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INVISIBLE VICTIMS?

How we talk about Forcibly Disappeared Persons and their Families. A Case Study from Lebanon.

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Abstract

The present thesis examines the portrayal of enforced disappearance in the public discourse through the case study of Lebanon, where an estimated 17.000 individuals have remained missing since the 1975-1990 Civil War.

After decades of advocacy work, a milestone has been reached by the establishment of a national commission with the mandate to investigate the fate of the disappeared. Currently, this process is being stalled by the political stakeholders, which is why continuing civil society pressure is crucial. As an added problem, however, the discourse has not been picked up by the Lebanese society beyond the inner circle of activists. Therefore, this study investigates how the demands of the victims' families have been framed so far.

Two qualitative research methods are applied: First, eight published communication materials from different producers are discussed via content analysis. Second, four interviews with civil society actors provide an insight on how and why certain narratives and frameworks have been created.

The results show specific social and political circumstances in Lebanon spawned an intentional strategy of depoliticising the issue and framing it as a humanitarian cause. This has been achieved with one dominant narrative surrounding emotion, motherhood, waiting, suffering, passivity and weakness. The thesis also illustrates the need for a critical reflection of alternative approaches in order to create a national discourse and further the cause of Lebanon's disappeared.

“Disappearance is a complex system of repression,

a thing in itself.

With less noise than expected, it removes people –

including and significantly those it never tortures or kills –

from their familiar world, with all its small joys and pains,

and transports them to an unfamiliar place

where certain principles of social reality are absent.

The disappeared, then, are not dead terrorists or dead children.

They are people who have disappeared

through enforced absence and fearful silence.”

(Gordon 112)

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1. Introduction

"One memory I can't forget is of the day [my mother] found out my father was kidnapped . . . I remember how she looked, barefoot, screaming on the street. I can't forget it. It's stuck in my mind . . . we were young and we didn't understand what was happening, but when you see your mother like that you ask yourself, why is she acting that way, and then you discover the tragedy and, of course, you can't forget it."

- *Souad Nehme Najim's daughter* (Yakinthou 1)

"We say inshallah he will return. We say inshallah but 30 years have passed. Some say they threw them in the sea, others say in mass graves. We went to the mass graves. We used to come back from those mass graves smelling [like the] dead. We used to search through the swollen corpses."

- *Sana I.* (Yakinthou 10)

During the researching process for this thesis, I have lost count of how many stories I have read about the disappeared of the Lebanese Civil War. They almost always sound quite similar: *She is at home. He gets taken away by other men, or simply does not return home one day. She has kept waiting and waiting and waiting, to this day.* The events are always told from the perspective of their wives, mothers or children. Every story is individual – concerning one person with their own life, interests, dreams and love for their family – but they are also the same; in their mass building one narrative.

During the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), more than 17.000 persons are believed to have been forcibly disappeared by participating militias and state forces (Amnesty International 5). When the war ended, an Amnesty Law ensured that the crimes were never investigated and that the presumed perpetrators remained in power. Moreover, the topic of the Civil War has become a taboo in Lebanon. This was possible through a combination of an unwillingness of the political leaders to have a national debate and the reluctance of the majority of society towards remembering (Haugbolle 69). The families of those who had been disappeared – particularly their wives and mothers – have since been demanding to know the whereabouts and fates of their loved ones. In cooperation with local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), they have been using various forms of activism, advocacy, and street pressure in an effort to put the case on the political and legal agenda (Touma and Zaghbour).

After four decades of activism, they might have reached a turning point. As a result of the establishment of Law 105 in 2018, the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons in Lebanon (hereafter: National Commission) was created in 2020 (ibid). The National Commission's mandate covers a wide range of tasks such as conducting investigations to trace missing and forcibly disappeared persons, ensuring verification of a DNA database, setting in motion a process for burial site exhumations, suggesting reparation mechanisms and support for the families, and raising awareness amongst decision makers and the public (UMAM, *Law 105* 22-25).

