described as الأحداث (Al-ahdath) – the events, due to the multitude of battles between different actors in a row instead of just one continuous war, this description seems to be more accurate.<sup>1</sup>

The main actors of the civil war were: **The Lebanese Front** led by the Gemayel and Chamoun families, who founded the Phalangist Party, it represented the Christian Maronites and reflected the ideals of the traditional elite; **the Lebanese National Movement** (hereinafter LNM), which was a coalition between Sunni Muslims, secular leftist militias led by Kamal Jumblatt and sympathised with Arab nationalism; the **Amal** (hope) **movement** consisting of the Shi'ite population and lastly **the Palestinian Liberation Organisation** (hereinafter PLO), representing the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, led by Yasser Arafat. Moreover, **Syria** and **Israel** intervened in the conflict as international actors, each supporting different militias. Roughly summarised it can be stated that while the Lebanese Front – Kataeb was supported by Syria, it had the PLO and the LNM as opponents, which often sided together. Israel, on the other hand, supported Christian militias through arms supplies and funding in southern Lebanon in order to have an ally in their fight against the PLO.<sup>2</sup>

**"To this day, both the outbreak and the events of the civil war are highly contested, which leads to the absence of a unified understanding of the course of the civil war."**

After Lebanon finally gained independence from the French mandate in 1943, the National Pact, an unwritten agreement laid the foundation for Lebanon's confessional form of state. This was the first conciliatory power sharing breakthrough between Christians and Muslims, with the purpose of allocating the highest offices of the state between the country's major religious groups depending on their demographic representation within the country.<sup>3</sup> The pact stipulated that the president would be Maronite Christian, a Sunni Muslim would obtain the post as Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament would be Shi'ite Muslim, while the Druze would be entitled to cabinet posts. The National Pact constituted a suitable solution for around thirty years, allowing religious communities to coexist despite their varying histories and political aspirations. Nevertheless,

it departed premise that the demographic representation of Muslims and Christians in the country was 50:50. Regional constraints, namely the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 came along with an initial influx of Palestinian refugees, which had an impact on Lebanon's demographic

balance. The PLO took advantage of Lebanon's geopolitical position by continuing its battle against Israel in the south of the country. At the same time, the PLO provided a state within a state for Palestinian refugees; due to the impossibility of citizenship for them. Among others they had far less access to social benefits from the state than Lebanese, thus the PLO began to provide these services to the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, undermining the sovereignty of the Lebanese government. The PLO's strategy was to Israel's disadvantage resulting in violent outbreaks putting Lebanon in the crossfire. This led other actors, especially the Maronites, to mobilise their groups against the PLO. Further, the growing number of Muslims and decreasing number of Christians in the country started to shift the balance of power the Lebanese state was built



<sup>1</sup> Larkin Craig, *Beyond the War? The Lebanese Postmemory experience*, International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 42, November 2010, p. 617

<sup>2</sup> Kingston Paul and Ochsenwald William, *Lebanese Civil War – Lebanese History*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 19.07.2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Lebanese-Civil-War> (viewed: 18.05.2021, 13:26)

upon, which caused further instability and tension. The spark was ignited on 13 April 1975 when Muslim militias attacked the Maronite leader Pierre Gemayel, who survived the attack. However, this led to Maronite Christians in turn besieging a bus carrying Palestinians who were passing through a Christian neighbourhood, which had lethal consequences for the passengers. The beginning of the war is a chart for the following fifteen years of conflict. An image of retaliation eye for an eye, representative of the intricacy of the goals that the different groups wanted to achieve.<sup>4</sup>

**The civil war itself was characterised by several militia clashes, political assassinations, international interference, yet it can be divided into five main periods**

<sup>3</sup>I. Salamey, R. Payne, *Parliamentary Consociationalism in Lebanon: Equal Citizenry vs. Quotated Confessionalism*, *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 14:4 (2008), pp. 4–5

