



SAMHÄLLS-  
VETENSKAPLIGA  
FAKULTETEN

Centre for Middle Eastern Studies

# (Un)learning the Lebanese Past: Envisioning History Education for the “Next Generation”

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Author: Mina Augestad Fossum

Advisor: Torsten Janson

Examiner: Rola El-Husseini

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# Abstract

In view of its complex demographic composition and the lingering controversies on recent civil war historiography, Lebanon provides a unique case of education in a post-conflict context. The absence of a common Lebanese national history curriculum puts individual history teachers under significant pressure. In lieu of an engagement with recent national history, avoided because of its controversy, Lebanese history education remains largely focused on French and Ottoman history, with little relevance for present-day Lebanese affairs.

Empirically based on narratives about educational experiences and reflections on history didactics from current Lebanese education students, this small-scale phenomenological study explores the complexities and political sensitivities inherent in Lebanese history education. Drawing on post-conflict and inclusive education theory, the thesis argues that an institutional and methodological marginalization of the subject of history, hinders Lebanese history education from becoming an instrument for reconciliation and social cohesion in Lebanon. The study contributes to an expanding field on research on post-conflict education by exploring the challenges and potentials of critically engaging with history didactics in the context of post-conflict Lebanese society.

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# Table of Content

<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	1
1.1 Research Question .....	2
1.2 Key Concepts .....	4
1.3 The Lebanese Educational Context .....	5
1.4 Thesis Outline.....	7
<b>2 Literature Review</b> .....	8
2.1 Education and Reconciliation.....	8
2.2 History Education and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Societies .....	9
2.2.1 History Teachers in Post-Conflict Societies.....	12
2.3 Current Research on Lebanese History Education .....	14
<b>3 Methodology</b> .....	17
3.1 Research Paradigm: Social Constructivism.....	17
3.2 Research design: Phenomenology .....	18
3.2.1 Unit of analysis.....	18
3.2.2 Access.....	19
3.3 Data Collection.....	20
3.4 Data Collection Procedures .....	20
3.4.1 Sampling.....	20
3.4.2 Interviews .....	21
3.5 Data Analysis .....	23
3.6 Reflexivity .....	24
3.7 Ethical Considerations.....	25
3.8 Limitations.....	25
<b>4 Theoretical Framework</b> .....	27
4.1 Memory Cultures.....	27
4.2 The Theory of Social Representations .....	28
4.3 The Role of Education in a Post-Conflict Setting .....	29
4.4 The Political Function of History Education.....	30
4.5 The Concept of Historical Consciousness .....	32
4.6 Inclusive Education .....	34
4.6.1 Six principles for Inclusive Post-Conflict Education .....	34
<b>5 Findings</b> .....	38
5.1 Current Status of Lebanese History Education .....	39
5.1.1 Multi-chronological understanding of history .....	39
5.1.2 The “Best Story” Approach.....	41

5.1.3 Transmission Model of History Teaching .....	43
5.1.4 Teacher Restrictions .....	45
5.2 Reflections on Lebanese History Education Reform .....	46
5.2.1 A multi-perspective, postmodern approach.....	46
5.2.2 An interactive, disciplinary approach is necessary.....	49
5.2.3 Extrinsic Teacher Responsibility.....	51
<b>6 Discussion</b> .....	<b>53</b>
6.1 History in the educational sphere .....	53
6.1.1 Institutional marginalization of history .....	53
6.1.2 Methodological marginalization of history .....	55
6.1.3 Interdisciplinary Approach to History Education.....	57
6.2 History within Lebanese society .....	58
6.2.1 A Counter-Hegemonic and Critical-Narrative .....	59
<b>7 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>8 Bibliography</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>9 Appendices</b> .....	<b>68</b>
9.1 Appendix A: Structured Interview Guide.....	68
9.2 Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide .....	70

# 1 Introduction

*How can a country move forward, when its past is nothing more than an anecdote with a dozen different versions told over coffee, unwritten and unacceptable to the “other?”*

Marina Chamma, 2014

Few Lebanese students find the opportunity to study their “own” national history in school. Since Lebanon gained independence from France in 1943<sup>1</sup>, the country’s eighteen different ethno-religious groups<sup>2</sup> have been unable to agree upon an official national curriculum in history. Instead, most history textbooks end the historical narrative in 1943 with the Lebanese independence. Despite several efforts, Lebanon remains without a common history curriculum (De Baets 2015:16). During the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the history subject emerged as an “ideological battleground” between the country’s distinct groups (Fontana 2017:73). To date, a common account of the civil war remains elusive resulting in a multitude of narratives and interpretations about the civil war (De Baets 2015:16).

This becomes all the more striking in the light of education theories highlighting the potential of history education in reconciliation and social cohesion processes, when addressing root causes of conflicts (Fontana 2017:125). In Lebanon, however, the civil war remains obscured from view in public education. The absence of an official history curriculum puts individual history teachers under significant pressure, commonly resulting in an avoidance of discussions about the civil war given its controversy and complexity (van Ommering 2015:204). In private schools, children are often exposed to sharply different versions of Lebanese history (Fontana 2017). As a result, most Lebanese children end up learning more about French and Ottoman history, than about their own country’s history. Although Ottoman history also can be considered Lebanese history and France had an influential role in shaping modern Lebanon by creating the modern Lebanese state in the 1920s, such history education

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<sup>1</sup> In 1943 Lebanon gained independence and the National Pact between the Maronite and Sunni elites aiming at reconciling Lebanon’s two main political ideas, established the foundations of the modern Lebanese state (Fontana 2017:65).

<sup>2</sup> No official population census has been conducted in Lebanon since 1932, but the biggest religious communities is considered to be Shia and Sunni Muslims, Maronite and Greek Orthodox Christians and Druze (Fontana 2017).

provides little understanding of present-day Lebanon, yet significantly influence how students understand the past and the purpose of learning history.

Consequential of this absence of history within formal education, few Lebanese students seem prone to fill this knowledge gap by studying history at university level. Enrollment numbers from Lebanon's major universities<sup>3</sup> demonstrates this conspicuous lack of interest among current Lebanese students in obtaining a degree in the humanities or social science<sup>4</sup>. The humanities and social science are often seen as a lesser degree among Lebanese people. Only few Lebanese universities also provide educational programs with focus on social science didactics, and few such programs are active.

## 1.1 Research Question

Despite this, however, little research attention has been devoted to the practice of Lebanese history education and its potential for contributing to reconciliation in Lebanon. Even less attention has been devoted to the role of history teachers in post-conflict Lebanon and the challenges facing educators in the classroom. This thesis aims at shedding light on such challenges by exploring how future history teachers – that is, current education students aiming to teach history in Lebanon – view Lebanese history education. Based on such student reflections, this study aims at exploring the relationship between history education and reconciliation in the context of post-conflict Lebanese society. The main research question of this thesis is therefore:

***How are prospective teachers in Lebanese higher education reflecting on the current status of history didactics and its potential for reconciliation in post-conflict Lebanon?***

Drawing primarily on post-conflict and inclusive education theories, this thesis aims at understanding the restrictions, challenges and obstacles for teaching modern history in Lebanon and how Lebanese history education potentially may contribute to educational and social cohesion within Lebanese society. This thesis will therefore explore the following sub-questions:

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<sup>3</sup> Based on acceptance numbers from AUB and LU.

<sup>4</sup> The humanities include subjects such as history, religion and philosophy, while social science include civics, geography and politics.

- *What are the main theoretical, institutional and methodological obstacles for teaching modern history in Lebanon, conducive to social cohesion?*
- *How do current education students envision the potential of Lebanese history education to contribute to reconciliation?*

This study relies on 18 interviews conducted with education students from two of Lebanon's major universities; three semi-structured interviews conducted with students from the Lebanese American University (LAU) and 15 structured interviews from students enrolled at the Lebanese University (LU). The participants of this study represent a unique group within the Lebanese educational system. Unlike most young people in Lebanon, they share an interest in the social sciences. They have chosen to study education with the aim of learning how to teach history, carrying their own visions and perceptions of this history and consider a future as history and/or social science teachers. In short, they may provide unique insights into how current students envision the current state of Lebanese history education and its potentials.

This thesis particularly explores the students' reflections on "conflicting history" and what they see as the main challenges of teaching modern Lebanese history. What are their own experiences from learning history and how do they consider the potential to overcome present obstacles in their own educational practice? A particular focus is devoted to how the Lebanese Civil War has complicated the prospects of a unified Lebanese history curriculum and the potentials for reform of Lebanese history education.

To answer the research questions, this thesis proposes two layers of analysis. The first layer presents the themes identified through the analytical coding process and discusses the findings in close proximity to the students' reflections. Drawing on these analytical findings, the second layer of analysis discusses how the student reflections connect to broader institutional, political and social mechanisms in post-conflict Lebanese society. My main argument in this thesis is that current Lebanese history didactics is obstructing history education from contributing to long-term reconciliation and that the participants in this study, by offering an alternative perspective on Lebanese history didactics, challenge current Lebanese educational policies.

## 1.2 Key Concepts

*History* in this thesis is understood as “a broad social phenomenon, comprising different representations of the past, produced by scholars, administrators, cultural entrepreneurs and vernacular storytellers” (Ahonen 2014:75). Thus, history not only refers to the chain of past events, but also to “the act of writing about the past” (Yilmaz 2007:177). The epistemological underpinnings for this understanding will be elaborated in the methodology chapter.

Furthermore, post-conflict history is understood as consisting of contradicting narratives of conflicts, upheld by different proponents and parties, and therefore charged with normative and competing notions of morality and victimhood (Ahonen 2014:75).

*History didactics* is understood as the study of how the subject of history practically is taught in school, and its theoretical underpinnings. Thus, history didactics is concerned with two levels of learning and teaching history. Firstly, history didactics is related to pedagogics and focuses on the methods of teaching. Secondly, history didactics focuses on the theoretical conditions and purposes of teaching and learning history (Rüsen (1987:277). According to Jörn Rüsen (1987:277), the theoretical level establishes the objectives and forms of history education within a given social, political, cultural and institutional context, which in turn results in educational practices on a pragmatic level. According to Seixas and Morton (2013) historical analysis involves engaging with six main historical principles: historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives and ethical dimension. History didactics also concern forms and functions of historical knowledge in daily life (Rüsen 1987:281), but such broader perspectives are beyond the scope of this thesis, which focuses on history didactics in formal education.

*Reconciliation* refers to “the complex process by which deeply divided societies recover the ability to function normally and effectively after violence” (Cole 2007:1). It is regarded as a dynamic, complex and long-term process aiming at finding ways to engage with and manage differences rather than harmony (Cole 2007:10). Thus, reconciliation is both a process and an outcome aiming at diminishing ensued violent conflict and facilitating peace settlements and their long-term viability (Psaltis et al. 2017:3). Furthermore, this thesis focuses on processes of *social* reconciliation, hence exploring group processes, rather than individual reconciliation. The notion of social reconciliation thus refers to processes aiming at promoting tolerance and acceptance of rival groups’ abilities to coexist in war-torn societies (Kumar 1999).

### 1.3 The Lebanese Educational Context

In 1926 Lebanon was declared a republic under the French mandate and a confessional political system of power-sharing<sup>5</sup> between the country's religious communities was established. The French confirmed the communities' rights to maintain private schools from the Ottoman era, while they simultaneously wanted to enforce control over the education system and strengthen state schools. As a result, different identities, informed by different interpretations of the past, flourished in Lebanon during the mandate period (Fontana 2017:63-64).

In 1946 the first official school curriculum since independence was established for all subjects aiming to convey a "pride for a common past and an overarching vision for the future" (Fontana 2017:68). Realizing that Lebanese and Arab identity constructions had become an increasingly salient and contested issue within Lebanese society, the government revised the history curriculum in 1968 and avoided references to the "Lebanese nation", "Lebanese identity", and other allegedly controversial social and political issues. This, however, only strengthened the development of exclusive and competing versions of Lebanese history. During the civil war, school education came to reflect "the narratives, identities and political ideologies and visions of the different confessional communities" (Fontana 2017:70, 73).

With the 1989 Taif Agreement, the civil war officially came to close. It called for the protection of private institutions, state control over all schools, reform of national curricula and the production of a unified textbook in history and civics. By introducing these provisions, the agreement aimed at encouraging feelings of unity among its citizens and to reinforce processes of national cohesion (Fontana 2017:11).

In 1991, however, the government passed a law of general amnesty<sup>6</sup> detrimental to an officially sanctioned discussion about the civil war. By passing this law, the politicians aspired to ignore the past and produce civil peace between the sects. This, however, led to what critics have called a "state-sponsored amnesia" (Kassir 2002:104 in Haugbolle 2010:71) where the amnesty law became "intricately bound up with collective forgetfulness" as the war memories were kept from discussion (Haugbolle 2010:72). Nevertheless, Lebanon's

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<sup>5</sup> This system divided the Lebanese parliament according to the eighteen different sects and allocated the posts of president, prime minister and speaker of the house to the three largest religious sects: Maronite, Sunni and Shia (Fontana 2017:6).

<sup>6</sup> The law excluded war criminals from being prosecuted from crimes committed during the war. The only exception was crimes committed against political and religious leaders (Haugbolle 2010:69-70).

confessional schools continued to preserve and reproduce group identity constructions among their constituencies (Fontana 2017:77).

In 1997, new curricula were issued for all levels and subjects except for history, although the government emphasized the importance of developing a history curriculum. In 2001, a last curriculum attempt was made when a committee was appointed to develop a common history textbook. The curriculum guidelines were published, and textbooks were produced, but nothing in the end reached the classrooms as the Minister of Education disapproved one of the textbook pages (Fontana 2017:130-31). Thus, today the 1968 version remains the official history curriculum for Lebanese public schools. Only private schools can have textbooks covering modern history as they can choose their own textbooks, if they do not conflict with national curricula or public order (van Ommering 2017:107).

Today “private education is the norm rather than the exception in Lebanon” as over more than 70% of all Lebanese students are enrolled in private schools (van Ommering 2017:107). Private schools are regarded to provide higher educational quality and discipline than public schools, and have enjoyed more financial support, although they tend to be more intolerant toward other religious communities (Frayha 2003:87). They can also appoint teachers and choose their preferred methods. Until recently, however, no teaching diploma was required to teach in private schools, with the effect that many history teachers lack formal training in didactics or classroom management. Some high-end private schools offer supervision and teachers’ training, but this remains an exception and most schools leave teachers to develop their teaching skills on their own devices (van Ommering 2017:108).

Finally, both the private and public educational system consist of three main academic levels; elementary, intermediate and secondary education, during 12 school years. Students study largely the same subjects but can choose specializing courses on the secondary level (Loo and Magaziner 2017).