Due to the current volatile political environment in Lebanon, it is yet to be seen whether the National Commission will be able to operate as an independent and successful transitional justice (TJ) mechanism and fulfil its mandate. Experts remain sceptical and assume that the political leaders have never intended the National Commission to function, hindering their work by not providing them with any budget or power to act (di Mayo, *interview*). Another challenge has been raising awareness about the issue of enforced disappearances especially on the local

sphere (ibid). It can therefore be assumed that in order to create more pressure towards political stakeholders, there is a dire need of a meaningful public discourse within the Lebanese society. As a first step, it is crucial to take a critical look at how the topic has been communicated and framed so far. This thesis aims to provide a small contribution by analysing selected published material and adding insights from actors who have been actively involved in shaping the discourse. There are three aspects that merit special consideration.

First, how do we talk about forcibly disappeared persons? The *we* in the title of this thesis leaves room for several actors involved, given that a discourse is usually formed with more than one perspective. The *we* can be the families talking about the disappeared individuals, it can be the local civil society, the media, international human rights or humanitarian organisations, and – theoretically – even the perpetrators[1]. The only ones excluded from this *we* are the disappeared themselves. The direct victims stay mute, passive and invisible. They are stripped of their agency and have no means of claiming their own narrative. Due to the very nature of the act of the crime, others have to speak about or even for them in their efforts to challenge their violently enforced invisibility. Meanwhile, they stay in limbo between being alive and dead, visible and invisible. This brings up moral and ethical questions as well as questions about strategic communication in political advocacy.

Second, how do we portray the families of disappeared persons? The wives, mothers or children of the disappeared are not only family members; they are also indirect victims of the crimes (see chapter 2.5). This means that within the discourse, their roles and portrayals are twofold: A wife or mother fighting for her right to know the truth about her husband or child is a mourning woman and a political activist at the same time (Malin 188-189). Here, the widely used victimising pictures of crying women in all black holding portraits of "their" disappeared clash with the active and political role they play. How do *we* deal with these dichotomies between weakness and power, private and political, activity and passivity? Is it possible that these apparent contradictions exist next to each other, and do the women switch between roles to function within the public discourse? Who gets to speak, who does not, and for which reasons? Which narratives have been created and have they changed over time? Are the families' portrayals forced onto them from external players or the media, or are they themselves

[1] Due to the lack of prosecution after the Civil War in Lebanon, the perpetrators never had to address their own actions. They are as silent and invisible as the disappeared – this thesis will therefore not be able to analyse their perspectives within the discourse.

actively shaping their stories? Which role does gender play here – the disappeared being predominantly male, and the ones fighting for their cause predominantly female (ICRC 8)?

Third, under which circumstances has the discourse been happening so far? It can be argued that a conversation never takes place in an empty space but is inevitably shaped by its political and social environment. Hence, it seems valuable to contextualise political and societal specifics of Lebanon as well as recent political developments for a better understanding of how they can affect the topic even if a comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis.

1.1. Research Question

This thesis focuses on one main research question: In which ways does the portrayal of enforced disappearance by advocacy actors such as the families of the disappeared, local NGOs, and international organisations and media influence the narrative of the issue in Lebanon?

In addition to this, several subquestions have been outlined, which will add insights to the bigger picture. First and foremost, the analysis aims to find out how the direct victims of enforced disappearances are portrayed in various communication tools. Correspondingly, a focus will be laid on the indirect victims – especially the wives and mothers of disappeared. Furthermore, recurring roles, frames and narratives of the discourse will be identified during the course of the analysis and textual portrayals will be compared and contrasted with the visual representations. Finally, the thesis aims to shed light on the mechanisms and intentions which are shaping these portrayals.

1.2. Methodology

In order to answer the questions of this research, a combination of two qualitative methods is used – content analysis and interviews. Going forward, the process of gathering data will be described, as well as personal involvement and limitations.