<sup>4</sup> Kingston Paul and Ochsenwald William, *Lebanese Civil War – Lebanese History*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 19.07.2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Lebanese-Civil-War> (viewed: 18.05.2021, 13:26), see also Haugbolle Sune, *The Historiography and the Memory of the Lebanese Civil War*, SciencesPo, 25 October 2011, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/fr/document/historiography-and-memory-lebanese-civil-war.html> (viewed: 17.05.2021, 09:35)

**1975–1976**

**1976–1984**

**1983**

**1985–1986**

**1988–1990**



**The clash between the Maronite Phalange and the Palestinians was followed by a two-year war**

**Futile attempts at peace were followed by Syrian intervention and the Israeli invasion**

**The war of the mountain between Druze and Christian militias**

**The war of the camps, which included the conflict between Shiites and Palestinians**

**The war of liberation 1988–1989 and the war of annihilation 1990 in which clashes between Christians and Syrians eventually turned into Christian militia infighting<sup>5</sup>**





The war came to an end with the signing of the Taef Accord in 1989 mediated through Saudi Arabia and Syria. In order to understand the political ruling class of today, it needs to be mentioned that most of the parliament members were involved in the adoption of the Taef agreement, as well as in the amendments of the constitution, and even some of them in the implementation of the National Pact. However, the Taef Accord was too fragile to restore lasting peace and ultimately led to political unrest, which resulted in the assassination of President Hariri in 2005. Political upheaval followed once again, which lasted 18 months and ended with the conclusion of the Doha Accord the 21st of May in 2008.

5 Larkin Craig, *Beyond the War? The Lebanese Postmemory experience*, International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 42, November 2010, p. 617, For more details on the phases of the war, see Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, Pluto Press, 2012

6 Article 95, first Paragraph, first sentence

7 For further information Issue 1 of the Lebanon Papers: The economic collapse and its impact upon confessionalism

8 Barak Oren, “Don’t Mention the War?” *The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetfulness in Postwar Lebanon*, Middle East Journal, Vol. 61 Nr. 1, 2007, p. 53

## II. Post Civil War

The Taef Accord was able to put an end to the fifteen-year conflict, but at what cost?

Originally the aim of the Taef agreement was among others to abolish “political confessionalism”<sup>6</sup>, which is reflected in Art. 95 of the Lebanese Constitution, that first was amended in 1943 and again in 1990<sup>7</sup>. Since the leaders of the various groups involved in the war signed the Taef Accord in 1989 and saw this as the basis for peaceful coexistence for the future, none of those responsible were held accountable, as a general war amnesty was agreed upon in 1991. Thus, there was a complete lack of reparations for the victims, truth commissions or reconciliation commissions. After the war, there was little agreement on what the exact causes of the conflict had been. Some saw the cause of the ongoing clashes in the peace accords and their distribution of power based on religious affiliations. Due to this power sharing system in place and the inability to abolish the confessional form of state, the same groups that during the war were fighting each other had to get along, in order to govern the country peacefully. “For the state’s leaders, dealing with the conflict was not necessary for attaining their goals and could even obstruct them. Hence, the state has avoided open discussion about the war [...] and for Lebanese politicians the conflict became taboo”<sup>8</sup> It was therefore as if the conflict had not existed, which is why many in the

literature speak of a “state-financed amnesia”<sup>9</sup>, as well as a structural forgetting that spread in the aftermath of the war. At the same time, a discourse became popular that described the war as a “war of others” – “une guerre pour les autres”<sup>10</sup>, shifting responsibility to external actors and powers. The briefly summarised explanation of the civil war and its prehistory is emblematic of how confusing and difficult it is to comprehend the reasons for and the happenings in the war. The multitude of different actors, as well as the ever-shifting alliances, are just one example of the complexity of the conflict. However, it also explains the countless narratives that try to find an explanation for what happened. Although a unified version of the history of the civil war was supposed to be created after the end of the conflict, historians did not succeed despite several attempts, as the different versions were rejected anew by parliament each time. Every politician, every religious denomination, every group has a different opinion, a different narrative of history and each individual version is the correct one. This led to the fact that the history curriculum in schools until today stops after the year 1943. Young generations thus grow up with the narrative of their grandparents, parents, neighbours.