## 1.4 Thesis Outline

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 involves a discussion of the existing research on post-conflict education, with a special focus on the teacher's role in a post-conflict setting. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of this study, while Chapter 4 discusses its theoretical framework, including the main theoretical concepts applied in the data analysis. Chapter 5 involves a first layer of analysis presenting the empirical findings of the study. In Chapter 6 these findings are discussed in relation to the larger context of post-conflict Lebanese society and in connection to current research. Finally, this thesis concludes by engaging in a discussion of the research questions, based on the analysis and by outlining possibilities for future research.

## 2 Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the existing academic literature on post-conflict education, with a particular focus on the relationship between formal education and intergroup conflicts. In its first section, I briefly discuss the field of post-conflict education and its potential for fostering reconciliation. Secondly, I discuss the major debates within the field of history education in relation to post-conflict reconciliation, focusing on the role of history teachers. Finally, I discuss the status of history education in Lebanon through the lens of available academic literature, focusing mainly on the practice of history education in Lebanese schools. Due to the scope and aim of this study, primary attention is devoted to educational practice and didactic choice in post-conflict settings, rather than questions of institutional, curricular and textbooks reform. The main argument of this review is that history education in Lebanon remains a gap in research. Most previous research has focused on educational policies and curriculum reform, and more attention should be given to the practice of history education in Lebanon and its role in contributing to reconciliation.

### 2.1 Education and Reconciliation

With their influential UNICEF paper, Kenneth Bush and Diana Saltarelli (2000) were among the first to address the relationship between education and conflict by acknowledging the role schools can play in affecting intergroup conflict. Since its publication, increased attention has been devoted to the potential of education in facilitating reconciliation in post-conflict societies (Fontana 2017; Shuayb 2012; Novelli & Smith 2011; Freedman et al. 2007; Cole 2007). In such research, education has been highlighted as a crucial component of reconciliation and the classroom as an important arena for educating the next generation not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Focusing on schools' role in promoting social cohesion through a series of case studies from both multicultural and post-conflict societies, Maha Shuayb (2012:2) advocates for a multidimensional approach that addresses the social and political role of education and promotes the cohesion of communities. According to Shuayb (2012:246), social cohesion is most effectively promoted through a holistic education approach that revisits the overall objectives of education and its competing agendas.

Several scholars, furthermore, point to the challenges emerging when attempting to implement educational reform in highly politicized societies recovering from conflict. For one, studies (Freedman et al. 2007; Cole 2007) demonstrate that there often is a high level of

mistrust in society, both on interpersonal and institutional level, after identity-based conflicts. Many politicians are accused of being concerned only with maintaining power over their own constituency, hence fostering conflict, rather than promoting compromise and cooperation. In-group loyalties tend to prevail in a context of mistrust in other groups and political parties. Building trust between groups therefore becomes a crucial part of reconciliation (Cole 2007:8). According to Elizabeth Cole (2007:8), this requires clear and consistent signals that perpetrating groups must refrain from violations. In the absence of such signals, mistrust will prevail, counteracting any meaningful education reform.

Secondly, several studies (Fontana 2017; McCully 2012; Freedman et al. 2007) show that social divisions tend to be reflected and perpetuated in the classroom, rendering inclusion of controversial issues and educational reform challenging. Sarah Freedman et al. (2007:57), in their study of four post-conflict societies (Croatia, the UN-administered province of Kosovo in Serbia-Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda), documented the resistance to interethnic contact in schools due to fears of overt violence which resulted in educators feeling compelled to control discussions and avoid controversial topics. Exploring the political function of education in Lebanon, Ireland and Macedonia, by investigating how compulsory education contribute to regulate identity-based conflicts, Giuditta Fontana (2017), furthermore, found that both before and during conflict, schools contributed to socialize children into separate and mutually exclusive notions of identity. This in turn sustains the integrity of ethnic, religious and national groups, and the education reform proposed by the countries' peace agreements consolidated rather than altered political entrenchment (Fontana 2017:2). The challenges of teaching history in post-conflict societies thus remain a key issue in the field of post-conflict education.

## 2.2 History Education and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Societies

During the last decade, researchers have devoted increased attention to history education's role in reconciliation processes, as these often entail how post-conflict societies are to come to terms with their recent past, including establishing facts about past human rights violations, bringing perpetrators to justice and launching initiatives to prevent repeated violations. Post-conflict societies, however, often face the challenge of presenting the next generation with an allegedly accurate version of the past, as this often is interpreted differently among society's different groups (De Baets 2015:6). Post-conflict societies also commonly demonstrate a tension between those who wants to forget and those who wants to remember the

controversies of the past, making it even more challenging to introduce educational reforms. How schools teach and promote historical narratives through history education, thus determines the role they play in promoting conflict or facilitate social reconciliation (Cole and Barsalou 2006:1).

Before a debate about history education reform can be introduced, however, other elements in society, such as minimal security and institutional changes, must be established (Cole 2007:18). According to Cole (2007:20) a history curriculum reform thus constitutes a “second stage” of the reconciliation process. Sirkka Ahonen (2014:84), however, points out that although a society might be ready for this second stage, any history education reform is dependent on a political will of implementation. Even intense lobbying or intervention by the international community is ineffective, if the state cannot or is unwilling to mobilize domestic forces (Ahonen 2014:84). Thus, state action is crucial for history education to fulfill its potential for reconciliation.

Nonetheless, several scholars argue that history education can contribute to peace-building, democracy and social cohesion in a post-conflict society (Psaltis et al. 2017; Ahonen 2014; McCully 2012; McLean Hilker 2011; Cole and Barsalou 2006). For one, scholars (Ahonen 2014; McCully 2012) argue that history education can foster reconciliation by embracing social inclusiveness in the classroom. History is crucial for identity construction and members of communities identify with different elements, such as ethnicity, social class, profession or religion. Consequently, Ahonen (2014:77) argues that history lessons should provide an open arena for dialogue, provide opportunities for multiple identity constructions and historical accounts in order to be inclusive.

Secondly, scholars argue that the history subject, because of its potential for citizenship education, can play a key role in peacebuilding (McCully, 2012; Cole 2007; Lee and Shemilt 2007; Cole and Barsalou 2006). According to Arthur et al. (2008:5), citizenship education aims at developing “knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable [young people] to participate in the communities in which they are part”. Following this, scholars argue that “history is central to citizenship formation in any open and democratic society” (Lee and Shemilt 2007:17) and that history education should and can help students become “engaged, responsible citizens” (Cole and Barsalou 2006:4). Elizabeth Cole and Judy Barsalou (2006:4), argues that even in deeply divided societies history education should be “taught in a way that inspires young people to believe in their own abilities to effect positive changes in society and

contribute to a more peaceful future”. According to Alan McCully (2012:154) history education has “a distinctive but complementary role” to citizenship education because it establishes linkages between the past and present inviting debate and action. It is, however, beyond the scope of the history discipline to take on the mission of citizenship education itself.

Finally, scholars argue that history education must be grounded in local circumstances and connected to ordinary people’s experiences to have any sustainable impact on reconciliation (Ahonen 2014; McCully 2012; Hawkey and Prior 2011). Looking at the impact and utility of an enquiry-based multi-perspective history approach based on studies conducted in Northern Ireland, McCully (2012) argues that history education reform will have limited impact until history becomes relevant to young people’s day-to-day cultural and political experiences. According to him, this can be achieved with an approach to history education that promotes an empathetic understanding of history and relates history to the lived experiences of ordinary people. This provides potentials of breaking down emotional barriers between groups and motivate people to study the past (McCully 2012:153).

Following this, several scholars argue that history education should consider unofficial history sources (Ahonen, 2014; McCully 2012; Hawkey and Prior 2011; Cole 2007). Today, young people are exposed to multiple unofficial sources, such as family, friends, community and media, that all are affecting their historical understanding (Seixas 2000:31). These sources are often also more powerful than formal education because of their close adherence to identity and belonging (Hawkey and Prior 2011:242). Thus, formal education is no longer the only source for historical knowledge but competes with a range of other outlets. Kate Hawkey and Jayne Prior (2011:242), exploring the relationship between what children learn at home and in school in three multicultural cities in Britain, found that the impact of family or community on students’ historical understanding influence their response history in school. Knowledge gained at home is often accepted unquestioningly and this can lead to mistrust in the teacher’s approach (Hawkey and Prior 2011:242). Seixas (2000:31), however, points out that although unofficial sources can influence young people’s historical understanding, formal education remains the most significant institution for reinforcing or counteracting students’ notions about history.

### **2.2.1 History Teachers in Post-Conflict Societies**

History education's potential for reconciliation puts pressure on the history teacher, since teachers in post-conflict societies often are required to play several roles at once (van Ommering 2017:104; Cole and Barsalou 2006:11). For one, teachers are expected to act as peace and democracy-builders that "teach children how to live together in peace by overcoming prejudice within and between individuals and communities" (Sindhi 2016) while at the same time foster "values and attitudes that offer a basis for transforming conflict" (Novelli and Smith 2011). According to Swahela Sindhi (2016), teachers must realize that their goal is more than "completing of syllabus and conducting examination" and that they as agents of social and political change also must "teach the skills required for civil participation and employment", especially in conflict zones.

Secondly, teachers are the guardians of quality education as their "behavior, attitudes, motivations, and training are key to ensuring that a quality learning environment is maintained" and they should act both as authority figures and role models for their students (Dupuy 2008:50). Finally, teachers are expected to act as socializing agents, and be responsible for providing the environment and encouragement for learning (Berns 2001, paraphrased in Dupuy 2008:50).

Thus, history teachers are trusted with many overlapping roles. Several scholars, however, argue that the challenges of teaching history in post-conflict societies renders teachers unprepared to play all the expected roles (van Ommering 2017; McCully and Montgomery 2009; McLean Hilker 2011). Erik van Ommering (2015:204) argues that teachers in post-conflict contexts must navigate in a "highly complex web of power relations" as they struggle to position themselves in the contradiction between the omnipresence of conflict in daily life and the absence of it in educational discourse. Thus, history teachers are not immune to outside pressures or excluded from "informal encounters with representations of history" (McCully and Montgomery 2009:92). They too are products of a divided society (McCully 2012:150), and their values and experiences may feed into teaching practices challenging democratic educational practices (Akar 2011:470).

Research (van Ommering 2017, 2015; Akar 2011; McCully and Montgomery 2009) indicates that this situation often makes history teachers feel overwhelmed and burn-out. They are often reluctant to address sensitive topics, and instead schools tend to mute contentious issues to protect teachers from conflict (van Ommering 2017:111). According to Alan McCully and

Alison Montgomery (2009:93) teachers tend to “hide” behind “a mask of professional neutrality” to avoid potentially sensitive issues. By ignoring sensitive topics, however, teachers prevent students from exploring such issues and they remain uninformed about essential parts of history (McCully and Montgomery 2009:93). Studies show, however, that teachers embracing new methods in class often risk strong public criticism from more traditional segments in society (Cole and Barsalou 2006:10). Thus, teachers’ ability to act as catalysts of change is weakened by the context in which they operate (van Ommering (2017:111) and if teachers are to embrace educational reform, they need strong and ongoing support from parents, school administration and other authorities (Cole and Barsalou 2006:11). McCully and Montgomery (2009:103-4), however, argue that “teachers will not be able to teach sensitive history effectively until they have first recognized the role of emotion in their own learning and, in the process, confronted the potential impact of personal values and identity on their teaching”. According to them (2009:94) this kind of “experiential teacher education” is required if teachers are to contribute to social change within post-conflict societies.

Furthermore, scholars emphasize that teachers must be given the necessary tools to be able to serve as critical pedagogues and agents of social change (Psaltis et al. 2017; Kello and Wagner 2017; McCully and Montgomery 2009). History teachers in post-conflict settings need the skills and confidence to tackle controversial topics and must be given more training in the historical discipline to be able to foster critical thinking among their students (Kello and Wagner 2017). If not, Charis Psaltis et al. (2017:11) argues that they will function more as “lay historians” than academic historians, which in turn can hinder successful reconciliation since the teaching will be constrained by master narratives of the past. Thus, as Psaltis et al (2017:11) points out “a weak tradition of history teaching methodology makes history teaching an unlikely candidate to contribute to a transformative process”.

Examining different communication styles for history teachers by relying on interviews conducted with Latvian teachers, Katrin Kello and Wolfgang Wagner (2017:220) argue that the history teacher has the power to define how to present history in class but needs assistance to be able to present complicated epistemological explanations in “simple, age and ability appropriate ways”. In most cases, however, current teachers stand quite alone when deciding what to convey from the curriculum, and often find themselves insecure about what to do (Kello and Wagner 2017:220).

Today, history teachers are seen as the primary stakeholders in history education reform as they are the ones who in the end must practically implement a new curriculum and teaching methods. As Cole (2007:17) points out “a textbook, revised or not, is only as important as the degree to which it is used by the teacher”. Thus, reforming the practice of history teaching is even more important than curricular reform. All the same, research on teaching practice in conflict-affected communities remains scarce. Few studies acknowledge the socio-political contexts in which education is situated and how it relates to teachers’ perspectives, strategies and practices of teaching (van Ommering 2017:105). More research is therefore needed on the strategies and practices employed by teachers in post-conflict situations, and how each particular post-conflict setting affects their pedagogical practice.

### 2.3 Current Research on Lebanese History Education

Little scholarly attention has been devoted to the practice of history education in Lebanon, even though Lebanon’s break on history teaching and failed curriculum reform efforts makes history education especially challenging for history teachers. Most existing studies focus on curriculum and textbook developments, and only a few studies focus on history practice in Lebanese schools. Most of these studies concentrate on high school education and elementary education.

The existing studies, however, provide important insights into the evolving situation of history education in Lebanon. Some studies (Fontana 2017; Bahous et al. 2013; Abouchéid and Nasser 2000) found that Lebanese history education primarily is influenced by the traditional confessional schools from the Ottoman era and still contributes to establish different, at times competing, narratives of Lebanese history. By analyzing history textbooks from seven confessional schools, Kamal Abouchéid and Ramzi Nasser (2000:74) found that most of the textbooks were influenced by the schools’ own beliefs, while the beliefs of other communities were neglected. They conclude that “history teaching in Lebanon is not conducive to national integration”. According to them, the major obstacle for changing this situation is the limited will from the Lebanese government to interfere and the schools’ loyalties to particular communities. Fontana (2017), examining the debate on history in Lebanon, found similar trends and argues that the practices and principles of Lebanon’s confessional political system impact the content of Lebanese history education.