1.2.1. Gathering Data

The first four questions can be discussed via a qualitative content analysis of published materials – first analysing a selection of sources individually and secondly discussing the most common framings and narratives. The selection process for the materials was to collect, examine and limit different types of messaging that have been used to portray the issue. The selection criteria were accessibility, language (English, subtitled or translated to English), diversity of text type (written and audiovisual) and range of actors. In consultation with the supervisors of this thesis, eight materials were selected: Two of them – a written publication and an awareness campaign comprised of five tv spots – were produced by the local NGO ACT for the Disappeared (ACT). Two other sources were made by family members of the disappeared – a documentary by Wadad Halwani, founder of the Committee of the Families of Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon and wife of a disappeared person, and an artistic film by Ghassan Halwani, her son. The fifth and sixth sources are written reports produced by international organisations – the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Lastly, there are two productions by international media outlets – a video report by Al Jazeera and an online article by Deutsche Welle (DW).

To address the fifth sub-question, four interviews with actors who have been contributing to the discourse around the disappeared have been conducted: Justine di Mayo, co-founder and director of ACT for the Disappeared, Monika Borgmann, co-founder and director of UMAM Documentation and Research, Ghassan Halwani, filmmaker and son of a disappeared, and Carmen Abou Jaudé, member of the National Commission.[2] The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into the process of how and why these portrayals and representations came into being: Which framings were used intentionally and strategically, and for which reason? What have been the challenges of communicating about the disappeared? Are there lessons that can be learnt from this experience? As an added component to the analysis, social and political specifics and developments of post-war Lebanon will be discussed to provide contextualisation. This is important in order to understand why the local framing of the issue of enforced disappearance emerged in the way it did.

[2] For a short portrayal of the interviewees and their perspective to the topic, see chapter 4.5.2.

1.2.2. Personal Involvement and Limitations

In addition to the analysis of the materials and interviews, data which has been collected in a semi-formal setting contributes to this thesis due to my role as an exchange student at the Arab Master's Programme in Democracy and Human Rights. My residence in Beirut from February to July 2022 allowed me to gain a small but benefiting insight into the local context of the issue, which I could not have had otherwise. Throughout my stay, I attended the weekly course "Human Rights Lab" at the University St. Joseph, led by Carmen Abou Jaoudé, who is a member of the National Commission. The seminar examined the issue of the disappeared, providing guest speaker sessions with Lebanese and international civil society actors who discussed their advocacy efforts with the students. On two occasions (12 April 2022 and 28 May 2022), the students organised roundtables which enabled guest speakers, members of the National Commission and representatives of political parties to engage in a debate on how to move the issue forward. As part of the course and in collaboration with the NGO ACT for the Disappeared, I also coordinated a report about the role of communication and outreach regarding the National Commission's mandate. In addition to this class, I observed and documented an event at Beit Beirut Museum on 13 April 2022, where the families of the disappeared commemorated 47 years of the advent of the Lebanese Civil War.

My notes, observations and experiences from these classes and events allowed me to both acquire a deeper understanding of the issue myself, and to collect a valuable range of perspectives, background information and statements now included in this thesis. My own role was therefore manifold: Sometimes I was actively participating as a university student, at other times I could function as an external observer, documenting without getting involved. Considering that the issue is an extremely personal one to those affected by it, it was beneficial for me to gain access within the setting of the university course. Additionally, all university events provided a professional translation for international participants, which reduced the language barrier significantly.

Nonetheless, not being able to speak Arabic was a considerable limitation in the selection process of the materials to be analysed. It meant that the samples could not include primary sources such as local newspaper articles that had been published during or shortly after the Civil War. Due to the availability of a vast amount of published or archived materials in English, translated to English or with subtitles, the research therefore focuses on the period that started after the internationalisation process at the beginning of the 2000s.