9 Ibid fn 5

# III. How to Remember and Educate about the Past

Should the numerous violent turmoil that scar Lebanon to this day be addressed or would it rather have the contrary effect? Has too much time passed to address the past, to reconcile the narratives in order to find closure and if not how could this be achieved properly?

Bernard Hage, political cartoonist, and the author of *The Art of Boo* explained that he would have wished for his parents to be able to tell him a story that has a beginning and an end, so he would have had a clear image of the past of his country, instead of growing up surrounded by contradicting narratives. He described the importance and relevance to address the past to this day with a metaphor: if a middle-aged man would struggle with his mid-life-crises and see a therapist, the therapist would rather ask about that man's past than the present. The solution lies in the past, not only on a personal level, but on an institutional level, they go in parallel. By building statues to commemorate the victims of the war or by including the conflict into the history curriculum it would support and strengthen the collective memory, the citizen could then rely on for individual purposes. Due to the lack of reconciliation Lebanese never had the opportunity to overcome or properly deal with their trauma. Monika Borgmann, co-founder of UMAM – Documentation and Research, explained that her work is based upon the belief that it is necessary to properly address the past. In the last twenty years, the question has repeatedly arisen as to whether the war indeed came to an end with the signing of the Taef Accord or if it has not taken on new forms time and time again. In other words, without this collective and individual reappraisal, it is impossible to open a new chapter, she continued. This is precisely why Monika Borgmann and Lokman Slim founded UMAM Documentation & Research<sup>11</sup> in 2004, based on the conviction that one must know one's history in order not to repeat the past in the present or in the future, Monika Borgmann elaborated further. UMAM is one of the largest NGOs in Lebanon devoted towards remembering the past. To do so UMAM has organised many events and large-scale projects including interactive history writing, as well as produced two documentaries named *Massaker*<sup>12</sup> and *Tadmor*<sup>13</sup>.

But how should history be taught; how should the different narratives be reconciled?

Nadim Shehadi, director of the Lebanese American University – LAU Academic Center in New York, explained that Lebanon is going through a crisis that resulted in a feeling of defeat, complete collapse and collective failure. This triggers a process of reinterpretation of the country's history, values and institutions. Mr. Shehadi pointed out that within this process the focus should be in understanding the country's history rather than projecting that failure into the past. Furthermore, he expressed serious doubts that reconciling the multiple narratives into a "unified history" would be useful. The "unified history" would result in a rigid version that would be difficult to question without seeming to break a consensus of national unity and social cohesion. In a country like Lebanon, historical revision should on the contrary be a dynamic process with continuous debate and acceptance of sometimes contradicting narratives.

Despite the institutional backlog in commemorating collectively and educating about the past, the Lebanese Association for History (hereinafter LAH), has taken on the challenge by becoming active in the battle against the "public discourse of forgetfulness and erasure". Iyad Mouawad, Executive Manager at LAH, pointed out that LAH being a teacher's association is focusing primarily on teachers and students in Lebanon and the Arab world. Mr. Mouawad explained that LAH believes that in order to achieve conflict transformation learning about the past should start in the history classroom, by following a threefold approach.

First, it is necessary to include how to teach contested and non-contested issues in school. Therefore, the integration of critical and analytical thinking, as well as multiple perspectives and resources is crucial, Mr. Mouawad elaborated further. At the same time students have to be encouraged to not only memorize historical facts, but to be able to analyse and critically assess the provided information, in order to formulate a scientific fact-based opinion.