Other studies focus on the role of teachers and how the absence of a national history curriculum places significant pressure on Lebanese teachers as curricular-instructional

gatekeepers (Thornton 1991). In his ethnographic study of five elementary schools, van Ommering (2015) found that most teachers frequently seek to avoid discussions about the civil war because of its controversy, but that the students themselves want to learn about it. According to one teacher “for our students, civil war is *the* topic” and when the school year is over “the students will always ask ‘can you talk about the Lebanese war now?’” (van Ommering 2015:204). Thus, Lebanese students indeed want to learn about their recent history, while teachers employ a strategy of evasion.

Van Ommering’s (2017) recent study of five elementary school communities in Lebanon, gives further insight into the complexity and challenges Lebanese teachers currently face. Through extensive ethnographic work, van Ommering (2017:108-9) found that the autonomy of Lebanese private schools leaves many teachers with uncertain job futures compared to public school teachers, less rights, and limited supervision and professional training that often leads them to rely on “verbal violence” to control the students. As he points out (2017:109), “with no trust, supervision or training available, the odds that teachers develop and practice alternative techniques to stimulate students’ engagement are rather limited”.

Van Ommering (2017:110) also found that conflict has a profound impact on both teachers’ and students’ lives and that classroom divisions and internal conflicts run parallel to the political developments in the country. According to him (2017:110) “heavy sanctions are imposed on whoever starts a political or sectarian debate” since such tensions are particularly hard to contain for teachers. Based on his findings, van Ommering (2017:106) proposes a framework that can contribute to understand the confines of teachers’ roles in conflict transformation by looking at four different aspects of a teacher’s situation: (1) the social, political, economic and institutional context; (2), their relations with students, colleagues, parents and school administrators; (3), their personal biographies and (4) the educational tools available to confront conflict. Van Ommering’s (2017) study shows how teachers’ practices and experiences are deeply affected by the socio-political context and the necessity of considering the range of challenges affecting their work.

The abovementioned studies represent some of the few accounts of how history education is practiced in Lebanese schools today. History education in post-conflict Lebanon, however, remains a gap in research. For one, most research has been concerned with industrialized countries over the past two decades and little focus has been devoted to education in the Middle East. As a result, educationalists have come to define teaching almost exclusively in terms that applies to a minority of educational contexts, while most teachers’ experiences

elsewhere go unnoticed (van Ommering 2017:105). Lebanon in particular, with its complex demographic composition and conflicting history, provides a unique case of post-conflict history education. Lebanese education, and especially history education, however, remains understudied, while the country's politics and sectarian dynamics has been in the foreground. Thus, more research is needed into the complex situation of Lebanese history education and how future history teachers reflect on its potential for contributing to long-term reconciliation. Shedding light on the next generation of teachers will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the current situation of Lebanese history education; its obstacles as well as its potentials.

## 3 Methodology

In this chapter, I present the different research steps included in this study; its research design, the unit of analysis, the data collection procedures, the data analysis process, its ethical concerns and limitations.

### 3.1 Research Paradigm: Social Constructivism

Relying on student reflections of Lebanese history education, this study explores the relationship between history and reconciliation through the research paradigm of social constructivism. Rooted in the ontological assumption of relativism, social constructivism holds that “social realities and identities are created and maintained in conversations with others – rather than in structures” (Cunliffe 2008:125) and that our understanding of the world, the concepts, categories and terms we use, are dependent upon where and when in the world we live (Burr 1995:3). Epistemologically, social constructivism assumes that all knowledge is socially constructed and interpreted through daily interactions with others in different contexts (Burr 1995:3). Thus, there exist multiple interpretations of reality and knowledge and such interpretations are relative to and situated within a specific historical moment and social context.

The understanding of history of this thesis is, furthermore, based on a postmodernist point of departure. Rejecting the positivist notion of history as a truth that can be discovered, postmodernism argues that there never has or will exist any “true” knowledge of the past as an expression of an essence (Jenkins 1997:6). Instead, history in the postmodernist sense is “just another more or less socially accepted narrative, competing for our attention and our assent” (Butler 2002:33). Focusing on the relationship between historical narratives and political interests, postmodernism holds that all interpretations are constructed for specific purposes and thus may both compete and contract with each other (Seixas 2000:29-30). Not all historical interpretations, however, are equally true or false. Based on historical criteria, students should learn to identify valid historical interpretations (Yilmaz 2007:185).

Furthermore, postmodernism challenges the division between the discipline of history and collective memory and argues that history is produced in different social spheres, from both unofficial and official sources, such as family and community narratives (Seixas 2000:30). According to Ahonen (2013:91) history is produced in three main fields of cultural activity:

through public memory as different memorialisations of the past in the open space; through social memory mediated by everyday interactions; and through academic research. Thus, history is a discipline that deals with “the past” institutionally, as well as in looser social contexts and individually. History education is primarily located in the field of public memory, but also draws on social memory and academic history (Ahonen 2013:91). History educators become the main *mediators* between these fields (Psaltis et al. 2017:11). Rooted within the paradigm of social constructivism and taking a postmodern approach to history, the thesis hence seeks to understand and explore the students’ individual views and experiences of institutional history education in Lebanon.

## 3.2 Research design: Phenomenology

This study places itself within the tradition of phenomenological research. It thus aims to “describe, understand and interpret the meanings of experiences of human life”, positioning the researcher as a mediator between the respondents’ individual voices and experiences and the broader community of those interested (Bloor and Wood 2006:128-29). Central to phenomenological research is Edmund Husserl’s notion of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*): the “everyday experiences that we live and which we reflect upon” (Bloor and Wood 2006:128). Drawing on this concept, I aim to explore students’ individual understanding of the relationship between history education and reconciliation in a post-conflict setting.

### 3.2.1 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis in this study consists of 18 Lebanese education students enrolled in the bachelor program in Elementary Education at the Lebanese American University (LAU) and the bachelor program in Elementary Education with specialization in geography, history and civics at the Lebanese University (LU). LAU is a private, independent university, founded in 1924 with more than 8500 students as of fall 2017. Being an American-founded university, the official educational language is English, and all students are required to master an intermediary level of English. With over 79 0000 students, LU is the only official, public institution for higher education in Lebanon. Founded in 1951, the university has over 16 different faculties spread over five different campuses all over the country. In contrast to LAU, the official educational language is Arabic, and all education and research is in Arabic or French.

The two bachelor programs at LU and LAU, furthermore, rely on different educational systems. While LAU relies on the American educational system where students are required to study a broad selection of courses, with minimal specialization, LU follows the French educational system, where students specialize and earn their teaching diploma in specific subjects. Thus, while the LU students can choose to specialize in certain topics, the LAU students study an array of different subjects based on the American liberal arts model.

These two educational degrees, however, represents two of the very few possibilities Lebanese students have for studying social science education at university level in Lebanon. The American University of Beirut (AUB) also offers a bachelor program in Elementary Education with specialization in social studies, but this program has not been offered in a long time due to lack of student interest. Thus, the programs included in this thesis provide unique opportunities for insight into the reflections of Lebanese history education among students considering a future as history teachers. In the fall of 2017, 17 third-year students were enrolled in the bachelor program in Elementary Education at LU, while 18 first-year students were enrolled in the program at LAU.

### **3.2.2 Access**

It was during my time in Beirut in the fall of 2017, that the focus of this study fully developed. Through my internship at the Lebanese Association for History (LAH) and in discussion with colleagues, I defined what available options I had as a European researcher with limited Arabic or French<sup>7</sup> speaking skills. My internship at LAH enabled me to get familiar with the context of Lebanese history education and helped me to gain access to the participants. As part of my internship, I was able to partake in a social science didactics course at LAU which gave me direct access to the students, and the opportunity to observe their discussions and exercises in class. Regarding access to the LU students, one member of LAH, also teaching history in the Faculty of Pedagogy functioned as a gate-keeper and gave me access to the students in his history course, all enrolled in the LU education program. Considering that LU proved to be a relatively difficult setting to access in view of my limited Arabic skills and lack of familiarity with this university context, this gate-keeping function proved important for this study. I contacted the LU students through email, but most communication went through my gatekeeper.

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<sup>7</sup> Arabic is the official language in Lebanon, while French is also widely spoken.

In both cases, however, it was my internship supervisor who served as the main gate-keeper, in granting me access to both the course at LAU and the teacher at LU. She was instrumental in directing me to the situations, events and people facilitating my investigation to progress (Bryman 2012:439). Thus, my internship at LAH became the framework for my study and gaining access to the participants may have been impossible without this opportunity.

### 3.3 Data Collection

In line with the procedures of phenomenological research, the data collection consisted of interviews conducted with Lebanese students: three semi-structured in-depth interviews and 15 written structured interviews. I began my fieldwork in September 2017 and conducted the in-dept interviews in November 2017. In January 2018, assisted by my gate-keeper at LU, I distributed the structured interview guide. Data were collected using a mixture of English and Arabic. I conducted all the three interviews in English by recording them and taking notes, while the structured interviews were done in Arabic and subsequently translated into English.

### 3.4 Data Collection Procedures

#### 3.4.1 Sampling

The LAU students were sampled from the abovementioned course on social science didactics. It is called “Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Social Studies” and is mandatory for all students enrolled in the LAU education program. The LU students were sampled from a mandatory course called “The Modern History of Lebanon.”<sup>8</sup> The participants are in the third year of their program, and teaching history, geography and civics is a part of their specialization. Of the 18 LAU students, only three students considered teaching history and thus participated in in-depth interviews. Of the 17 LU students, 15 responded to the written structured interview guide.

As the study focused on a specific group of students, I relied on a purpose-based sampling. They were selected based on my judgment about which participants I thought would be most relevant and useful for the research (Babbie 2013:128). I aimed at interviewing students from different regions in Lebanon and from both genders, but the main criterion was that they studied education with a wish of teaching history and/or social science. While the low interest

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<sup>8</sup> Although this course is called “The Modern History of Lebanon” it does not address Lebanon’s recent history since 1943, only Lebanese history from 1516 until 1943.

for a future as social science and history teachers limited the sample available, I managed to gather a sufficient number of relevant participants.

The participants of this study thus represent some of the few Lebanese students considering teaching history and/or social science in the future. They originate from different regions and socio-religious groups in Lebanon, which provides a diverse sample of students with different personal backgrounds, views and motivations. Most participants were in their twenties. They had attended both private and public schools and some of them were French educated, while others were English, or Arabic educated. Considering that LAU is a private, American and prestigious university, while LU is a public university, the participants also belong to different socio-economic classes. All the participants, however, were female, in reflection of the current gender balance in the programs. Indeed, among all the education students currently enrolled in the courses at the time of this study, only one student was male. Females constitute a vast majority<sup>9</sup> of the teaching profession in Lebanon (Avis 2017:13).

### **3.4.2 Interviews**

As part of my field experience, I arrived at the conclusion that conducting structured interviews was the most suitable data procedure for this study. The LU students represented some of the few students relevant for this study. Since they were limited to speaking Arabic, the choice of structured interviews in Arabic became necessary for gathering the relevant data, also since this group was unavailable for in-depth interviews due to time constraints of the study and the participants intensive study period. In order to develop the interview guide for the structured interviews, however, I also conducted three semi-structured interviews with the LAU students. These interviews were conducted in English and included personal reflections that helped me formulate questions for the structured interview guide.

I developed the structured interview guide (see appendix A) based on the post-conflict education literature and on the available literature about Lebanese history education. For the semi-structured interviews, I developed a temporary interview guide (see appendix B), flexible enough to follow up on the interesting perspectives that came up during the interviews. In the end, the structured interview guide came to include the five following topics:

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<sup>9</sup> Women constitute 75.2% of the total number of teachers in Lebanon (Avis 2017).

- The participants' interest in history
- Their experiences with learning history in school
- Their reasons for becoming teachers and teaching history/social science
- Their views on the current situation of history education in Lebanon
- Their views on the role of the teacher in history education

The preliminary interview guide included questions about the students' understanding of modern Lebanese history and identity. These topics, however, were not included in the final interview guide as I after conducting the semi-structured interviews, considered these topics to be too sensitive or complex to answer in the limited space available in a written interview. Even so, as I was interested in exploring individual experiences and motivations, most of the questions were open-ended where the participants themselves were able to somewhat elaborate their answers. Thus, both data collection procedures can be considered qualitative.

#### **3.4.2.1 Structured Interviews**

The structured interviews relied on a fixed set of questions guiding the respondents. It included 17 open-ended questions, with some sub-questions and the gate-keeping teacher distributed the guide on my behalf. The interview guide also included a section where the students were asked to answer some personal questions, enabling me to assess the diversity of the group. This included questions about geographical origin, age and gender, if they had attended private or public schools and what language that was the language of instruction.

#### **3.4.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews provided a flexible format (Bryman 2012:212), suitable for the purposes of the explorative section of the data collection procedures. They enabled me to engage in a conversation with the LAU students about their views on Lebanese history education, providing thorough insights into the participants' reflections. Through this format, the participants seemed comfortable in sharing their stories, considering also that we had established a familiar relation before the interview. It allowed the participants to expand on topics of individual interest and allowed me to follow-up with questions of relevance in a pragmatic fashion. This was important as the contours of the study emerged throughout the research process and in interaction with the students. One interview was also followed up with more specific questions after transcription that provided some clarifications.

All the interviews were conducted in English, and in an informal setting. Two of them were conducted on the LAU campus, while one was conducted at a café in Hamra, close to AUB. Interview times were scheduled before hand through text-message, and I emphasized that the interviews would be informal. The average time of an interview was about 50 minutes. In the transcription of the interviews, elementary, obvious grammar mistakes were corrected, but no major changes were inserted.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Drawing on Johnny Saldaña's coding manual (2009), the data analysis process included five main steps. The first step included an *attribute coding* of all my transcripts. Attribute coding includes the notation of basic descriptive information such as where and when interviews were conducted, participant characteristics, time frame and data format (Saldaña 2009:55) and enables the researcher to get an overview of essential participant information. The attribute coding included making a participant profile of all the participants including living place, age, gender, study and educational background.

The second step involved a *structural coding* where similar segments of data relating to the same inquiry topic were grouped together in larger categories before a more detailed coding. Thus, structured coding is a question-based coding that "acts as a labeling and indexing device" and that allows the researcher to both categorize and initially code the data corpus at the same time based on pre-set coding ideas (Saldaña 2009:67). I based the structured coding on the five main topics of the interview guide outlined above, which enabled me to review, code and organize the data simultaneously, and it prepared the data for a more detailed coding.

Step three entailed a *descriptive coding* where every data set was coded using *Value*, *Process* and *In vivo* coding mechanisms. In a descriptive coding a word or a short phrase, often a noun, is used to summarize the basic topic or idea of a passage of qualitative data (Saldaña 2009:70). All the codes were included in a code book describing and organizing the codes after their frequency. While some of the codes were theory-driven based on the defined topics, other codes emerged based on the content of the transcripts.