Finally, it must be addressed that for this thesis, no new interviews with the wives or mothers of the disappeared were conducted directly. This raises a question about the very topic the research covers: Are important perspectives made invisible? The reason behind this decision is twofold: First and foremost, there was no necessity for new interviews to be conducted because there was already a considerable number of published interviews, reports, videos and other material available. This made it possible to collect and reference a broad range of quotes by the women about "their" disappeared, their own personal life and their political and legal demands.[3] Combined with the second reason – the fact that each interview triggers painful memories and has the potential to retraumatise – the decision was made from the start that for the purpose of this research, no such interviews were necessary.

1.3. Outline

Chapter 2 will provide an extensive overview of the matter of enforced disappearances, starting with definitions and the legal context as well as describing disappearance as a method of warfare. Following, the role of victims will be described, first focusing on the disappeared persons ("direct victims") and secondly discussing their relatives ("indirect victims") and the implications the disappearance has on their lives. Seeing as direct victims are predominantly male and those advocating for the issue predominantly female, the relationship between gender and the disappeared justifies a more detailed examination within a sub-chapter. The last part of chapter 2 will be looking at the societal aspect of it, examining enforced disappearance through the lens of transitional justice.

Chapter 3 will set the groundwork regarding the research field in which this thesis operates. The first part will describe the method of qualitative content analysis and explain why it is a fitting technique to answer the research question. The second part will give a brief overview of the field of political communication and explore the strong link between communication and political advocacy within the sphere of human rights and transitional justice movements.

Chapter 4 will deal with the Case Study of Lebanon, first providing local historical background which will help to clarify why it is such a challenge to establish transitional justice mechanisms and memorialisation projects in the country. After a brief overview of the Civil War, the chapter

[3] The additional input that the thesis required regarding the strategical intentions behind the narratives was covered by interviews with involved experts / civil society actors who have been collaborating closely with the families.

will elaborate on the extensive use of enforced disappearances during the war. Following this, the focus will be on the demands of the families of the disappeared, describing their efforts and their collaboration with other actors and organisations over the course of four decades, ending with the most recent developments of the establishment of Law 105 and the National Commission. After contextualising the issue, common narratives and frameworks regarding the discourse will be determined by analysing the selected materials. The findings will be discussed using dichotomies that have become apparent – such as visibility/invisibility, private/political, or weakness/power. Following the content analysis, input from the four interviews will provide insights into the advocacy strategies, illustrate alternative approaches and reflect on future possibilities to further the cause.

The conclusion will summarise the results, before arguing the importance of a continued and deepened discourse around the missing and disappeared of Lebanon with the participation of the broader public, especially considering the current political environment.

2. Neither here nor there: Enforced Disappearance

Victims of enforced disappearance are, as the term suggests, individuals who are taken away from their families or community against their will. In this chapter, the act of enforced disappearance will first be explained both as a legal concept and as a globally used tool of warfare. Building on this, the focus will be laid upon the individuals affected by enforced disappearances – not only the disappeared victims themselves but more extensively their relatives, also seen as indirect victims.

2.1. Terminology

First and foremost, it is worthwhile to take a closer look about how to label the individuals this thesis is about: "missing" or "disappeared" persons? It is quite fitting that this seemingly simple or neutral formality immediately touches a subject matter of this thesis – framing and its implications. While the broader category "missing" is used but not defined in international humanitarian law (IHL), the term "enforced disappearance" refers to a human rights violation, both in times of peace and armed conflict (Kovras 14). Often, it is not possible to establish if individuals have gone "missing" in terms of warfare or have been "disappeared" by state or militia agents (ibid). In the Lebanese context, both terms have been used throughout the decades. There are several associations fighting for the victims – such as SOLIDE, ACT for the Disappeared, ICTJ, or the Committee of the Families of Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon (hereafter: Committee of the Families*)* – all of which tend to focus on specific types of victims. Considering that this thesis is specifically concerned with the victims of enforced disappearances during the Civil War, the terms recently privileged by the Committee of the Families are used when writing about the Lebanese case: "disappeared persons", "forcibly disappeared persons", "victims of enforced disappearances" or simply "the disappeared" rather than "the missing".[4] It is noteworthy that by working with this term and the demand for the "right to know", the problem is being positioned within the context of international human rights law (IHRL).[5]

[4] For a closer look on the Arabic terms ("mafqûd", "makhtûf" and "mikhfi") and how their usage developed, see Comaty 154-55.
[5] The development of this strategic framing is explored in chapter 4.2.