<sup>10</sup> Haugbolle Sune, *The Historiography and the Memory of the Lebanese Civil War*, SciencesPo, 25 October 2011, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/fr/document/historiography-and-memory-lebanese-civil-war.html> (viewed: 19.05.2021, 12:07)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.umam-dr.org/>

<sup>12</sup> A documentary about the killings that took place in the refugee camps in Sabra and Shatila during the Civil War in 1982. Six of the perpetrators speak about the committed atrocities.

<sup>13</sup> A documentary about the life in Tadmor's prison. A group of former Lebanese detainees of the Assad regime break the silence about the horrific years they spent imprisoned in Tadmor, Palmyra, one of the Syrian government's most dreaded prisons.



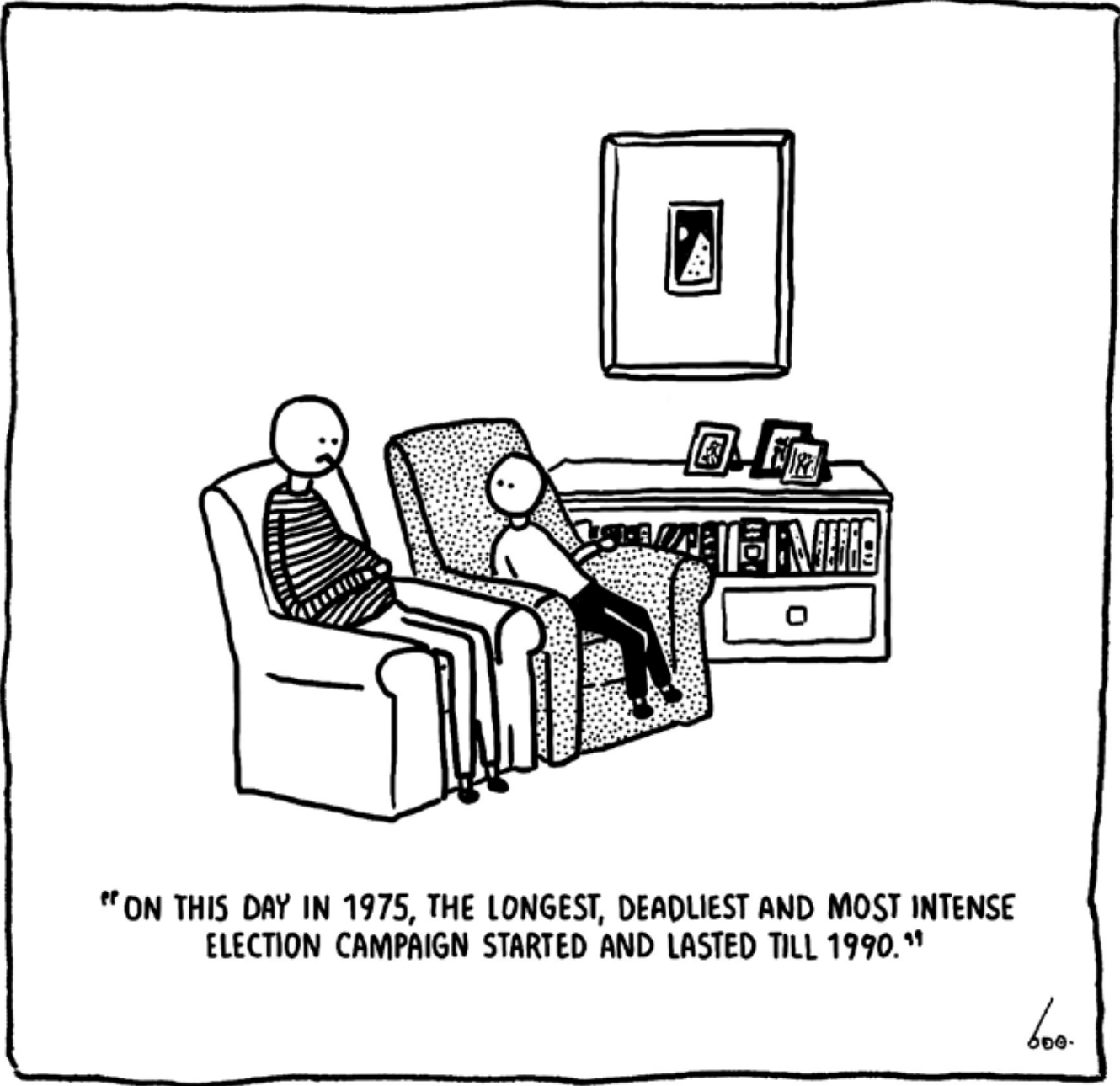
Second, new topics should be included into the history curriculum of schools, in doing so not only political and military history should be integrated, but social, cultural, economic aspects of history. As political history can be divisive and is very contested, social history can create bridges while providing a common ground for people with different backgrounds in Lebanon.