In step four I conducted a *focused coding*, where the coding results were coded and grouped into larger categories. Focused coding entails a search for the most frequent or significant initial codes that will enable one to make broader categories of the data corpus consisting of

the most important codes (Saldaña 2009:155). This process included several steps where the categories were reduced and thematically condensed. In the end I ended up with seven major themes significant for the research questions.

Finally, the last step entailed collecting the quotes and codes for each theme to get an overview of what ideas the different themes entailed and how they interconnected. In addition to these five steps, I also wrote coding memos noting the most important codes, categories and emerging patterns, and an analytical memo of the coding process.

### 3.6 Reflexivity

When conducting qualitative research, a researcher must be aware of the implications his/her methods, values, biases and decisions have for the knowledge being generated and the impact he/she has on the research subjects. Furthermore, reflexivity entails being sensitive to the cultural, political and social context in which the researcher is situated (Bryman 2012:393).

When first approaching the LAU students, I introduced myself as a master's student conducting research in Beirut and interning at LAH. I was aware, however, that my own biography as a foreign, white, female master's student of European origin active at a Swedish university, most likely affected both what I saw and heard during the interviews, how I have interpreted my findings, and how the participants perceived me. Although I am in the same age group as most of the participants, I remain an outsider to their university context. As I have never done field research in the Middle East before, I am also unfamiliar with several political, cultural and social aspects of the field. At the same time, however, I experienced that my age and status, as a university student in her mid-20s proved advantageous in stimulating the interviews. Our comparable situation seemed to facilitate our interaction. Considering also that the participants already were familiar with me, they seemed comfortable in opening up and sharing their views. I had the impression that all participants took my research seriously and that they were genuinely interested in the questions of the study.

When conducting interviews about sensitive issues, researchers must treat their participants' views and opinions with respect (Babbie 2013:330). Considering that modern Lebanese history is a highly politicized issue, my intent was not to pass value-judgments on the students' accounts, but to explore and aspire to understand the reasons for their attitudes. I did not however experience that the participants felt insecure or improperly scrutinized during the interviews.

As I was unable to meet the LU students in person but only communicated with them through email, it is difficult to assess how they perceived me, but based on our email correspondence they appeared to be interested in assisting me in my research. Most of the communication with the LU students, however, considering that they only spoke Arabic or French, went through my gatekeeper at LU. Thus, the LU students participated in my research without knowing me and had to rely on how I represented my research through email, and the explanations provided by the gate-keeper.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Taking ethical issues into consideration, the participants were advised in advance that I was conducting this study for my master thesis. They were assured before partaking that their contribution to the research was voluntary and that their contributions would stay anonymous and only available to me, the translator and my supervisor. For the LAU students, I relied on oral informed consent before conducting my research. Regarding the LU students, I got their consent through the gate-keeper and a reassurance of confidentiality was also included in the introduction of the structured interview guide. Furthermore, to guarantee confidentiality, I deleted the names of the participants when transcribing, and in the written structured interviews I did not inquire about the participants' names. All the data was kept secure during the research process, and only I, the translator and my supervisor had access to it.

### 3.8 Limitations

One limitation of this study was its short time frame. As my stay in Beirut was limited to four months, I was unable to totally immerse myself in the social setting of my research and learn the different norms, rules and terminology of the university context (O'Reilly 2005:95). Using my internship at LAH as a framework for my research was thus essential in this regard.

Another limitation was language. Although most of my research was conducted in English, my limited skills in Arabic and French limits my research in the sense that people often manage to express themselves more freely by using their mother tongue. Thus, although the LAU students spoke English, there were several incidents where they expressed themselves in Arabic or French and where I had to ask for clarification. Especially, regarding the structured interviews, the language became a limitation. Because the LU students did not speak or write English, the interview guide and emails had to be translated from English to Arabic and the results translated back into English once they were completed. The analysis was therefore not

based on the original discourse of the participants, but a translation thereof. The language barrier also made it difficult to get access to the LU students during the sampling process and at several times I found myself quite limited by the field, and dependent on the students' willingness and availability to participate.

Furthermore, a limitation for this study is that I was unable to ask follow-questions to the LU students and had to rely solely on their answers from the structured interviews, which sometimes restricted me from getting clarification or further information about the participants' answers. Thus, there is a difference between orally conducted semi-structured interviews and written structured interviews regarding the complex, thorough and in-dept answers one can obtain, which influenced the type of answers that I got.

A final limitation is that the data I collected was highly dependent on the questions of the interview guide. Thus, the data could have looked differently, if I had asked different questions. When conducting the semi-structured interviews, I tried to get a thorough understanding of the participants' ideas by asking follow-up questions, but I also realized that the participants' answers sometimes were affected by my own formulations, for instance in asking for clarifications and directing the conversation to particular concepts or debates relevant to the questions. At the same time, however, such interventions sometimes proved important for the participants' understanding of the questions in the interviews.

## 4 Theoretical Framework

As we have seen, the controversies over Lebanese identity and history may be considered as the main obstacles for developing a common history curriculum in Lebanon. A theoretical elaboration of the role of the past and the constructions of notions of history in a post-conflict scenario like Lebanon is therefore crucial for the analysis of the challenges and opportunities of Lebanese history education. This following theory chapter will be divided into four parts. In the first section, I discuss Sune Haugbolle's (2010) theory of memory cultures in relation to Lebanon as an overarching theoretical framework for this study. Secondly, I discuss the theory of social representations, as schools are one primary arena where social representations of both national and group histories are conveyed. Third, I turn my attention to post-conflict education theory, in order to discuss the role of education in a post-conflict setting, the political functions of history education, and the role of history education in developing a historical consciousness among students. Finally, I discuss theories of inclusive education and their potential in advancing education in a transforming post-conflict society.

Already here, however, it should be noted that theories on education in general, and on post-conflict and inclusive perspectives of history education in particular, by necessity include a normative aspect. Such theories are, in essence, concerned with *transforming* education. They explore didactics reform and measures aspiring to make learning and teaching more efficient, more functional and more inclusive – thus interconnecting pedagogical theory with ideological, socially transformative ideals. As Slee (2011:14) points out inclusive education “invites us to think about the nature of the world we live in, a world that we prefer, and our role in shaping both of those worlds”. Indeed, in choosing to explore the challenges and opportunities of Lebanese history education, this thesis inherently co-constructs such normative aspects, while aspiring to do so in a nuanced and critical manner.

### 4.1 Memory Cultures

Constructing history is instrumental in developing and maintaining imagined communities (Anderson 1983) based on a collective memory (Halbwachs 1950) shared by the community. In Lebanon, 18 different imagined communities exist with their own version of the country's history and in the absence of an official history curriculum, history is narrated and produced in many different aspects of society. To capture this plurality and complexity of history production within Lebanese society, I rely on what Haugbolle (2010) calls “memory cultures”

as the overall framework for this thesis. While influenced by Halbwachs' (1950) work on memory, Haugbolle (2010:8), argues that "memory cultures" is a more suitable way to "describe the variety of overlapping agendas, issues and interpretations in any culture" than the more monolithic term of "collective memory". Indeed, at heart of public Lebanese discourse, Haugbolle (2010:13) identifies a pervasive historical silence "conveying the things people agree on omitting rather than including".

According to Haugbolle, a counterhegemonic memory culture of what he calls "memory makers" developed in the years after the civil war in Lebanon. These memory makers were people of the creative class who became concerned with how to memorialize the civil war through social and artistic activities such as book, film and article production (Haugbolle 2010:8). This memory culture contrasted the memory culture of Lebanon's political groups based on idealistic ways of understanding the past used to legitimize their political identity (Haugbolle 2010:9). According to Haugbolle (2010:9) there are three kinds of memory cultures; political, intellectual and artistic, that all "emanate from individual experiences that are socially constructed, imagined and represented, and are discernable to observers as social patterns, expressions and narratives". These memory cultures can, furthermore, be studied as "a snapshot of current norms" in society and thus, how a group remember tells us more about how history is dealt with in the present, than about the past itself (Haugbolle 2010:12).

## 4.2 The Theory of Social Representations

A crucial part of a memory culture is its representation of history. Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986), the theory of social representation is concerned with how national, ethnic or political groups represent and communicate themselves in society. Social representations can be understood as "coordinated patterns of thinking, communication and behaving that exist among actors in social groups relative to issues or imaginary or real objects, which become relevant in certain situations" (Kello and Wagner 2017:204). A social representation also includes what individual group members think regarding a specific issue, how they communicate it and behave towards others. Thus, representation concerns action as much as thinking (Kello and Wagner 2017:204-5).

Regarding history, social representations provide groups with narratives telling them who they are, where they came from and where they should be going (Liu and Hilton 2005:537). According to James Liu and Denis Hilton (2005:538) a central part of a group's representation of history is what they call a charter; "an account of its origin and historical

mission, which will have been amended and renegotiated over time to reflect changing circumstances and frame its responses to new challenges”. A charter provides a foundational myth for a society or group, defines its rights and obligations and legitimizes its social and political arrangements. This way, social representations of history also become essential elements of identity construction and have crucial impact on a group’s sense of collective identity as they help distinguishing group identities by drawing boundaries between “us” and “them” (Liu and Hilton 2005:538, 550).

Liu and Hilton focus on the social representation of nation states but the concept can also be applied when analyzing ethnic, political or religious subgroups within nation states, such as in Lebanon. According to Liu and Hilton (2005:546), hegemonic social representations of history occur when a nation’s subgroups share the same perception of its history because it offers an adequate position for each group. This in turn leads to a positive relationship between national identity and subgroup identities. In deeply divided societies, however, heterogeneous representations of history will likely develop because the subgroups feel that their social representation of history do not fit into the national charter. This leads to a tension between the national and ethnic identity (Liu and Hilton 2005:546). For the purposes of this thesis, the theory of social representation can provide important perspectives on how the students understand modern Lebanese history.

### 4.3 The Role of Education in a Post-Conflict Setting

Formal education is one important arena where key-identity-forming narratives are conveyed and reproduced through curricula, school procedure, structures and daily practices. Through formal education students are “indoctrinated into the explanatory clusters, stereotypes and myth-symbol complexes” of the nation states they belong to through a process of socialization (Fontana 2017:39). This, however, often becomes problematic in deeply divided societies where schools tend to convey competing group identities deviating from the national narrative, thus strengthening boundaries between communities, instead of overcoming them (Fontana 2017:39).

Tony Gallagher (2005), examining religious education in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, identifies three contending perspectives on how schools can contribute to perpetuate intergroup conflict in a post-conflict setting. The first position is that “separate schools enhanced religious divisions by providing different curriculums that heightened inter-group antagonisms” (Gallagher 2005:434) and thus that curricular contents can perpetuate

intergroup conflicts. For this reason, it is curricular changes that should be prioritized in any post-conflict educational reform. In Gallagher's (2005:434) second perspective "the mere fact of separation, allied with the hidden curriculum of separate schools, encouraged religious differences" and thus, a reform of the daily practices and structures of schools should be prioritized after violent conflict. According to Alan Smith (2005), states can shape its basic educational system in three ways. They can promote "conformity to a single set of dominant values (assimilation)" through mandatory and state-sponsored institutions. They can allow for "the development of identity-based institutions (separate development)" and thus legitimize the authority of communities upon their children. Finally, they can "encourage shared institutions (integration)" by promoting common schools, alongside other institutions (Smith 2005:376).

In the third perspective the main reason for conflict is "the unjust relationship of domination and subordination between the majority and minority communities" (Gallagher 2005:434). Thus, a redressing of inequalities and remediation of unjust inter-group hierarchies is necessary to reach conflict resolution. The redistribution of material sources and political power do, however, not solve inter-group tensions long-term if schools continue to convey conflicting narratives, although inequalities have been redressed (Fontana 2017:45). Thus, a focus on inequality often becomes a supplement to more fundamental curriculum reforms.

These three perspectives reveal that schools contribute to reproduce and perpetuate inter-group conflicts in deeply divided societies and that they may continue to convey competing narratives, if they are not reformed (Fontana 2017:45). Within this study, these perspectives can contribute to understand how the education students regard the role of Lebanese schools in fostering conflict.

#### 4.4 The Political Function of History Education

In post-conflict societies, history education is often at the core of the debates over education reform because of its instrumental role in "shaping individual and group identity and influencing inter-group relations" (Fontana 2017:124). It is the primary arena where social representations of history, hegemonic or heterogenous, are sanctioned and communicated and is often expected to offer "an interpretation of the past to suit contemporary needs" (Fontana 2017:125). According to Fontana (2017) history education is entrusted with two responsibilities. First, it is expected to contribute to social cohesion by providing a positive collective narrative of the past. Secondly, it is expected to contribute to long-term

reconciliation and promote tolerance, mutual understanding and trust by addressing the roots of past conflict. In deeply divided societies, however these expectations pose a dilemma as history education only can promote long-term peace if followed by an acknowledgement of the different group histories and their place in the past, present and future (Fontana (2017:125).

According to Peter Seixas (2000:20) there are three ways societies can deal with conflicting interpretations of the past, that in turn reflect three fundamentally different orientations towards historical pedagogy and epistemology. Which model a society chooses highlights history education's main political function in society. First, Seixas (2000:21) identifies the "enhancing collective memory" or "best story" approach. This approach focuses on curricular content rather than on pedagogical techniques and provides a single narrative of the past. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a single narrative has dominated most countries' history teaching (McCully 2012:147), as it is regarded as having the potential to provide students with identity, cohesion and social purpose (Seixas 2000:22). In a post-conflict society, however, it is controversial to decide what the right version of the past is, and to formulate a common curriculum immediately after conflict may be challenging as no acceptable record of the conflict exists (Fontana 2017:125). Political elites may also have "vested interest in retaining simple narratives that flatter their own group and promote group unity by emphasizing sharp divergences between themselves and other groups" (Cole and Barsalou 2006:9) which can lead to accusations of manipulating history for political purposes. Finally, the "best story" approach understands history as "something fixed by authority rather than subject to investigation, debate and its own system of warrants" (Seixas 2000:23). Because of this, the "best story" approach often leads to a history education only including already agreed upon history in the curriculum, or what Lynn Davies (2004) calls a "sanitization" approach where controversial content is eliminated from the history education. Contrasting this approach, is a "sensitization" strategy where controversial content is included and reworded in the curriculum (Davies 2004).

Seixas' (2000:24) second approach is what he calls the "disciplinary" approach to history. By presenting multiple historical accounts to students, this approach aims to teach students to reach their own conclusions about what versions of the past that is the best interpretations based on documents analysis. In other words, it aims to teach students disciplinary criteria for deciding what makes good history and to make them familiar with historical sources and methods (Seixas 2000:20). According to Seixas (2000:25) the disciplinary approach provides

students with active exercises in building their own historical knowledge, criticizing other's historical accounts and to independently develop their own opinions. Thus, it focuses on building skills and values among the students and to this way promote trust-building and reconciliation (Fontana 2017:126).