2.2. Enforced Disappearance in International Law

Before specific international instruments were created to address the issue legally, there was jurisprudence from regional and international bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Committee, or the Human Rights Chamber for Bosnia and Herzegovina (OHCHR 7).[6] Since the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the classification as a crime against humanity can be found in article 7/2 (i) of the Rome Statute, which was drafted in 1998 and entered into force in 2002 (UNGA *Rome Statute*, 3-5).

After a report of an independent expert requested by the Commission on Human Rights in 2001 identified major gaps in the legal framework regarding enforced disappearance, an international treaty was drawn up in negotiation with over 70 states, several NGOs as well as associations of families of the disappeared and experts (OHCHR 7). In 2006, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) was adopted. For the subject matter of this thesis, it is important to point out that article 24(2) establishes a right for victims "to know the truth regarding the circumstances of an enforced disappearance". While a similar legally binding provision – the right of families to know the fate of their relatives – can be found in IHL, more specifically in article 32 of Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions, the "right to know" in the Convention ensures broader application for three reasons. First, it goes beyond situations governed by IHL. Second, the right not only applies to "families" but to "each victim". Third, the right is not limited to the knowledge of the "fate" but to know the truth of the circumstances of a disappearance (McCrory 557).

The ICPPED also legally defines enforced disappearance, considering it to be

> "the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law." (UNGA *ICPPED*, article 2)

In contrast to this, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – which has been an important actor in the Lebanese case – is usually working with the more generalised IHL term "missing persons". Their definition is applicable to a broader range of victims, encompassing

[6] Extensive information on this case law is provided by Scovazzi and Citroni. In chapter 2 (pp. 101-244), they examine a number of cases such as *Bleier v. Uruguay* (HCR 1982), *Blake v. Guatemala* (IHCHR 1998), *Timurtas v. Turkey* (ECHR 2000) or the Srebrenica cases of *Selimović and others v. Serb Republic* (HRCBH 2003).

people captured during a war, combatants whose fate remains unclear, victims of mass killings or abductions, or persons who were buried without being identified (ICRC, *Q&A* 535). Missing persons according to the ICRC are understood as individuals

> ”of whom their families have no news and/or who, on the basis of reliable information, have been reported missing as a result of an armed conflict – international or non-international – or of internal violence, internal disturbances or any other situation that might require action by a neutral and independent body.” (ICRC, *Missing Persons* 9)

Up until now, Lebanon has not signed the Rome Statute and has signed but not ratified the ICPPED – however the national Law 105 which was adopted in 2018 establishes the rights to know and to be informed in articles 2 and 3, and provides a very similar definition to the ICPPED. A notable difference is the omission of the phrase “acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the State”, therefore including non-state perpetrators. Furthermore, article 1 of Law 105 not only defines the term “Forcibly disappeared person”, but also “Missing person”, “Family member”, “Close parties”, and “Associations representing family members”, thus providing frameworks for the specifics of the Lebanese case (UMAM, *Law 105* 11).

