

Sune Haugbolle. *War and Memory in Lebanon*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xiii + 260 pp. \$90.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-19902-5.



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In the streets of today's Beirut, the invisible borders of its neighborhoods are manifest in the changing public expressions of cultural, religious, and political affiliations in the form of posters, banners, flags, bumper stickers, and graffiti, coloring each neighborhood with distinct symbolic meanings. Beirut's historical division into quasi-confessional quarters was sharpened by the Lebanese Civil War (1975-90) drawing a clear line between Muslim West Beirut and Christian East Beirut. The end of the war in 1990 neither erased these urban borders, nor breached the divide among Lebanese whose memory of the war lingers in the betwixt space of sectarian violence and communal loyalty and the desire for a unified Lebanese nation. The contrast between public ruins such as the bullet-ridden Holiday Inn and the restored soulless downtown, demonstrates the impetus to remember or silence the violent and bloody traumas of the recent past. These contending strategies of memorialization and representation in the public and the private realms of Lebanese postwar society are the subject of Sune

Haugbolle's timely and admirable book. At its center are the challenges that inter- and intra-communal violence pose to national unity or a collective memory of the nation, as well as the strategies of state and non-state actors in memorializing this dark episode in Lebanese history.

National narratives about the civil war are informed by traumas and calamities, but the realities of civil strife and experiences of sectarian violence "cannot be captured by the triumphant history" of the state, and its efforts to sanction collective amnesia (p. 8). Haugbolle's ambitious project combines methods of ethnography with cultural and intellectual history to explain "how fragmented elements of memories are shaped over time, how they influence the way a society views its past and how political communities negotiate what happens and what it meant" (p. 2).

Haugbolle is neither interested in the events of the war themselves nor in constructing an objective historical narrative of the past; rather he sets out from Maurice Halbwachs's well-known

observation that the way in which people remember tells us more “about the present (postwar period) than about the past (the war)” (p. 10). Instead of relying on Halbwachs’s static formulation of collective memory, Haugbolle focuses on the contested, multifaceted, and politically salient memories which are disseminated through less official channels that are often silenced by the sterile, and somewhat stagnant, state-sanctioned “collective memory.” He draws on Antonio Gramsci’s notion of “the folklore of philosophy” as applied to memory cultures, which he defines as political, artistic, and intellectual production and representation of memory that emanates from individual experience. This creates a unique and open space to examine multiple interpretations of the war. The book unfolds through seven chapters, addressing the complex dynamics of memory within its political, cultural, social, and historical context.

Relying on newspapers, television programs, interviews, films, novels, and graffiti, Haugbolle lays open two particular counterhegemonic memory cultures. The first consists of those “memory makers” who memorialize the war through “social and artistic activities” by producing popular books, films, articles, art exhibits, or collecting oral testimonies (p. 8). This is contrasted with Lebanese political groups, who utilize these hagiographic references of the past to “underpin and legitimize their political identity” based on a cult of heroes and martyrs (p. 9). Haugbolle outlines the roots for these two competing visions of the war, their various motivations, meanings, and strategies of constructing and representing the war experience, to contemplate the effects these two memory cultures have on Lebanese society and state policies.

Chapter 1 builds on these theoretical themes, to demonstrate how master narratives of the war are challenged by the memories of most Lebanese. For instance, the state-sanctioned explanation that it was really a “War of Others” per-

petrated by American, Israeli, Palestinian, and Syrian interests, only victimized the Lebanese, and freed them from responsibility. Despite the reality behind this national myth, Haugbolle argues that it is “devoid of personal characteristics or individual impressions and details” and fails to account for many features of the war, such as inter- and intra-communal fighting (p. 15).

Chapter 2 explores political representation before the war, and its impact on the public sphere. Haugbolle delineates how a class-based system of *zu`ama`* (or overlords) clientelism, was increasingly challenged by ideologically driven political movements aided by the “introduction of mass culture and ideology” (p. 63). This dichotomized the public sphere so that during the war sectarian and militia propaganda competed with artistic and civilian expressions that resisted sectarian representations. Chapter 3 illustrates how the initial public debate about war memory--instigated by the Lebanese left--grew out of an increasing uneasiness with the postwar reconstruction. Leftist literature and cinematography challenged the amnesiac reconstruction of Beirut’s downtown by the corrupt and ambitious development firm, Solidere, owned by former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, and urged the Lebanese to confront their memories.

