



Handout 16: Finding a Topic

Session: Building Blocks of a Research Project

Subject:

The Lebanese War (1975 – 1990)

Topic:

What aspects of the war are you specifically interested in? What have you heard about that has captured your imagination? What are the untold stories that your research can uncover? Do they concern experiences that are cultural? Economic? Political? Social? Geographical? Local? Military? Educational? Maybe you can think of topics closer to home. A general rule of thumb is that the selection of your topic goes hand-in-hand with who you have access to and who you will be able to interview, i.e. **your narrator**. For example, the topic of women combatants during the war would probably not be a good choice if you do not know or have connections to anyone who was a woman fighter during the war.

At the same time, maybe you don't have to look very far. In the case of history in Lebanon, local history is very under-researched, so why not start looking in "your own backyard"? Start with something that interests you. This is your project, so you need to be the first person excited about it. What is it about the war that you've always wondered about? What remnants of the war are there around you? What is the story of that abandoned building at the entrance of your village or town? Maybe investigate how your **town/village/neighborhood** was directly affected by the war. Maybe you could interview the father or mother of the town's moukhtar (making sure they are old enough to have lived as an adult during the war!) or the owner of the village shop (dikkenji), the grandfather or grandmother of your close friend, or even your own grandfather or grandmother. Maybe the father of your neighbor was a long-time employee in a factory in the town of Kfarshima or Hadath going back to the years before the war and extending into the war years.

For example, subjects could center on a specific event of the war and how different people from different walks of life experienced the same event. How were their experiences different? How were their experiences similar? How are their perspectives on that same event different/similar? Topics could involve how people managed to make a living, how their workplaces (factory, school, bank, bakery, hospital) were affected by the war, how their daily routine changed because of the war, how they commuted to work, how they got to school, how they cared for their children or parents, how they secured basic necessities (bread, fuel, electricity). What did they do on the days or months when the fighting stopped? How did the war affect their celebration of life's milestones (engagements, marriages, births, deaths, graduations)?