2.3. Disappearances as a Method of Warfare

> “Some men arrive. They force their way into a family’s home, rich or poor, house, hovel or hut, in a city or in a village, anywhere. They come at any time of the day or night, usually in plain clothes, sometimes in uniform, always carrying weapons. Giving no reasons, producing no arrest warrant, frequently without saying who they are or on whose authority they are acting, they drag off one or more members of the family towards a car, using violence in the process if necessary.” (*Disappeared! Technique of Terror* by the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues in 1986, qtd in OHCHR 1)

Enforced disappearances are no recent invention and have been strategically used in a widespread manner all around the globe. To illustrate this, a few examples that are by no means exhaustive will be provided here.[7]

A notorious precedent was the large-scale usage of the practice in World War II, though not under the same term. During the reign of the Nazi regime, it became common for opponents to disappear into the “night and fog” – ending up in the concentration camp system or in mass graves. A main characteristic of the night and fog decree (German: “Nacht und Nebel Erlass”) was that authorities should explicitly deny information of the whereabouts or fate of the arrested

[7] The occurrence of enforced disappearances in Lebanon will be explored in chapter 4.

persons (Murray 59 and Scovazzi and Citroni 4-10). Not long after, the tactic of disappearing enemies was used in the French operations in the Indochina and Algeria wars. When the French military applied their newly designed brutal counterinsurgency doctrine (*guerre revolutionnaire*), they feared public backlash (Trinquier 39-42). Aguilar and Kovras (4) suggest that for this reason, the French military chose to conceal political repression and apply more clandestine forms of warfare against the revolution. During the Battle of Algiers, 3.000 persons are estimated to have been disappeared and according to observers, dead bodies were thrown from aircraft into the sea (ibid). From the 1960s to the 1980s, enforced disappearances were used by military regimes in Argentina, Guatemala, Brazil, El Salvador, and Sri Lanka. Overall, the method often began as counterinsurgency programs against guerilla groups – in many countries however, this developed into a "massive campaign to wipe out anyone remotely thought to be terrorists or subversives" (Malin 194). By now the practice has become a global phenomenon not restricted to particular regions and also used by formally democratic regimes for ethnic and religious cleansing (Singh 210). The ICRC states that hundreds of thousands of individuals are currently missing, and that "the full scale of the problem is unknown and chronically unacknowledged" (ICRC, Q&A 538).

Aguilar and Kovras argue that under certain conditions, the crime becomes "more appealing" (9). For example, from the 1970s onwards, international human rights watchdogs emerged and media reporting has increased. Hence, perpetrators are pulled towards extrajudicial forms of repression in order to avoid international scrutiny and future accountability (ibid 3-5). As enforced disappearance seldom leaves survivors or physical evidence, it is possible to hide behind the secrecy and avoid the consequences and international pressure that can emerge from more visible violations (Dewhirst and Kapur 1). Aguilar and Kovras thus point out three aims of the perpetrators: to eliminate real or perceived enemies, to spread a unique form of terror that paralyzes not only families but the broader society, and to avoid criminal charges by hiding the body (Aguilar and Kovras 1-2). The following sub-chapters will focus on the first two aims by discussing the long-lasting consequences that victims and their relatives face.

2.4. Invisible Victims: The Disappeared

From a human rights' perspective, several fundamental rights of a forcibly disappeared person are violated. Amongst them are the right to security and dignity, the right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to humane

conditions of detention, the right to legal personality, the right to a fair trial, the right to a family life, the right to an identity, and – if the person is killed or their fate is unknown – the right to life (OHCHR 3).

However, it would be insufficient to only see the legal violations and implications. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) vividly describes the paralysing impact of disappearances:

> "The victims are well aware that their families do not know what has become of them and that the chances are slim that anyone will come to their aid. (…) Even if death is not the final outcome and the victim is eventually released from the nightmare, the physical and psychological scars of this form of dehumanization and the brutality and torture which often accompany it remain." (OHCHR 1)

To go even further, Avery Gordon states that even though enforced disappearance is usually accompanied by violent acts like torture or killing, it is not reducible to it (Gordon 112). She elaborates that a key aspect is the elimination of the victim's whereabouts: "The disappeared have lost all social and political identity: no bureaucratic records, no funerals, no memorials, no bodies, nobody" (ibid 80). Thus, an *erasing* violence is involved, and the terrorizing effect of enforced disappearance is generated through a dialectic of visibility and invisibility (Bargu 44, commenting on Gordon).