Chapter 4 explores the use of nostalgia as a central theme in the debates about reconstruction and war memory in the 1990s. The government’s idea to recreate the Beirut of the 1950s and 1960s was criticized by the leftists, who preferred debate to amnesia and inaction. However, Haugbolle shows that despite virtue of this critique, their own representations of the civil war were dominated by a nostalgic vision of prewar Lebanon. Chapter 5 exposes the war’s violence as it was featured in newspaper testimony, autobiography, and radical films. Many of these represented the experience of former militiamen who sought to renew “their membership in the moral community of reconstructing Lebanon by distanc-

ing themselves publicly from sectarianism,” denouncing it as a wartime evil and publicly emphasizing reconciliation, forgiveness, and a collective understanding (p.159). However, the following chapter illustrates that in the private sphere—marked by sectarian and political homogeneity—divisive memories of inter- and intra-communal violence persisted and that a renewed attachment to sectarian and class-based clientelism flourished. What is particularly interesting, is that it includes oral histories from inhabitants of the religiously homogeneous Beirut neighborhoods of Muslim Basta (Fawqa and Basta Tahta) and Bashura as well as Christian Ashraffiya. Haugbolle combines interviews with local officials or *mukhatir* (pl. of *mukhtar*) with symbolic expressions of sectarianism and the cult of war heroes such as shrines, monuments, and graffiti, sensitive to the historical context of their production as well as to their placement within the urban space. What is most interesting here is his conclusion that the hagiography produced in these various urban spaces is inscribed “into the context of Lebanese nationalism and hence [of] defining the nation from a sectarian perspective” (p. 162).

The final chapter explores the shift in the production of memory as a result of the “Independence Intifada” in 2005, i.e., the mass demonstrations following the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, the withdrawal of Syrian troops, and the subsequent political restructuring. The post-2005 period witnessed a proliferation of public discussions and artistic representations of the civil war memory, motivated by the idea that the Lebanese would benefit from open debates about their experiences. Haugbolle shows that despite the best intentions, this “liberal memory culture” misjudged the society in which it operated. The Lebanese left strongly advocated for these debates, trying to bring people together from all side of Lebanese society, but discounted the importance of sectarianism through their emphasis on class struggle. Yet these debates illustrate that “Lebanese for better or worse, live in social struc-

tures largely determined by the space, economy and politics of their sect” and that sectarian subjectivities must be accepted as the foundations of Lebanese society (p. 226).

One of the strengths of *War and Memory in Lebanon* is its multiple levels of analysis moving from state discourses to cultural production to sectarian and political propaganda. Whereas the study of memory in postwar Lebanon is not entirely new, scholars have focused heavily on the violent erasure of memory in the downtown reconstruction project. Haugbolle’s book is essentially the first major attempt to bring together the multifaceted layers of social memory in Lebanon, relevant to scholars and students of Middle East history, political science, and anthropology. It should also be of interest to scholars of memory studies, as a case study that provides new methodological insights on how memory is produced on a subnational level and complicated by a political system that relies on confessional representation for its legitimacy.

Most interesting, although not quite worked out to its fullest potential, is the relationship that Haugbolle uncovers between sectarianism and nationalism, previously considered two mutually exclusive concepts. The subnational loyalties that were central to the Lebanese Civil War persisted in the postwar period and are symbolized in neighborhood allegiance to local leaders or political parties. Sectarian and political symbols are engraved in the urban landscape and are often accompanied by the Lebanese flag, illustrating that the “representations of national memory resid[e] in the sect,” which stands in sharp contrast to the ideals of the father of the Lebanese constitution Michel Chiha, who saw “sectarian identity residing in the nation” (p. 193).

One could criticize *War and Memory* for being selective in its sources (a small number of films and books that generally speak to the tune of his interpretations), or in its ethnographic focus on two homogenous neighborhoods (when in-

cluding religiously mixed neighborhoods such as Ras Beirut or Hamra would have exposed more complicated representations of the past). But Haugbolle must be commended for exposing multiple memory cultures that lie outside of the officially sanctioned narrative, through the creative use of multiple archives. He also deserves praise for his sensitive approach to the symbolism of urban space, moving beyond his own interpretations as an outsider and scholar and exploring their meaning through the eyes of neighborhood representatives. This book is a pioneering work in social memory and a history of cultural and intellectual debates about memory. In its methodology, and recognition that sectarianism and nationalism are not necessarily antagonistic practices, but instead exist in a dynamic and changing relationship, it should serve as inspiration for further inquiry into this fascinating subject.

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