

Rethinking the Lebanese Civil War: National Struggle, Regional Stakes, and Global Entanglements

Call for proposals

International Workshop Series

Beirut, June 2025

Paris, Autumn/Winter 2025

Proposal submission deadline: 7 March 2025

Contact email: lebanesecivilwar@proton.me

Presentation and objectives

Almost fifty years after its outbreak, the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) stands as the last war of the Cold War era in the Middle East and a precedent setting model for a long list of internationalized civil wars that have since torn apart Arab societies in Algeria, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Sudan. Accordingly, the Lebanese Civil War still needs to be brought into conversation with the new wave of scholarship that has considerably enriched the understanding of civil wars in the past two decades (Arjona et al. 2015; Audoin-Rouzeau 2008a; Baczko and Dorronsoro 2017; Cabanes et al. 2018; Kalyvas 2006; Marchal and Messiant 2006; Weinstein 2007; Wood 2008, to only cite synoptic approaches).

Echoing this renewed interest in civil wars, this international workshop series pursues two objectives. First, it sets out to advance the study of the Lebanese Civil War by situating it within a broader historical framework. The war transformed the historiography of modern Lebanon (Laurens 2016), superseding the optimistic pre-war readings of a growing symbiosis between consociational democracy and liberal modernization with research on the root causes of sectarian strife and the alleged state failure. Rather than falling into this teleological interpretation, which casts the conflict as inevitable, this workshop aims to revise this view by questioning the war's boundaries in terms of time, space, and practices, and by giving room to contingencies and "paths not taken" (France 2018).

The second objective is to provide a platform for a broader reflection on armed conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere. Departing from the enduring perception of "Lebanese exceptionalism" (Abu-Rish 2021), we believe that the Lebanon's experience provides a fertile ground for a wider perspective on contemporary wars. Pioneering works on the Lebanese Civil War (Salibi 1976; 1 Kassir 1994), supplemented by more recent studies (Clerck and Malsagne 2020;

Sinno 2008), have shown how a combination of internal and external factors led to civil strife. However, the very hybridity of this protracted conflict, which articulates its national and international dimensions, has led to two complementary and yet unsatisfactory perspectives: one that denies its classification as a civil war and promotes instead the idea of "a war for the others" (Tueni 1985)—or its variant "a war of the others"—and another that focuses exclusively on geopolitics (Corm 1986 and 2005).

Building on recent scholarship on civil wars, we aim to challenge these perspectives by putting the entanglements between civil and international conflicts under scrutiny. To do so, we suggest the simultaneous consideration of multiple scales: the macro-scale of states, meso-scale of institutions and groups, to the micro-scale of individuals, and how each level was connected to global and regional dynamics. Such an approach will center the agency of local actors while demonstrating how local processes inform and are informed by broader historical dynamics.

On the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the war—according to the conventional historical narrative—this workshop series will gather scholars from around the world, and result in the publication of an edited volume showcasing such theoretically and empirically informed new scholarship. The series will comprise two rounds. The first workshop, to be held in Lebanon on June 18th-19th, aims to discuss the overall historiographical issues at stake and the participants' early drafts. The second workshop, to be held in Paris in Autumn/Winter 2025, aims to complete the chapters with a final round of deliberation. Participants will be asked to circulate their drafts ahead of the sessions (details to be later provided to the selected candidates).

Practical information

Proposal submission deadline: 7 March 2025

Contact email: lebanesecivilwar@proton.me

- For consideration, candidates should send a proposal of **250-350 words** that includes a clearly articulated research question, a brief literature review, and a description of the sources engaged.
- Proposals should also include a short biography with contact information.
- Applicants will be informed of the acceptance of their proposal **by the end of March**.
- Successful applicants will be provided with support for travel and accommodation.

Proposals may address one or more of the following themes

1. Combatants, militants, and new economies of violence

The first section focuses on the main protagonists of the Lebanese Civil War, the members of local militias, Palestinian factions, and Lebanese and foreign militaries. Research on armed conflicts in the Middle East has long neglected the ordinary experience of men and women who engaged in protracted violence. The Lebanese Civil War is no exception. Only recently scholars have begun to explore the experience of male and female fighters and militants and decipher their behavior (Eggert 2022; Hassine 2022; Parkinson 2022; Soulié-Caraguel 2021). Whereas sectarianism often serves as an encompassing explanation for the outbreak of violence in multireligious societies such as Lebanon, we will put an emphasis on other categories of analysis such as class, gender, age, and kinship, as well as other quotidian social ties, to account for the mobilization of fighters and militants (Buton and Gayer 2012; Debos 2016). Such mobilization also needs to be located within a broader timeframe: What was the significance of previous experiences of violence such as the 1958 civil war? How did these experiences shape nascent paramilitary organizations and their hierarchies? At a more meso-level, some scholars have proposed to analyze civil wars as radical transformations of the “economy of organized violence” among national and transnational state and non-state actors (Dorrnsoro 2024; Quesnay 2022). In this perspective, how can we gain a new understanding of the “militia-ization” process in Lebanon? Or of the role of transnational networks and external resources, notably in the dynamics of organization or fragmentation amongst the warring parties?