To implement a disciplinary approach in deeply divided societies, however, has also proven difficult as communities tend to go on fighting a “history war” where history becomes a political tool used by different political parties to justify their respective causes and historical interpretations (Ahonen 2014:76-77). Furthermore, the disciplinary approach has been criticized for loosing students to relativism and making people uninterested in studying history by detaching it from identity. As students, however, already are exposed to conflicting historical interpretations in popular culture, they need criteria for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of these interpretations (Seixas 2000:25-26).

Finally, Seixas identifies a third approach to history teaching – the “postmodern” approach. While the two already mentioned approaches have shaped most of debates and productions within the field, the orientation of postmodernism is less explored (Seixas 2000:26). This approach, as mentioned already in the method chapter, challenges the notion of the “best story” and explores the relationship between historical knowledge and power. Through this approach, students are also presented with multiple versions of the past which they must relate to their political uses in the present (Seixas 2000:20). Thus, the postmodern approach aims to make students “understand how different groups organize the past into histories and how their rhetorical and narratological strategies serve present-day purposes” (Seixas 2000:20-21). Postmodernism, however, have been criticized for furthering relativism and for turning all history into collective memory if historical knowledge is understood only as “a weapon in a power struggle” (Seixas 2000:30).

These three different perspectives all concerns the question of to what end a society should teach history and can help to identify both what model Lebanese schools currently are employing and which they should employ, according to the participants.

## 4.5 The Concept of Historical Consciousness

By teaching students to utilize historical criteria and draw connections between past and present, history teachers also cultivate an historical consciousness among the students (Ahonen 2013:91). Historical consciousness can be understood as how an individual

understands the relation between the past, present and the future, and focuses on how people understand multi-chronological relations (Thorp 2014:21). According to Robert Thorp (2014:21-22), however, it is the understanding of the relation of past, present and future that is significant, not the relation itself. He, furthermore, argues that historical consciousness can be detected through three different manifestations: through narratives, through different uses of history and through historical culture. A historical culture affects how individuals interpret historical events and facts and is upheld by the individuals narrating and using history (Thorp 2014:23).

Furthermore, Seixas (2006:149) identifies four different ways of understanding history. The *traditional way* see history as either true or false and leaves no room for critical assessment of history or contradictory historical accounts (Seixas 2006:145). In the *exemplary way*, history is understood as a positivist science where only applying the right method for approaching history matters, so the truth can be discovered. This view is more advanced than the traditional view because it engages with historical method, but still treats historical accounts as substantive (Thorp 2014:23). A *critical type* of historical consciousness moves beyond the positivist view and questions the actual possibility of truth in history (Seixas 2006:148). It does not, however, offer any method for how to treat historical accounts but regards all historical accounts as equally true or false (Thorp 2014:23). Finally, a *genetic way* of understanding history falls between positivism and relativism and sees historical knowledge as constructed “by a community of inquiry that exercises mutual checks and balances within itself” (Seixas 2006:149). Thus, “[h]istorical knowledge changes over time, and, yet, in any particular historical era, there are standards for valid historical accounts or arguments” (Seixas 2006:149).

Drawing on these types of historical consciousness will enable me to theorize whether the education students understands multi-chronology and discuss how they understand history. The concept of historical consciousness can also contribute to understand to what extent the students have developed a historical thinking. Historical thinking is commonly understood as the ability to understand how historical knowledge is constructed and for what means, and an ability to contextualize historical narratives (Thorp 2014:26). Historical thinking is “the creative process that historians go through to interpret the evidence of the past and generate stories of history” (Seixas and Morton 2013:2).

## 4.6 Inclusive Education

The concept of educational inclusion is complex and have been used in multiple ways making it open to a wide range of interpretations. For one, scholars distinguish between inclusive pedagogy and inclusive education. Inclusive pedagogy refers to a teaching and learning approach concerned with providing rich learning opportunities for all students so that everybody can participate in the classroom community (Black-Hawkins 2017:14-13). Inclusive education, on the other hand, has increasingly been understood as the “broad political, social and cultural processes that shape schools and education systems, with the aim of making provision for all children to be educated together” (Black-Hawkins 2017:17). It focuses on making all students feel welcomed, appropriately challenged and supported in their learning, and successful inclusive education primarily happens through “accepting, understanding and attending to student differences and diversity” (McManis 2017).

Secondly, within the field of educational inclusion, primary focus has been devoted to the inclusion of students with special needs or “disabilities”<sup>10</sup>. In recent years, however, increased attention has been given to the role of inclusive education in conflict-affected societies, and how the practice of inclusive education might succeed in transforming post-conflict 21<sup>st</sup>-century societies (Smith and Barr 2008:403).

### 4.6.1 Six principles for Inclusive Post-Conflict Education

Focusing on the post-conflict society of Northern Ireland, Ron Smith and Sean Barr (2008:406) argues that educational inclusion must be viewed as “a social movement manifesto in pursuit of transforming society via educational environments supportive of cultural diversity, equality and excellence for all”. Furthermore, Smith and Barr (2008:406) identifies six principles for restructuring learning environments and promote inclusive learning communities in transforming post-conflict societies. These principles will allow me to understand both to what extend current Lebanese history education is inclusive and what efforts the students see as necessary for inclusive education to work in post-conflict Lebanese society, as an inclusive education is regarded as having the potential to further reconciliation.

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<sup>10</sup> The concept of “disabilities” is highly contentious and complex and has been used to describe a wide range of characteristics and conditions – focusing on individual aspects as well as the social constructedness and environmental aspects positioning an individual or group as “disabled”. Today, two trends dominate definitions of disability according to the UN Standard Rules, the Disability Discrimination Act (U.K) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (U.S.): 1) a physical or mental characteristic perceived as an impairment, and 2) some personal or social limitations associated with that impairment (Wasserman 2016).

First, Smith and Barr (2008:407-9) argues that a sense of community must be developed within the classroom to achieve interdependence among students, and that learning must involve constructing knowledge in dialogue with others. Studies show that where learning is approached in a communal, collective and collaborative manner, “diverse contributions are embraced, differences are de-emphasized, and inclusion is promoted” (Smith and Barr 2008:407). Where a sense of belonging exists, students feel more independent to make their own choices and actions, which leads to better results for more students, as they are in the learning process together.

Second, education must empower citizens for democracy by establishing democratic teaching and learning in schools. For this to happen a shared decision-making among the school staff, among teachers and students and between educators, parents and community members must be present. By more actively engaging the voice of the students, the goal should be to empower them, make them less dependent on the teacher and break down hierarchies (Smith and Barr 2008:409).

Regarding history education this principle connects to the distinction between “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” teacher motivations within education theory. Having an intrinsic motivation involves doing an activity because it is inherently satisfactory or interesting, rather than for its separable outcome. Having an extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, means doing an activity because it leads to a separable outcome and thus have an instrumental value (Ryan and Deci 2000:55). In relation to education, intrinsic teacher motivations are those aims inherent within a specific subject discipline, while extrinsic motivations are “broader educational aims” focused on influencing change in society (Slater 1995:125-6 in McCully and Montgomery 2009:93). Thus, a history teacher with an intrinsic purpose would focus primarily on conveying historical content, while a history teacher with an extrinsic motivation would also focus on values and norms necessary for social transformation.

Third, Smith and Barr (2008:410) advocates for the development of a connective pedagogy that moves beyond a narrow, conventional education and makes connections to the factors influencing young peoples’ learning, such as everyday life experiences inside and outside of school, multiple ways of knowing, support systems, their social-emotional dimensions of learning and their own views of effective learning. Extending pedagogy this way will make it easier to include and recognize all students and their diverse needs. Drawing on Vygotsky’s social development theory (1980) where students are to play an active role in learning, a

connective pedagogy can be reached by promoting active and collaborative learning, learner responsibility and meta-learning (Smith and Barr 2008:411).

Fourth, education in transformative societies must embrace a border pedagogy and develop cultural fluency among students. Students must develop the ability to negotiate borderlands – those areas residing at the margins of experience between identities, perspectives and commitments – and embrace their own culture while understanding its relation to others (Smith and Barr 2008:411-12). Border pedagogy focuses on developing ways of talking, writing and representing that challenges existing traditions of understanding while at the same time offers new possibilities for action within society. The task of the teacher becomes to support the students in familiarizing themselves with their particular histories and make them confront the limitations of their own perspective to understand how cultural diversity produces different historical understandings (Smith and Barr 2008:412).

Fifth, to fully establish a community of supportive learning, an effective support system must be present between students, teachers and parents and between the schools and their communities (Smith and Barr 2008:414). Finally, drawing on this support system, a network between the parents and the community needs to be established where parents, teachers and students work together towards shared goals. Especially, educational reforms require both parents and schools to recognize the importance of their contributions (Smith and Barr 2008:415).

With these six principles, Smith and Barr encourage a shift from the dominant transmission model of teaching to what they call a co-construction model. The transmission teaching model is a teacher-centered approach where the teacher's role is "to prepare and transmit information to learners" and where the students' role is "to receive, store and act on this information" (Tishman et al. 1993:149). Thus, learning through a transmission perspective is seen as simply being taught. In a co-construction teaching model, learning involves "individual sense-making" and "creating knowledge as part of doing things with others" (Smith and Barr 2007:406). In this model, curriculum is seen as inquiry and both the teacher and the students are learners that together in a community engage in "generative" instead of "passive" learning activities and collaborative argumentation. A co-construction model also has the potential to transform students on many different levels (Smith and Barr 2007:407). Within history education, Smith and Barr's proposed shift means a move away from the "best story" approach to a disciplinary or postmodern approach that applies historical concepts for historical analysis.

The theoretical framework presented in this chapter shows that there is a clear connection between how historical knowledge is understood and how it consequently is taught in post-conflict societies, and that history in many instances can be used for political purposes of identity construction and power legitimation, at the expense of students' learning and skills development. In the following chapters it becomes evident how these theories and concepts relate and manifests themselves within the context of Lebanese history education. Especially the concept of historical consciousness (Thorp 2014) and Seixas' (2000) three different approaches to history education is used in the findings chapter to analyze the student reflections on current Lebanese history didactics and how they understand historical knowledge. In the discussion, providing the second layer of analysis, Smith (2005) and Gallagher's (2005) theories of post-conflict education and Smith and Barr's (2008) six principles of inclusive education is applied to further analyze how the students' reflections connects to Lebanon's current educational policies. In this chapter, I also rely on Haugbolle's (2010) theory of memory cultures to understand how the students' reflections relate to broader political dynamics within Lebanese society.

## 5 Findings

The participants in this study are students who themselves have chosen to become teachers in Lebanon, and who considers teaching history and/or social science in the future. They represent the few young people in Lebanon today that actively, by becoming history teachers, aim at changing Lebanon's current history practice. In this chapter, I present the main themes that developed from the data analysis process. These themes are divided into two sections. The first section deals with the current status of Lebanese history education and includes four themes; the students' understanding of history, the theoretical and methodological approach to history they experienced in school and what they regard as the main challenges for Lebanese history teachers. The second section deals with the changes that the students think Lebanese history education should adopt and includes three themes; the theoretical and methodological approach proposed by the students and their expectations for the teacher's role in history education.

Already at this point, however, it may be noted that the participants are in accord about three key issues regarding Lebanese history education. For one, their choice of becoming teachers is motivated by a wish of contributing to a change within Lebanese society and for their students. They all want to offer a "better" history education for future students than the one they themselves experienced in school. They want to teach history in a way that connects to students' everyday life experiences and puts them at the center of the learning process. At the same time, they advocate for a postmodern approach to history that would contribute to enhance mutual respect and understanding between Lebanon's different socio-political groups.

Secondly, the students share many of the same goals regarding what they hope to achieve by becoming teachers. Most of them want to establish good relationships with their students, to contribute to their personal and social development and to raise their awareness and interest for history in society. Many of the participants want to contribute to change their students' perception of the humanities and social science and make them see what role such studies can play in society. Or as formulated by one participant: "I hope I will become a successful teacher who is liked by my students and try to change their opinion about social sciences and also to attract them to this subject."

Finally, my findings show that most of the students, regard Lebanese history education as closely connected to the country's political landscape, and that any reform of Lebanese

history didactics is dependent on an agreement among Lebanon's political parties. Thus, an educational reform in history education is more than anything regarded as a political "history war" over the right version of Lebanese history.

As already mentioned, this thesis includes two layers of analysis. This chapter concerns itself with the first layer and involves a presentation of the findings in close relation to the students' reflections. Thus, the findings are in and of themselves analytical and based on the theoretical concepts discussed in the previous chapter. How these findings, furthermore, connect and relate to each other, the existing literature and broader trends within Lebanese society will be discussed in the next chapter. It is worth noting, that the views expressed in this chapter are the views of most of the participants, if not stated otherwise.

## 5.1 Current Status of Lebanese History Education

### 5.1.1 Multi-chronological understanding of history

Thirteen out of the 18 participants claim that they want to teach history in the future. The remaining five wants to teach civics or geography. These five are all enrolled in the social science educational program at LU. All of the participants except for one, however, regard having historical knowledge as important, although only 14 of them express that they are personally interested in history. Drawing on the concept of historical consciousness (Thorp 2014), the participants have a clear understanding of the relation between the past and present, and what role history plays for understanding the present. Thus, they understand history in a multi-chronological way.

Furthermore, by advocating for a postmodern approach, most of the participants implicitly understand history as consisting of multiple interpretations of the past constructed differently by different people. As we shall see, this is especially evident from how they understand Lebanese history. The participants have a critical way of understanding history where not only one true account of history exists (Seixas 2000) but have not been introduced to methods for detecting more valid historical accounts. Many of them also see history as something narrated orally from the past generation and are aware that their historical understanding is influenced by their specific contexts. Thus, the participants have developed an "historical thinking" in the sense that they are aware of how history is constructed and able to contextualize history (Thorp 2014).

According to most participants, history contributes to understand how one's own nation and group have developed over time. As one student from LAU points out, history gives a person knowledge about "other cultures and traditions" and contributes to understand how and why societies develop:

It is important to teach history, because I think children have the right to know about their past and what happened in their country, why the world is what it is now, how it passes through changes, *ma baaref* [I don't know] if it is only for me, it is interesting to see how the world is changing, how it was before and what it is now, even the characteristics of people, our traditions, our cultures are also changing. The way we used to be and how we are affected by other cultures. That is why.

Thus, societies and cultures are understood as dynamic and changing over time when faced with new cultures and traditions, and history is seen as contributing to understand how and why these changes came about. In other words, history contributes to understand the present society in which we live and are part:

[...] another thing about history is that I think many aspects of the present are shaped from our history. So, you can understand your present more by knowing your history. You can understand how we arrived to here. How this have been shaped, how do these people think, and why do they think this way?

