Echoes After the Guns Fell Silent

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Although I was born years after Lebanon's civil war ended, its shadows never left our home. My grandmother kept war stories live, not as history lessons, but as warnings. From the way she stacked extra food, to how she flinched at a slamming door, I understood that the war had not truly ended for her, nor her children.

What I did not realize until much later was that the war had not ended for me either.

My mother was only a child when war tore into her world. In 1983, during the Kfarmatta massacre, she and her family fled the village. They hid in the back of a tomato truck, pressed between crates, her small hands clutching her mother's dress. She still remembers the smell of crushed tomatoes under her feet; she hates them to this day and refuses to even buy them. She did not understand politics. She did not know who was shooting or why, all she knew was that she was not safe, and that her childhood quietly slipped away in the back of that truck.

To this day, if my mother sees a firearm on TV, in a photo, or in real life, she screams. Not out of drama, but out of pure, uncontrollable terror. She never watches war movies. She cannot. The pain is too loud, too near, and too deeply engraved into her nervous system.

She survived, yes. But surviving is not the same as healing, and in ways I am only now beginning to understand, her war reached me too.

In school, we learned almost nothing about the civil war. Lebanon still lacks a unified history curriculum covering the conflict. Some of my classmates had parents who were fighters, others had parents who were refugees, and most of us were taught to stay quiet about both.

Without a shared narrative, our generation was left to piece together history from family stories, whispers, and silence.

My father's story was different, but no less terrifying. He was a fighter in the People's Liberation

Army (PLA), trained in the USSR by KGB soldiers, and eventually became a commander. He does not speak of it much. Sometimes I think he has words that he has buried so deep that even he cannot find them anymore. All I know is that he was a child thrown into a brutal world, believing that soil is more precious than human life, carrying a rifle that is heavier than him, while other children carried books. I have learned to respect his silence, but I have also learned to read between it.

The economic effects of the war are another inheritance we carry. My grandparents' home in Kfarmatta was burned not once but twice, and they never fully recovered financially. Like many families displaced by violence, they spent years trying to rebuild from nothing, carrying trauma in one hand and poverty in the other.

Lebanon's post-war economy was never built for recovery. Instead, it favoured former warlords turned politicians, creating a system where corruption and nepotism flourished while everyday citizens struggled. The result for my generation? Skyrocketing unemployment, decaying infrastructure, a collapsing currency, and the painful realization that we are still paying the cost of a war we never fought.

The warlords changed suits, not souls.

Many of us have grown up watching our parents stretch every lira, praying the electricity does not cut out while taking a shower, dreaming of leaving the country for somewhere more stable, not because we want more, but because we want rest.

Lebanon's post-war political structure, based on sectarian power-sharing, institutionalized the divisions the war etched into the country. It locked in the influence of many of the same figures who fuelled the violence and passed that dysfunction down like a cursed inheritance.

For us, the children of war survivors, this system reinforces a sense of betrayal. We are expected to move forward in a country governed by those who refused to reckon with its past. We see the same flags, hear the same speeches, and walk on streets named after men our parents once feared. We have inherited not only trauma, but a national identity that feels broken, suspended between survival and disillusionment.

And yet, we endure. Maybe because we must. Maybe because, somewhere inside us, that resilience is also inherited.

I think of my mother in that tomato truck terrified, hidden, silent. And I think of her now, watching me speak up, watching me write this. She still carries the war in her bones, but I carry her courage in mine. I wish I could have hugged that little girl and covered her eyes and ears.

But there is power in naming what we carry.

The war shaped our parents. Our parents shaped us. And now, we have the chance to shape something different. We may still live with ghosts, that is true, but we do not have to let them haunt the future.

There are stories that I know I will never hear, chapters of my parents' lives that were folded shut before I was born. Sometimes, in the quiet, I can almost feel them sitting inside those silences, too afraid to turn the page. I have stopped asking certain questions, not because I do not want to know, but because I have learned the cost of remembering. When my father stares off into the abyss for too long, I know he is somewhere I cannot follow. When my mother

turns off the news mid-sentence, I know it is not just noise she is avoiding, it is memory. They have taught me that survival sometimes means silence, but I have also learned that healing comes from naming the things we are afraid to speak. And maybe one day, when the grief is softer, they will let the words come. Maybe one day, we will sit together and finally open the chapters they locked away, and heal them.