2. Getting by in the war: individuals and institutions in a protracted conflict

This section broadly examines how local societies dealt with the experience of war and the resulting changes. Wartime order is not a tabula rasa where pre-war social relations and cultural repertoires suddenly become inoperative (Lubkeman 2008). However, the Lebanese Civil War brought about significant changes that need to be addressed by taking full account of overlapping historical dynamics and temporalities that go beyond the conventional boundaries of the war. Depending on the time and space, war was a very diverse experience. For those hailing from south Lebanon, for instance, the conflict did not begin in 1975, nor did it end in 1990; it rather continued until the end of the Israeli occupation in 2000. Proposals may investigate how organizations, institutions, and individuals managed to get by, adapt, or even survive during the war. Against the totalizing conception of Lebanon as a “failed” state, a conception which dates back to the civil war, a range of new studies have insisted on the mechanisms of state survival and transformation during the war (France 2020; Hassine 2023; Mouawad and Bauman 2017). This reappraisal of the state opens up new possibilities for understanding how institutions continued to function during the war, what purposes they pursued, and how individuals who operated them understood their situation. Drawing on previous works on the provision of social services by militias (Harik 1994), we will also shed light on the governance of civilian affairs by non-state actors (Arjona et al. 2015). More broadly, proposals may address questions relating to the political economy of the war (Picard 2000, Traboulsi 2007), such as control of trade and trafficking practices, transnational financial networks (Hourani 2010), land grabbing, labor issues, social and geographic inequalities, etc. Another line of inquiry pays attention to the tactics of individuals’, or the “arts of doing” as Michel de Certeau (2011) put it, to cope with the conflict: what skills were called upon to cross a checkpoint controlled by hostile forces or to secure access to public services? How do wartime experience and socialization generate new dispositions and skills in a context of uncertainty or emotional distress (Foa 2017)?

3. Ideologies, imaginaries, and war cultures across borders

For at least two decades, a considerable amount of research on the wars of the 20th century has shifted the traditional emphasis on their political and military history toward culture, notably by looking at the question of “war cultures” (Audoin-Rouzeau 2008b). If this concept’s explanatory character has been debated, it has also underscored the horizontal and decentralized nature of the production of the social representations that, on the various sides of the conflict, give meaning to the war and a face to the enemy. In the case of Lebanon, this research agenda remains obscured by the dominant framing of the Lebanese Civil War as an internal, purely sectarian conflict and the discarding of political ideologies and transnational exchanges as mere propaganda—with the notable exception of faith-based ideologies such as political Islam. To get a more complex view of the cultural dimension of the Lebanese Civil War, we are interested in issues such as the formation of public opinion and social imaginaries (Welsh 2014), the construction of the enemy figure (Bathia 2005), the social and cultural fabric of consent, individual and collective accommodation to violence (Loez 2010; Saint-Fuscien 2011), the management of suffering, death, and mourning (Dreyfus and Anstett 2017; Faust 2009). Proposals can also investigate the formation of a new intelligentsia and changes in the relationship between intellectuals and the field of power, as well as the transnational circulation of ideas, discursive devices, and cultural practices in the context of the Global Cold War, as well as imperial, revolutionary, and counterrevolutionary currents (Maasri 2020; Elling & Haugbolle 2024; Raymond 2019; George 2022).

4. Researching a protracted conflict: memory, archives, and fieldwork

Doing research on the Lebanese Civil War—and in the Middle East overall—raises multiple methodological issues: allegedly scarce or inaccessible sources, ethical engagement, and the politics of fieldwork. This last section proposes to reflect collectively on these difficulties and the way they informed our research and findings. The “archival turn” (Ketelaar 2017; Poncet 2019) takes the document itself as a key site for investigation: how was it produced? Why was it granted access by its keepers? (France 2020b) How can archival silences and the absence of documentation be turned into an opportunity for new findings? The recent multifaceted crisis in Lebanon and Israel’s war on Palestine also force us to adjust to a new reality: pauperization, forced displacement, and destruction are once again part of the ordinary life of the Lebanese and other vulnerable populations, such as Syrians and Palestinians. What ethical considerations are raised by this new context? How do these considerations affect our research and findings on the Lebanese Civil War?

Organizing Committee

Nathaniel George

Nathaniel George is Lecturer in Politics of the Middle East at SOAS, University of London. His first book project, *A Third World War: Revolution, Counterrevolution, and Empire in Lebanon, 1967–1982*, lies at the intersection of global political and intellectual history, challenging depictions of the Lebanese civil war as an internal sectarian conflict or a proxy ‘war of others.’ Instead, it understands Lebanon as an important setting in an international civil war over the direction of decolonization and the shape of political representation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Prior to joining SOAS, he held postdoctoral fellowships at Harvard University and Columbia University’s Center for Palestine Studies. His writings have been published in outlets such as *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, *Bidayat*, and *Arab Studies Journal*, and along with an article forthcoming in *American Historical Review*.

Jonathan Hassine

Jonathan Hassine is a Postdoctoral Research and Teaching Associate at Sciences Po Aix. His PhD thesis, completed in 2023, uses the Lebanese army as a lens through which to study both the state and society during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). His research has appeared in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Revue d’histoire moderne & contemporaine*, and *20&21. Revue d’histoire*, and a monograph, drawn from his thesis, is under contract with the Presses universitaires de France and set for publication in 2025. He is now working on a transnational history of Nasserism, at the intersection of local contentious politics, Cold War diplomacies, and regional knowledge production.

Candice Raymond

Candice Raymond is a researcher at CNRS, affiliated with the Centre d’Histoire Sociale des mondes contemporains (Center for the social history of contemporary worlds, at Pantheon-Sorbonne University). She obtained her PhD in history with a dissertation on scholarly practices of history and historiographical debates in Lebanon from the late 1960s onwards. Her current research is concerned with knowledge institutions, actors and practices in violent contexts, with a double focus on the Palestinian Revolution (1965–1982) and the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990).

Scientific Committee

Andrew Arsan (University of Cambridge); **Nicolas Badalassi** (Sciences Po Aix); **Carol Hakim** (Orient-Institut Beirut); **Matthieu Rey** (Institut français du Proche-Orient); **Joseph Bahout** (American University of Beirut); **Gilles Dorransoro** (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne).

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