This way, history can also contribute to a deeper understanding of how people think and act. History provides the background for understanding our present surroundings, while it at the same time teaches us about the "mistakes of the past", so that we can learn from them in the future. Furthermore, history contributes to make you a more "cultured" (*cultivé*) and knowledgeable person, as one participant from LAU pointed out:

Knowing about history of countries that you are not living in makes you more openminded. It makes you seem like as if you are well travelled, as if you travelled to this country and you know about it.

Following this, history can also contribute to an enhanced understanding of "other cultures", norms and values and broaden a person's worldview by exposing him/her to other ways of living. Finally, most participants mention the importance of historical knowledge for sense of "national identity", and they see a clear connection between having historical knowledge and the feeling of national belonging. Thus, connecting to Liu and Hilton's (2005) concept of

social representation, the participants regard the social representation of history as an important part of a group or nation's collective identity.

### 5.1.2 The “Best Story” Approach

Interviewing the participants about the history they were taught in school, it becomes evident that most of their history education was based on the 1968 curriculum excluding modern Lebanese history. Instead, the participants learned about European and world history and about Lebanon at the time of independence. Thus, current Lebanese history education adheres to Seixas' (2000) “best story” approach and have embraced a strategy of sanitization (Davies 2004) where only agreed upon history is included in the curriculum, as one student points out:

We keep on teaching the history that everybody says... *son tout accord* [French for “all agree”], that everybody agrees upon. This is why they are not overcoming this obstacle, since the political situation has not changed, the political parties are still the same and the political disagreements are still the same, so this is why they are not reaching to teach modern history yet. We are still on the same history they have been teaching for years and years and years, because it is the only history that everybody agrees on.

These reflections make it evident that Lebanon's amnesia have resulted a “best story” approach in schools where the civil war is excluded from the official history curriculum. This means that Lebanese students do not learn modern history in school, and that history curriculum has “stayed the same” due to the challenges of renewing it.

11 of the 18 participants, however, claim that they were taught about the civil war in high school, and seven of them attended public schools who in practice are obliged to follow government regulations. The assumption is often that students of private schools, as these schools have more freedom to include topics of choice into the history teaching, would be the ones learning about the civil war, if any. My findings, however, show that the civil war indeed has been part of the history teaching of public schools despite its exclusion from the curriculum, and that individual teachers have taken initiative to teach modern history. This, furthermore, shows that some teachers have taken initiative to challenge the system from within, by changing their practice. Most of the participants, however, do not elaborate on what exactly they learned about the civil war, and it is evident that the “best story” approach still is dominating most Lebanese schools, although most Lebanese students attend private schools.

According to most of the participants, the principle obstacle to changing this strategy in Lebanon today is the continuous disagreement over modern history between the different political parties and sects within Lebanese society. They are stuck in a “history war” over Lebanon’s national history and cannot agree on how the modern history curriculum should look like, as they all promote their own version of modern history. As one participant claims:

The obstacles are mainly the politics that exist in Lebanon. None of the political parties want the history... Each political party wants the modern history to be taught as they see it. So that is the biggest obstacle.

Thus, it is evident that the participants regard Lebanon’s confessional political system as the main obstacle for reform, and that history has become a weapon in a larger power struggle for political legitimization and maintaining of group identities. This, furthermore, shows that the participants regard Lebanese modern history as consisting of heterogenous social representations (Liu and Hilton 2005) and that Lebanon’s socio-political groups have constructed different social representations not only of what they understand as their own group history, but also of what they, based on their own “charters”, see as the true version of Lebanese history.

Most of the participants also see sectarianism and minimal acceptance and understanding across and among sects as major obstacles for reform, as one participant expresses:

Okay, so nowadays Lebanon is so affected by religious and... even if they are from the same religion, for example Muslim Sunni and Shia are fighting over this thing, so I think that is why they haven’t up until now been able to make a history book. They are being biased. They are taking sides. Muslims or Christians, Shia or Sunni [...].

Thus, on the one hand, the participants are aware of the socio-political realities of Lebanese society and the disagreements this leads to. On the other hand, however, they mainly seem to think in terms of a religious divide and although they point to the political nature of Lebanese society, they still primarily understand this in relation to religious belonging. Thus, the “history war” among the political parties is as much understood as a “history war” between Lebanon’s religious sects.

### 5.1.3 Transmission Model of History Teaching

Most of the participants, based on their own experiences with learning history in school, argue that the current practice of history teaching in Lebanese schools is based on a transmission model of teaching (Tishman et al. 1993). All of them, mention that their history education included “memorization” or “spoon-feeding”, and that assessment was based mainly on question-based essays and exams. The history education, furthermore, included little historical analysis or critical thinking, as expressed by one participant:

We didn't have many analyzing documents. We had a few... In history we didn't have a lot of document analyzing, it was more in geography, more in civics, but not in history. In history we used to write more of what we had memorized. [...] It was mostly about showing what you have learned. Of what you have memorized. It didn't leave us time or space for a critical thinking.

Thus, the history teaching is not based on a disciplinary approach where students are taught disciplinary criteria for analyzing historical documents. Instead, most participants claim that the history lessons focused on the teacher giving instructions in class, before they themselves memorized the content. Thus, the education remained teacher, rather than student-centered (Tishman et al. 1993). Most participants also claim that they experienced no interactive learning in form of active participation, discussions or joint activities in class, which resulted in history being taught in a “boring” way, as evident from this participant's experiences:

[There were] no presentations, no group works, no participation even. Questions were *yani*... I don't remember that our teacher even raised questions or tried to explain “Do you know about this thing?”. I remember that I was the one who was asking the teacher just to understand more sometimes. He only reads from the book, so this was so boring. The students have a certain attention...*yani*, they can pay attention for that specific time, if you don't do something in class they are going to lose that attention, and that was the major problem I think.

Most of the participants, furthermore, claim that these methods result in students becoming uninterested in history and some of them even say that they “used to hate history” because of the way it was taught. Thus, as one participant points out, history teaching requires varied and interactive methods to maintain the students' attention and interest:

[...] if it is not engaging for students, they will not be interested. The majority of instructors in Lebanon, history instructors, are old. They are all old. They cannot walk, they cannot engage, they teach us the way they learnt.

This illustrates that little effort has been devoted to developing teaching methods in history and that Lebanese history education has for a long time been based on a transmission model. It also reveals that many students regard their history teachers as detached from students' reality and as unable to relate to their current life experiences, due to the traditional model dominating the history education. Thus, connecting to Slaters' (1995) two teacher motivations, Lebanese history teachers seem to be driven by intrinsic motivations as the primary focus is on historical content.

Moreover, there seems to be a clear connection between the way history was taught and to what extent the students' experience that they learned history. Most of the participants claim that, although they were presented with history, they did not learn "anything" due to the traditional methods. Of the 11 participants who were introduced to the civil war in school, 8 of them responded that they did not learn anything. Thus, although the participants attended history lessons, it seems like they were unable to absorb what they were supposed to learn, because of the insufficient education relying only on content memorization and not critical analysis.

There is also a connection between students' experience with learning history and their perception of the value of history. According to most of the participants, the negative experience many students have of learning history in school make them perceive history as unimportant for their future academic and personal development. History is not seen as something that would benefit them in the future, and thus not something to focus on in school, as this student points out while reflecting on her experiences with history:

I already told you that in my high school history was taught in a *very* boring way and we used to think that the history sessions were our free sessions, where we could sleep, do other homework, chit-chat with each other, use our phones. It is our free session, because the instructor is will be sitting on a chair reading from the book and we are sitting in our places, there is no engagement, no discussions, there is no participation, except for me. I was a bit nerd. I am an A-student in the university, and in the school so I was the only one who focused in history and sitting in the front desk.

This shows that a teacher's attitudes and actions have significant effect on how students experience a subject in school. If the teacher is not interested in the subject he/she is teaching, it is unlikely that the students will be. Instead it becomes the individual student's responsibility to develop his/her own history teaching. Thus, it is the teachers' task to make the aims of the history education clear to the students and relate them to the students' life. It needs to be evident for students why learning history is important and how this could benefit them.

Finally, the limited focus devoted to history in the Lebanese school system contributes to maintain the students' perception of history as unimportant and irrelevant to their lives, as one student pointed out:

I was in a life-science section, so it was only 20 grades for history, so we didn't depend on history, we didn't even study it. We depended on the science and studied them, to replace history. And it was only memorization.

Thus, the prioritization of mathematics and science subjects within Lebanese schools upheld the perception among students that history is not something one should focus on.

#### **5.1.4 Teacher Restrictions**

According to most of the participants, the current situation of modern history places Lebanese history teachers in a challenging position as they must find a balance between how they would like to teach history and what is allowed and expected of them. The participants point to three different ways in which the history teacher is challenged in his/her role. First, just like any other teacher, the history teacher encounters systematic constraints present in the local school and must follow the school regulations. Second, the history teacher is quite constrained by the current curriculum, and although some teachers have taken initiative to teach modern history, most history teachers only teach curricular content. Many of the participants also claimed this was a crucial factor when asked if they would consider teaching modern history. Most of them answered that they would, but only when it is allowed by the government. One participant captures these challenges well:

I can only abide by what is asked for me to teach, because if I am in schools I have a certain program that I should abide to. I can only change my way of teaching it, but I cannot change what is the system, the formation that is inside.

Finally, history teachers must consider the community around them when deciding what and how to teach, as modern Lebanese history is a sensitive and highly politicized issue. One participant also points out that a teacher can end up in a conflict with their students' parents, if they disagree about their teaching methods. As already discussed in the literary review, these challenges contribute to make teachers feel insecure and unconfident when teaching history. They are afraid of confrontations that might arise, and unsure about how to tackle them. The absence of a modern history textbook makes the situation even more difficult and teachers often feel as they have no support in their teaching. Thus, although they maybe want to change their teaching methods, they feel constrained and left with little room to do so. This, however, shows that the participants are aware of the challenges and pressures Lebanese history teachers are facing.

## 5.2 Reflections on Lebanese History Education Reform

### 5.2.1 A multi-perspective, postmodern approach

According to most of the participants, any fundamental change in Lebanese history education cannot happen without a curricular agreement on government level. 13 of the participants explicitly mention that Lebanon's political parties must agree and develop one common official modern history curriculum. Most of them, however, argue that this curriculum should include all different accounts of modern Lebanese history, and not adhere to the "best story" approach pursued by the political institutions so far. According to them, modern history can be taught only by respecting diverse perspectives on and accounts of Lebanese history. As one participant responds when asked about how she pictures a new curriculum to look like:

I think they need to decide to include everything, so it will be a very big chapter on the Lebanese Civil War. I think they need to include all the different perspectives, so that students can choose which one to believe in, but of course there should be one book. I believe this is better than different books.

From this it becomes evident that most participants advocate for a more inclusive history education rooted in a postmodern approach to education as defined by Seixas (2000), where students are exposed to multiple accounts of the nation's history/ies. This way the participants also hold that Lebanese history education should embrace what Smith and Barr (2008) calls a border pedagogy that considers competing group narratives and tries to make students understand and respect their classmates point of view.

Furthermore, most of the participants argue that it is the politicians' responsibility to fill the existing knowledge gap of modern history among Lebanese students by embracing a postmodern approach. Although they themselves experienced an elimination of controversial topics in school, through the government's strategy of sanitization, they argue for Davies' (2004) sensitization approach where controversial content is reworded and discussed through dialogue in class. Ten of the 13 participants wanting to teach history, are positive to the idea of teaching about the civil war. For them learning future students about the civil war is important, and some of the participants also mention that they themselves wish to learn more about national Lebanese history. Most of the participants see it as students' right to know more about their past and regard formal education as a crucial arena for introducing an approach of sensitization. Some of the participants argue that including the civil war in the history education might also make history more interesting and relevant for students, and that the longer the civil war is ignored, the more problems it will cause, as expressed by one participant:

More generations are going to come and this history that we are teaching at schools it will be very far away from them. It will not be interesting for them. It will be years back then, so we will have a real problem for the next generations that they will need to learn more about the modern history, more about the civil war.

Thus, according to the participants it is first and foremost the politicians' responsibility to overcome the obstacles for teaching modern history, and that they still have not indicates how history is regarded within Lebanese society, as one participant points out:

There is no curriculum development, no care about this topic. They don't teach the modern history of Lebanon because the members of parliament don't agree on it, so it wouldn't uncover their previous deeds.

History is seen as something that primarily is used to serve political aims as excluding modern history benefits the politicians wanting to avoid dealing with the sensitivities of the civil war. Most important for the participants, however, is that history is taught in an "objective" and "neutral" way without any link to Lebanon's confessional politics, and this is also how they themselves wish to teach history in the future. Several of them explicitly mention that history education must be separated from politics for teaching of modern history to be possible. Thus, it is evident that the participants regard history education as an arena where Lebanon's confessional politics surface, and that also they are affected by Lebanon's complex political

landscape. According to them, history should not be used as a weapon in a political struggle or for convincing students of one story over another. Instead, history teaching should develop critical students able to make their own interpretations and conclusions about historical evidence, as expressed by one participant when asked how she thinks a modern history curriculum can be developed:

I think they would put a goal that history... that we should benefit our students and that we should make a better generation, we should change our society and we should make our students critical. We should make them mini-historians, creative historians, so this is the main goal I think they should focus on to make a modern history book. They should not only think about religion.

This shows that the participants regard history education as deeply affected by Lebanon's sectarian differences. Most of them argue that Lebanon's political parties should look beyond these differences and focus on developing a history education benefiting students, not politics. The participants, however, question whether the politicians have their best interest at heart and will manage to develop a multi-perspective curriculum, as expressed by one participant:

They [the politicians] are only focusing on silly details. They aren't thinking about the society as a whole, they aren't thinking of people, human beings and the upcoming generation. The presidents, they are only thinking about themselves and what side they are on. Especially our president, Saad Hariri, he was taken off the country<sup>11</sup> and this got Lebanon more reason to fight over religious stuff and now the Sunni-people are thinking that the Shia's was the reason behind this, and they are fighting more. They aren't being unified themselves so how will they be able to make a unified book?

Thus, although the participants regard the politicians as responsible for developing a new history curriculum, they doubt their willingness to do so and seem to have little trust in their own government. This is often the case in deeply-divided societies where people feel they cannot rely on their government to address their specific needs (Cole 2007), and in the case of Lebanon, the politicians are perceived to be more concerned about achieving their own political goals than cooperating to reform the history education.

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<sup>11</sup> Saad Hariri is not the president, but the prime minister in Lebanon. The interviewee is here translating literally from Arabic where the same term is used for president and leader. Furthermore, the participant is here referring to the events of November 2017 when Saad Hariri announced his resignation as prime minister through Saudi television due to Hezbollah's cooperation with Iran in Lebanon.