2.5. Indirect Victims: The Relatives

As established above, enforced disappearances are not only harmful for the primarily targeted individuals. The tactic is purposefully used for spreading terror and fear amongst a society as a whole: "it intimidates, demobilizes, depoliticizes, and ultimately reduces individuals to passivity with the threat of disappearance" (Bargu 43). Thus, from a human rights' perspective, it is evident that in many cases, the disappeared person is not even the real target of the government repression: The direct victim's family is left in a state of agony and insecurity, making them indirect victims. They "are ignorant of the fate of their loved ones, their emotions alternating between hope and despair, wondering and waiting, sometimes for years, for news that may never come" (OHCHR 1).

Every disappearance also violates human rights for the indirect victims, including the right to an effective remedy, reparation and compensation, as well as the right to know the truth regarding the circumstances of disappearance. In addition to these civil or political rights,

various economic, social and cultural rights often cannot be realized, such as the right to protection and assistance to the family, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to health, and the right to education (OHCHR 3-4).

Taking into consideration that in Lebanon, the fate of the disappeared remains unknown, this thesis focuses more on the implications of the indirect victims. It is ironic that just like the primary victims who are invisible in a literal sense, also their loved ones – even though still *here* – must fight to be seen: "The suffering of those who do not know what happened to their loved ones remains one of the least visible humanitarian problems" (Bernard 475). This is also apparent in Lebanon: Even though many people have been affected by enforced disappearance in one way or another, so far "there has never been a national movement for the disappeared" (Borgmann).

The following sections will discuss a range of possible difficulties for the relatives of disappeared persons. They are divided into psychological, social, economic, and legal and administrative consequences, bearing in mind that they are often intertwined: a legal issue will inevitably have financial as well as social implications. The accompanying quotes are taken from an ICTJ publication which captures the stories of 23 Lebanese women whose husbands are missing or disappeared.

2.5.1. Psychological Consequences

> "I never imagined that we'd hear nothing about him. I was hoping that he'd come back, despite fearing that they might tell me he was dead or in Israel . . . Why won't they tell us whether they are dead or alive? This was always on my mind . . . and I still wonder if they're dead? Where are they buried? Are they alive? Were they sent to Israel? The politicians who did it are still alive, they are leaders. Ask them."
>
> - *Aida Muhiddine Ghazayel* (Yakinthou 4)

The loss of a beloved person always puts a strain on those having to deal with a death. The psychological impact on families of persons who are not proven dead however is much more complicated: How can a mother explain to her children that their father is gone, but she doesn't know when or if he will come back? After how many months, years or decades comes the moment to stop waiting for them to return, if there will ever be one? How can a spouse deal with the guilt of trying to 'move on' and remarrying, or issuing a death certificate in order to have access to property rights or financial aid? Comaty describes this paralyzing state of endless

waiting with the concept of liminality: "Relatives, not knowing the fate of their loved ones, not having buried and mourned their missing in case of death, live in a state of in-between" (78).

According to the ICRC, families of missing persons are more affected by stress-related problems than families who know that their loved ones are dead. Even if the disappearances have occurred long ago, family members are unable to begin the grieving process (ICRC, *Missing Persons* 11). This phenomenon can also be described as *ambiguous loss* – coined by Pauline Boss in the 1970s, it has developed into a widely acknowledged framework. Ambiguous loss is described by Boss as unclear loss. It emerges when a person is physically absent but psychologically present, in other words when there is no clear status of dead or alive (Boss 521). Without proof of death, the "family's loss becomes a story with no ending" (ibid 522-523) with no possibility of resolution or closure. This complicates grief: Persons who suffer from ambiguous loss find their cognition blocked by the ambiguity and lack of information, which causes the grieving and decision-making processes to be put on hold (ibid 524-525). Boss' research has identified psychological effects such as chronic hyper-vigilance, sorrow, anxiety, major depression, suicidal ideation, addiction or abuse due to the immobilising ambiguity (ibid 525).