The third component focuses on developing history knowledge through research experts and making it more accessible, Mr. Mouawad concluded. Concerning the inclusion of this history into the school curriculum LAH follows a long-term process. Iyad Mouawad explained, that there should not be one narrative about the civil war, but multiple, so that not only political voices are being heard, but the stories of regular people that witnessed the war. LAH is approaching history from an inclusive standpoint, he continued, where different groups or people are not being marginalised. Especially for contested issues of the civil war this should be achieved by departing from a fact-based event that the different narratives can agree on e.g. the date of the beginning of the civil war 13th of April of 1975. By reconciling the narratives into a unified curriculum for schools, so that all students in Lebanon would have the chance to learn about the past, while entering dialogue with different groups, LAH is taking a progressive stance tackling the issue. Nevertheless, it does not come without challenges. Iyad Mouawad points out that within this process two issues are present: One from a cultural standpoint, and one concerning the professional development of teachers.

The cultural challenge arises since each family, community believes in the ultimate truth of their narrative, Mr. Mouawad explains. LAH does not want to change people's opinion, but the culture of listening to other perspectives. There is not one accurate truth concerning the war, therefore it is important to break each narrative down to the facts, to deconstruct it while opening it up and analysing every aspect of it. This process helps communities to become more acceptant of other perspectives and to reconcile stories of the past. The second challenge lies within the professional development

of history teachers, Iyad Mouawad elaborated further. Since the history curriculum is outdated and stops after the independence of Lebanon in 1943, the ministry of education did not consider it necessary to implement capacity buildings for teachers in order to introduce new ways, new methods on how to teach the history subject. It is crucial to work on the professional development for teachers in order to build capacities that are suitable to approach the contested history of Lebanon in the classroom, Mr. Mouawad continued.

**"The cultural challenge arises since each family, community believes in the ultimate truth of their narrative."**



**"ON THIS DAY IN 1975, THE LONGEST, DEADLIEST AND MOST INTENSE ELECTION CAMPAIGN STARTED AND LASTED TILL 1990."**





# Lastly,

While incorporating Lebanon's recent past into the history curriculum is essential, it remains important to provide accessible information about the Civil War through documentaries, art, public discussions, podcasts in order to enrich the collective memory. This allows for a more intensive engagement with the different narratives. However, this process requires a public space that provides the possibility to enter into dialogue and to express one's opinion freely. Unfortunately, this space is becoming increasingly endangered. Nevertheless, it could be countered by demanding an end to the culture of impunity, Monika Borgmann explained, which has been prevailing since the end of the civil war. There has been no accountability, whether concerning the several assassinations, the July war in 2006, or the explosion of the port in Beirut in August 2020. Accountability is crucial for reconciliation; it goes hand in hand with remembering the past. Finally, an end to the culture of impunity could create new perspectives for the Lebanese. New trust into state institutions could emerge and a new chapter could be embarked.

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