### **5.2.2 An interactive, disciplinary approach is necessary**

Of the 13 participants that want to teach history, all of them seem to be driven by a wish of teaching history “better” for the future generation. As one participant puts it, “there is an urge to re-shape the conduct of history education in all Lebanese schools”. The choice of becoming a teacher was motivated with an ambition to enact change for their future students, both on a personal and societal level. One participant had a very clear idea about why she wanted to teach:

If there were no teachers, we wouldn't be who we are today. And education really makes a change in students, in characters, in society, so I wanted to be, even though it be a bit, I wanted to make a change. I thought about teaching in rural areas and low socio-economic classes because I think these are the people who really need that education. It is not because of money only, we have to think of our society, the upcoming generations. They have the right to learn the proper education. In Lebanon, in rural areas and low socio-economic classes, they aren't learning the proper education, because teachers are not getting paid, so they teach anything and leave the class. So, I wanted to make a change, at least in these people's lives. Why not to give them a change, and maybe someday they will be something important in society.

Some participants also chose to become teachers because they regard it as a safe career choice, especially for women, and because they thought being a teacher would fit their personality. Thus, the choice of becoming a teacher was also affected by traditional gender roles as teaching still primarily is seen as a female profession in Lebanon.

As discussed above, a transmission model currently informs most Lebanese history education. Most of the participants, however, argue that Lebanese history education should move away from this model and embrace an interactive and disciplinary approach (Seixas 2000) to history teaching that focuses on developing students' skills and historical consciousness. For the participants, this is the only way history can be taught in a “fun”, stimulating, understandable and interesting way. Most of them hold that history teaching should focus on developing students' critical thinking and learn students to analyze historical documents through historical concepts. Only one participant mentions that she would continue to include memorization in her classes. Thus, the participants want future students to develop a genetic historical consciousness (Seixas 2000) that acknowledges different historical accounts but that

also, through historical disciplinary criteria, tries to detect standards for more valid historical arguments.

Apart from being taught in a disciplinary way, history, according to the participants, should be taught in an interactive way, including active participation in form of discussion and debate. History should be connected to the students' everyday life experiences and use modern tools, such as technology to convey content. This way the participants advocate for what Smith and Barr (2008) calls a connective pedagogy. As one participant mention when asked how modern history can be taught; "...this subject should be aligned with our day and time, and the learner has to learn things that he/she can sense in real life".

For this to happen, the teacher must try to relate to how it is to be a young student in contemporary Lebanon. Furthermore, the participants argue that history teachers should focus on student needs and place the students' voice at the center of learning. One participant clearly expresses this when asked about how to overcome obstacles for teaching modern history:

We can overcome these obstacles by making it an active learning process, where students are central in explaining lessons, by doing a lot of research and analyzing information, we also make it an active subject through videos, pictures, and classroom activities.

Thus, the participants argue that Lebanese history teaching should move from a teacher-centered transmission model as defined by Tishman et al. (1993) to Smith and Barr's (2008) student-centered co-construction approach. From this, it, furthermore, becomes evident that the teacher has crucial responsibility in making the students interested and engaged in history. He/she must stimulate the students to see that also history can be taught in an interactive and interesting way by adopting new and alternative history teaching methods focusing on the students and where knowledge is created through dialogue. Furthermore, the students argue that the teacher must try to make students see the value of having historical knowledge. Thus, according to most of the participants, the teacher must be aware of his/her influence, as he/she has a profound impact on the academic development of the students.

To be able to have a positive intrinsic influence, however, most of the participants argue that teachers also must enhance their own historical knowledge, and seven participants argue that the teachers themselves need to develop "historical thinking". This will make them feel more capable when teaching history in the future. Some participants also regard it as crucial that

teachers become aware and control their own bias, especially if teaching about the civil war is going to be possible.

### **5.2.3 Extrinsic Teacher Responsibility**

Most of the participants argue that teachers should embrace an extrinsic approach (Slater 1995) to history teaching, where they move beyond an intrinsic focus on historical content, but also functions as agents of social change aiming at influencing their students and making a change for the better in their lives. According to them, the teacher plays a crucial role in a student's social, academic and personal development, as he/she is one of the few people interacting with the students daily. Thus, a history teacher's responsibility goes beyond teaching historical content and should also provide students with critical tools to be able to question societal and political issues.

Indeed, most of the participants argue that teachers in all subjects should adopt an extrinsic approach, not only history teachers. Or to quote one of the participants:

Yes, not only the history teacher. It is a part of her teaching, part of her classroom management, part of her discussion with the children. It should be really... not to say everyday teaching, but it should always be present while discussing while solving a problem between two students while introducing a topic. It should be there, not only for history.

This, furthermore, reveals that a history teacher has multiple and overlapping roles according to the students. For most participants, the teacher is first and foremost a "role model" for her/his students and has a crucial impact in everything she does:

Of course, the role of the teacher is very crucial in education, because [...] the teacher is like a role model for her students, they are affected by her, the way she talks, the way she behaves, the way she acts, so the teacher's role is really important in a children's life, in building their character, and changing their minds and thinking.

Moreover, this highlights the importance of developing capable and confident teachers who are aware of their responsibility and potential influence. Seven of the participants mention that a key role of a teacher is to provide guidance and advice for his/her students. At the same time, the teacher should teach students about the norms and values of citizenship. Some participants also mention that the goal of a curricular reform should be to foster unity and co-existence through citizenship teaching. Thus, most participants advocate for a history teacher

that has an extrinsic role towards his/her students, but that at the same time focuses on the positive intrinsic influence that he/she can have if history is taught according to students' reality. As we have seen, this is also in line with most of the participants' own motivations to become teachers.

As discussed above, however, Lebanese history teachers face several challenges when trying to teach history. As no educational reform in the end can succeed without the teacher implementing it in the classroom, most of the participants argue that more focus must be devoted to teachers' professional development for any long-term change in Lebanese history practice to happen. Eight of the participants explicitly mention that creating workshops and teacher programs could contribute to develop more confident and capable teachers. Several more mention that new teaching methods must be introduced. One participant also emphasizes the importance of assessing and following up on the teachers' development.

From these findings, it becomes evident that the participants interviewed in this study is concerned with both the methodological and theoretical aspect of Lebanese history didactics – two aspects directly interlinked in the context of post-conflict Lebanon. The participants are not only concerned with reforming Lebanon's history curriculum, but also with fundamentally changing the methodological approaches applied in Lebanese history classrooms.

## 6 Discussion

As evident from the findings, the education students participating in this study point to several problems facing current Lebanese history didactics. Their critique of Lebanese history education, however, can be related to a broader critique of Lebanese society. In this chapter, I therefore interconnect and further analyze how the participants' reflections on the status, needs and potentials of Lebanese history education must be discussed in relation to broader processes and power relations within current Lebanese society.

The findings suggest that the school subject of history as well as history as a broader expression of collective memory is marginalized both within the educational sphere and in the broader public sphere of Lebanese society, and that this situation obstructs Lebanese history education from contributing to long-term reconciliation. Furthermore, I shall argue that current students, by advocating for alternative representations of history through an interdisciplinary approach, offer a counter-hegemonic and critical narrative for how Lebanese society can deal with its controversial past – both inside and outside educational sphere. Thus, the participants' reflections on the school subject of “history” can be regarded as one way of dealing with a past that is constrained both by institutional and methodological mechanisms and broader, political and social mechanisms inherent in Lebanese society. The results from the findings, furthermore, indicate that a pedagogically rethought and institutionally reformed history education indeed has important potentials for contributing to social cohesion and long-term reconciliation in Lebanon.

### 6.1 History in the educational sphere

From the findings it becomes clear, that the subject of history is marginalized in the educational sphere of Lebanese society through both institutional and methodological mechanisms.

#### **6.1.1 Institutional marginalization of history**

For one, the subject of history and its perceived value is marginalized institutionally by current Lebanese educational policies applying a “best story” approach to history education. As mentioned, several efforts have been made to establish an official modern history curriculum in Lebanon. Still, four decades after the civil war, however, modern history

remains excluded from Lebanese history education. Thus, as Ahonen (2014) points out, a successful history education reform in Lebanon is also in the end dependent on political will.

One main reason for Lebanon's break with history education lies in the politicians' approach to curriculum reform. So far, curriculum reform efforts have been based on establishing one agreed upon, single story of Lebanese history, instead of establishing a curriculum that considers the diversity of Lebanese society and includes the competing interpretations of Lebanese history. Thus, Lebanese politicians have tried to adopt what Smith (2005) calls an "assimilation" approach, as a single set of values have been introduced in public schools, based on an understanding of history as collective memory. Hence, the main political function of history education is to construct and foster an image of national identity through a common narrative.

Excluding modern history, however, this common narrative has contributed to maintain Lebanon's socio-political group identities and their competing historical accounts. Thus, the politicians' approach of "assimilation" has resulted in a continuous process of "separate development" (Smith 2005) as Lebanese confessional schools continue to narrate different histories to their children based on their own constructions of "Lebanese identity". This confirms what Abouchedid and Nasser (2000) found in their study, that a change in Lebanon's history education still is due to the government's limited will to interfere and schools' loyalty to their communities. It, furthermore, shows that a traditional, collective memory approach to history is unsuitable for the complex reality of Lebanese history.

Moreover, it shows that two of the perspectives discussed by Gallagher (2005) is evident also in the Lebanese context, as both curricular content and separate schools contribute to perpetuate conflict in Lebanon. As many Lebanese schools are based on community affiliation and run privately with little interference from government, Lebanese schools still contribute to enhance social divisions by conveying different historical narratives to their students. This situation, however, makes it difficult to establish a cohesive image of the Lebanese nation, as proposed by the government, and drawing on Gallagher (2005), both curricular changes and reform of school structures should therefore be prioritized after conflict.

Excluding modern history from the curriculum also prevents future generations from exploring the multiple accounts of the civil war, and as students are denied access to history in school they might turn elsewhere for information, most often through unofficial voices. In

Lebanon, such unofficial voices are often closely related to specific community narratives that are skeptical towards other accounts, which results in students remaining unexposed to other narratives. Within the classroom, this can lead students to mistrust the teacher's approach and contribute to uncomfortable discussions as they respond negatively to what is conveyed. Thus, the findings of Hawkey and Prior's (2011) from Britain also are manifest in Lebanon since also Lebanese formal education is competing for the students' attention with a range of different voices. Due to the country's own educational policies embracing a strategy of "sanitization", however, these voices have become very influential and formal education is not the main source for historical knowledge in Lebanon today. To achieve this, history lessons must be made interesting and relevant for students by incorporating multiple group histories. Thus, drawing on Ahonen (2014), Lebanese schools must provide identity for all social groups.

Today, however, the development of a meaningful civil war education remains dependent on informal education initiatives, as the "best story" approach prevents a postmodern historical understanding, which can contribute to mutual respect, from being introduced in Lebanese schools. Thus, if the civil war is not addressed in school, other measures outside the educational sphere must be taken.

### **6.1.2 Methodological marginalization of history**

The educational institutional marginalization of history, furthermore contributes to marginalize the attention given to reform the methodological aspect of history didactics in Lebanese schools. History is perceived as not having the same instrumental value as science and mathematics and evidently, already from the beginning, Lebanese students are subject to a system prioritizing certain subjects over others, expressing what society considers more significant. This, furthermore, seems to connect to a larger hegemonic issue within the Lebanese educational system where disciplines such as humanities and social sciences are suppressed through schools' regulations, curricula and assessment.

The perceived low value of history additionally contributes to uphold a transmission-oriented teaching model in most Lebanese schools, as little attention is given to reform the history teaching. Relying solely on a transmissive history practice suggests that history is appreciated less than other subjects, and that subjects perceived as more crucial are privileged with modern and non-transmissive pedagogical practices, even though a transmissive model counteracts the development of critical thinking. Thus, if history were regarded as an

important school subject, more attention would be devoted to developing its practice. History, however, continues to be unaddressed through official channels in Lebanon, and is therefore left unchanged in school.

Comparing the students' reflections with the six principles formulated by Smith and Barrs' (2008) for inclusive education, it becomes evident that Lebanese history teaching relies on a non-inclusive teaching model detrimental for fostering social change. For one, no sense of community exists in Lebanese history lessons as no dialogue among students or between students and teachers is present. In other words, the teacher fails to act as a "socializing agent" (Bern 2001 in Dupuy 2008). Knowledge is not created as part of "doing things with others" and students remain dis-centered in the learning process. Thus, history education provides few open arenas for dialogue, something Ahonen (2014) regards as a prerequisite for history education to contribute to mutual understanding but remains teacher-centered.

Furthermore, current Lebanese history teaching fails to empower students to become democratic citizens as students are excluded from influencing and personalizing their learning process and practices. Instead, a strict hierarchy between the teacher and the students exists in most Lebanese schools. Since teachers mainly function as authority figures (Dupuy 2008), and less as role models or supportive facilitators, students are completely dependent on the teacher in securing their history education. Moreover, as teachers tend to avoid discussion of politics and sensitive issues (McCully and Montgomery 2009), students do not encounter values and norms of citizenship in their history lessons. Thus, Lebanese history teachers are neither functioning as peace or democracy-builders (Sindhi 2016), but rather focus on the intrinsic nature of history teaching.

From my findings, it also becomes evident that Lebanese history teaching fails to embrace a connective pedagogy as few connections are drawn between students' experiences and history. History is not made relevant to students' everyday life or emotions, making it difficult for students to relate to historical events, and history remains taught based on the assumption that "learning equals being taught" (Smith and Barr 2008). As McCully (2012) argues, however, history education will have limited impact if it is not directly relevant to young peoples' daily cultural and political experiences. Thus, connecting history to life experiences is as a precondition for history to contribute to long-term reconciliation. Few efforts, however, have been made to strengthen Lebanese students' learning by applying interactive methods or collaborative learning strategies.

Smith and Barr (2008) moreover argues that post-conflict societies must embrace a border pedagogy that encourages learning about others historical narratives and that develops abilities to discuss varying perspectives and positions in diverse societies. As evident from the findings, Lebanese history education fails to embrace such a pedagogy consequential of the “best story” approach. Thus, my findings confirm those of van Ommering (2017) in demonstrating how the learning environment remains influenced by its post-conflict context. Lebanese history teachers’ ability to act as agents of social change is weakened by the complex setting in which they operate. They neither have the skills necessary to support their students in such a process, as few Lebanese teachers today have a formal teaching diploma or are trained in the historical discipline.

Finally, as evident from the findings, no effective support system or network between parents, teachers and the community, is present in Lebanese schools. Instead, history teachers receive little support in developing their educational or academic skills and stand quite alone when deciding their history didactics. Thus, my findings reflect what Kello and Wagner (2017) found in their study about Latvian history teachers. Findings, furthermore, confirm what Cole and Barsalou (2006) found in their USIP report: innovative practices in Lebanese history education risk public, community-based criticism. Thus, this study shows that Lebanese history teachers face challenges similar to other post-conflict contexts.

It, furthermore, reveals that the deficiencies of Lebanese history education provide little prospects of contributing to a reconciliation process, as it fulfills neither of its two entrusted responsibilities (Fontana 2017). It fails to provide a collective narrative of the past and it fails to contribute to long-term reconciliation by promoting tolerance, mutual understanding and trust. Instead, Lebanese history didactics is stuck in a transmission-oriented teaching model that through its sanitization strategy (Davies 2004) enhances, rather than counteracts, group divisions.

### **6.1.3 Interdisciplinary Approach to History Education**

By advocating for an interdisciplinary approach of a postmodern, disciplinary and inclusive education, the participants in this study challenge the institutional and methodological marginalization of history in school, which they see as hindering them from exploring their own history. Instead, the participants offer an alternative social representation of Lebanese history and provide critical and innovative perspectives on how Lebanese history education can be reformed and contribute to social cohesion. According to the students, Lebanese

politicians must rethink the objectives of curriculum reform and embrace multiple historical narratives, to be able to agree on an official history curriculum. Lebanese educational policies must embrace an approach of mutual respect, instead of allowing history to function as a political tool used to legitimize particularistic group narratives and identity constructions. This requires, however, a fundamental change of the conception as well as operationalization of historical knowledge in the educational context.

Furthermore, including modern history in educational policies might also contribute to make Lebanese teachers feel more comfortable with addressing the civil war in class. In addition, Lebanese teachers require support from the schools, communities and authorities, and access to additional and reformed teacher's training, geared at methodologies for fostering social change among students. Without such training, most teachers will remain, to draw on Psaltis et al (2017), "lay historians" unaware of their potential.

From this preceding discussion it is evident that Lebanese history didactics require reform on a theoretical as well as methodological level, in order to contribute to long-term reconciliation. This, in turn, requires that Lebanese students, teachers as well as educational and political institutions "unlearn" how history currently is taught and imagined, in order to elaborate new historical conceptions and educational practices. In short, reforming Lebanese history education hinges on a broader reconceptualization of the controversies of the past.

## 6.2 History within Lebanese society

The institutional and methodological marginalization of history in Lebanese schools remains informed by broader, political and social mechanisms inherent in Lebanese society that contributes to marginalize history also within the public sphere. By excluding modern history from the curriculum, political institutionalism affirms a culture of silence in Lebanon through its strategy of amnesia. Thus, Haugbolle's (2010) observations of the government's unwillingness to remember are manifest also in its curriculum policies. Instead of dealing with controversial topics, political institutions discourage any discussions about the civil war. This culture of silence, however, reinforces sectarian divisions as different political memory cultures manifests themselves in society and results in children growing up becoming politicized and attached to their specific community narrative. In this context, history cannot contribute to mutual understanding. The unwillingness to remember, furthermore contributes to maintain a perception of history as unimportant for the current lives and personal

development of students. As long as such perceptions perpetuate, a historical knowledge gap will remain among the younger generation in Lebanon.

This situation reveals that the failure of solving the curricular problem is part and parcel of a fragmented and sectarian system afraid of dealing with the past. The current logic of Lebanese politics inhibits thorough curricular reform. The sectarian system legitimizes and reinforces mutually exclusive historical narratives, extended through confessional private schools. As long as sectarian interests continue to define Lebanese political organization, Lebanon will likely remain locked in a post-conflict disposition unable to deal with its past. Thus, the marginalization of history in school interconnects and is hegemonically defined by broader political, social and religious forces of defining and obscuring the past, which in turns paradoxically enforces community-based notions of this past.

### **6.2.1 A Counter-Hegemonic and Critical-Narrative**

From this it becomes evident, that the students' critique of current Lebanese history education relates to a broader critique of the Lebanese social, religious and political order. By presenting an alternative approach to history education, the students challenge the political amnesia and provide a counter-hegemonic and critical narrative for how Lebanese society can deal with its controversial past. They urge the political institutions to "remember" the civil war and address its controversies, rather than continue to ignore them. By advocating for a postmodern approach, the participants argue that young Lebanese people have a right to know about their own history and find opportunities to explore it – both outside and inside the classroom. Thus, the government should break with its tradition of cultural silence and encourage discussions about the civil war. This way the participants are part of what Haugbolle (2010) identifies as a counterhegemonic memory culture where "memory makers", through intellectual or artistic means, offer alternative ways of memorizing the civil war, challenging the dominant political memory cultures. By offering an alternative way to memorize the civil war in Lebanese history education, the students contribute to construct a contrasting intellectual memory culture in contest of existing political memory cultures. The students' way of dealing with modern Lebanese history, furthermore, demonstrates how Lebanese youth currently is remembering the civil war in Lebanon and reveals a wish to (un)learn their national history.

The question remains, however, if Lebanese society is ready for an open discussion about the civil war or if it only would continue to enforce group identities. As Cole (2017) argues, a history education reform is best at a "second stage" of the reconciliation process. If the

political groups in Lebanon fail to invite a public, multivocal and critical dialogue about modern history and develop capacities to interfere in the country's educational dynamics, a reformed history curriculum will remain out of scope. The students' thorough frustration with Lebanese history education, demonstrated in the findings of this study, hence is part and parcel of their dissatisfaction with the political order of Lebanon. By advocating for an alternative approach to history education, the students simultaneously critique dysfunctional aspects of Lebanese politics. By urging the politicians to adopt a postmodern approach, the students opt for an open and critical dialogue among the country's communities and a questioning of the country's sectarian system.

On a more positive note, therefore, the students' reflections suggest that history education indeed has potentials as a vehicle for political change in Lebanon with a basis among the younger generation. Through their critique of the history education, the students demand social and political change that can contribute to further social cohesion in Lebanon. This, furthermore, shows that my findings confirm Cole's (2007) observation that a prominent level of institutional mistrust also prevails in post-conflict Lebanese society. The participants do not trust that the current politicians will cooperate and reform their history education, but rather continue to use history as a political tool to uphold a sense of victimization and legitimize their actions.

Finally, this demonstrates a pervasive tension between "those who want to forget" and "those who want to remember" past controversies. On one hand, Lebanese political institutions discourage remembering the civil war by imposing a strategy of amnesia and maintaining a culture of silence in Lebanon. On the other hand, the participants in this study want to remember the civil war and offers a critical and counter-hegemonic narrative for how Lebanon's conflicting history can contribute to long-term reconciliation – both within the educational sphere and outside in public life.

## 7 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the relationship between history education and reconciliation by relying on student reflections on current history education in Lebanon. Relying on post-conflict and inclusive education theories, I aimed to explore both the approaches currently used in Lebanese schools, and the approaches proposed by the students. Drawing on Haugbolle's concept of memory cultures, I also discussed how these approaches relate to broader political and social dynamics within Lebanese society.

Answering this thesis' main research question of how the students reflect on the current status of Lebanese history education and its potential for reconciliation, I argue that the students consider current Lebanese history didactics to be unsuitable for contributing to long-term reconciliation in Lebanon due to the marginalization of history within Lebanese society. Regarding the first sub-question asking what the main theoretical, institutional and methodological obstacles are for teaching modern history in Lebanon, I found that the main theoretical obstacle is the "best story" approach dominating history didactics, which in turn is informed by the main institutional obstacles; the continuous "history war" between the political parties and their imposed amnesia on history discussions in public life. For the students, the main methodological obstacle is the transmission teaching model applied in most Lebanese schools, leaving no room for critical thinking or historical analysis.

Furthermore, in answering the second sub-question on how the education students envision Lebanese history education to be able to contribute to reconciliation, I found that the participants advocate for an interdisciplinary approach to history, including a postmodern theoretical understanding combined with an inclusive and disciplinary teaching model that have the potential to further social cohesion. This way, I argue that the participants offer a counter-hegemonic, critical narrative for how Lebanese society can deal with its controversial civil war history – both within and outside the educational sphere. From this, it, furthermore, becomes evident that Lebanese history didactics needs to fundamentally change on both a theoretical and methodological level, in order to realize its potential to contribute to reconciliation within Lebanese society. As long as the civil war remains an "elephant in the room" within Lebanese society, future students will remain in the dark about their own history.

With this exploratory, phenomenological study I have aimed to contribute to the field of post-conflict education studies in general, and to research on Lebanese history education in particular. By exploring how current education students view Lebanese history education, this study offers a new perspective on the status of Lebanese history didactics, which I believe is important to consider in future attempts at reforming history education. As future history teachers, it is these students who face the challenge of navigating the educational landscape of their predecessors, while trying to adapt and reform it for current and future challenges. To further advance such research needs, future studies could explore and discuss the possibilities for introducing the interdisciplinary approach proposed by the participants and how it can be implemented in practice. A first step in this direction, could be to more thoroughly explore students' understanding of Lebanese history and identity, as such research would generate important insights into the challenges and promises of the development of Lebanese history education in the future.

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# 9 Appendices

## 9.1 Appendix A: Structured Interview Guide

This is a questionnaire for my master thesis about history education in Lebanon. In this questionnaire you are asked to answer questions about your interest in history, your experience with history education, your views on history education in Lebanon and the role of teachers in history education. In the end, I also kindly ask you to answer some quick questions about yourself. All the answers will remain anonymous. Thank you for your cooperation.

Best regards,

Mina Fossum – Master Student at Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University

### Experience with learning history

1. How was your history education in high school? What did you learn? How was the pedagogical practice and assessment?
2. Did you learn about the Civil War in high school? If yes, what did you learn?

### Views on current situation of history education in Lebanon

3. What do you think are the biggest obstacles for teaching history in Lebanon today? (why is modern Lebanese history after independence not taught in schools)
4. How do you think these obstacles can be overcome?
5. How do you think Lebanon's conflicting modern history can be taught?
6. What do you think should be the aim when developing a modern history curriculum in Lebanon?

### Views on the role of the teacher in history education

7. How important do you think the teacher's role is in history education?
8. What do you think the role of a history teacher should be?
9. What do you think are the main challenges of being a history teacher in Lebanon today?
10. What do you think can be done to develop more capable and confident history teachers?

### Historical interests

11. Are you interested in history?
  - a. If so, why? What makes you interested in history?
  - b. If not, why not?
12. Do you think having historical knowledge is important? If so, why? If not, why not?

### Reason for becoming teachers

13. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
14. Why did you decide to study education with a specialization in the social sciences?
15. Do you want to teach history?
  - a. If so, why do you want to teach history?
    - i. How would you like to teach history yourself in the future?
    - ii. Would you consider teaching modern Lebanese history (after 1943) in the future?  
If so, why? If not, why?
  - b. If not, why not? What do you want to teach and why this subject?
16. What do you hope to achieve by becoming a teacher?

Personal information

17. What is your gender?

Female

Male

18. How old are you?

19. Where in Lebanon are you from?

20. What kind of school did you attend?

Private school

Public school

21. Which language was the official educational language of your school?

French

English

Arabic

## 9.2 Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

### **Background info:**

- From:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Study and university:

For my study, I am interested both in your views on history education in Lebanon, your ideas about becoming a history teacher in Lebanon in the future and understanding of modern Lebanese history, with particular focus on the Lebanese civil war.

### **To start off, however, could you tell me a bit about what makes you interested in history?**

- What is history to you? How do you see it?
- \* What was it that first got you interested in history?
- \* Why did you want to study history? (not sure if they study history)
- Do you think studying history and having historical knowledge is important? Why? Why not?
- What kind of history are you especially interested in?

### **Could you tell me a bit about your own experiences with learning history in school?**

- How was your own history education (primarily in high school)?
- What did you learn? What was the focus? Can you give me some examples?
- Where there any topics or issues you would have liked to learn about and you didn't?
  - o Why do you want to learn more about these topics?
- Did you experience any incidents where you felt your teacher were biased? Can you give me an example?
- How were the pedagogical approaches in the education? How did the teachers present the material?
- How was your assessment?

### **Moving on, I would love to hear more about why you decided to become a teacher in history (or why you consider becoming a history teacher)?**

- Why did you decide to study education?
- \*Why did you decide to enroll in this degree?
- \*Why do you want to teach history specifically?
- Why do you think it is important to teach history?
- Do you want (or consider) to teach Lebanese history in the future?
  - o If so, why?
  - o Do you think understanding the war (or the past) is important for contemporary students? Why?
  - o If not, why?
- After having participated in this course now for some time, how would you like to teach history yourselves in the future?
  - o What would you focus on?
  - o How would you approach the history?
  - o What would you do to make history more interesting for students?
  - o What do you hope to achieve with teaching history in Lebanon?
  - o Do you hope and expect to be more successful than the previous teacher generations?  
If so, why?

### **What do you think are the biggest obstacles for teaching history in Lebanon today?**

- How do you think Lebanese society can work to overcome these obstacles? What is the best strategy?
- How do you think Lebanese modern history, and especially the civil war, could (and should) be approached?
  - o What are the perils (or important) of teaching war history or conflicting history?
  - o How do you think conflicting history should be taught?
  - o Do you think it is possible to teach the civil war?
- Do you think history education can or should be a tool for nation building?
- What do you think should be the aim when making a modern history curriculum in Lebanon?
  - o Do you think it is possible to make a unified textbook and curriculum?
- As you may know, modern Lebanese history is not so much taught in schools in Lebanon - Why do you think it is this way?
- What is Lebanese identity to you? Do you think there is one thing you all have in common?

### **How important do you think the role of the teacher is in history education?**

- What do you think the role of a history teachers should be?
  - o Should teachers only focus on the content of history (intrinsic) or go beyond this and try to influence society as a transmitter of value and norms (extrinsic)?
  - o Why do you think one of the other?
- What do you think can be done to develop teachers so that they have more capacity and are more comfortable with teaching sensitive and difficult topics, such as the civil war?
- What do you think is challenging about being a history teacher?
- What do you think are the main challenges for teaching history in Lebanon?
- How do you think history education in Lebanon can improve?

### **Can you tell me a bit about what you know about Lebanon's modern history after independence?**

### **Can you tell me some more about what you know about the Lebanese Civil War?**

- How would you say that the civil war started?
  - o Why did it start?
  - o What do you think was the main cause of the war?
  - o What were the three main causes?
  - o And what kind of causes was this?
- Why do you think the civil war lasted so long?
- Who took part in the war? Who did not?
- How did the war end? Who lost and who won?

### **Finally, I am wondering how you know this? Where did you learn this from?**

- Do you talk about the civil war with your family? Friends?
- If so, what do you discuss?
- If not, why not?

### **Now, do you have any questions?**