2.5.2. Social Consequences

> "You don't even know your status. What are you? Not married? Not widowed? You don't know . . . You bury the feminine side of you deep inside, by force . . . I lost my life as a woman . . . I worked hard to give [my children] a standard of living that was acceptable to us. But I did not live the life I should have lived. The kids grew up. I don't have the resources to meet people or travel. I'm emotionally drained. I dream of continuing my education. I dream of doing something, earning a degree."
>
> - *Souhad Khoury Karam* (Yakinthou 20)

The consequences of not being able to have a grieving process are not only emotional, but also social. (ICRC, *Missing persons* 11) Without a verifiable death and a burial, there is a lack of cultural or religious rituals for mourning with others, and less chance of honouring the victim. Moreover, the grief of families of disappeared persons is often not considered "real" in the eyes of the law, religious institutions and the larger community (Boss 522). While death within a family is globally recognised by communities, in cases of ambiguous loss there is often no such recognition (ibid 525). In certain communities, families are hesitant to talk freely about their situation due to fear or mistrust. Normally, other community members might be a source of

support, however, in disappearance cases the families often fear political retaliation or being shunned. Some end up isolated within their own society because of their unclear social status, local culture or their psychological issues (ICRC, *Missing persons* 11).

Also within the core family, ambiguous loss can cause social problems. There can be confusion about who has which function in daily life, like parenting or earning the income after the disappearance of a parent. Roles are confused, tasks and responsibilities neglected, and celebrations cancelled even though they could be a comfort. For spouses, the question arises: Am I still a wife or a widow, a husband or a widower (Boss 524)? This is especially problematic for women in patriarchal societies. When a husband disappears, the woman finds herself not only alone in her society, but also alone in the family circle. It becomes necessary for her to switch between the roles of motherhood, womanhood and fatherhood, sometimes transgressing femininity to fill the gap within the family. If a woman chooses to remarry, it is probable that she faces social pressure and judgement (Comaty 55).

2.5.3. Economic Consequences

> "We sold his car [to live]. The government didn't pay us his pension. Instead of giving it to us and helping us . . . it didn't give us anything. [His employers] stopped his salary immediately after they found out he was kidnapped." (Yakinthou 14)

Considering that most victims of enforced disappearances are adult men, many families lose their main breadwinner and face economic difficulties. Providing food, health care, housing or education for the children becomes a challenge, and when as a result women become heads of households, they often face limited options for sufficiently paid occupations (ICRC, *Missing Persons* 11). In case the missing or disappeared person has debts, usually their family inherits them (IRCR, *Living with Absence* 11).

Another financial challenge emerges as many families spend much of their resources trying to find their loved one. Some sell property, borrow money or quit their jobs in order to travel long distances for their search (ibid). Linked to this, another issue often arises, described by Comaty as a "dark economy" that has "mushroomed with the rise of a trafficking of information on the missing persons": Families might fall victim to individuals who peddle false information and rumours. Large amounts of money are being paid to intermediaries who claim to know the whereabouts of disappeared persons, for example a prison. They demand bribes of thousands of dollars for any type of information, relying on the desperate hope of family members trying

anything that might reunite them with 'their' disappeared (Comaty 56 and ICRC, *Missing persons* 11).

In addition to this, the family usually does not receive financial support or access to the bank account of the missing person until their legal status is officially recognized (ICRP, *Missing Persons* 11 and ICRC, *Living with Absence* 11).

2.5.4. Legal and Administrative Consequences

> "I was not able to withdraw more money to educate my children, and everything needed invoices for what I'd spent . . . So for 20 years I haven't been able to do any bank transaction, my assets were frozen [by the government]. [When] I asked why, they told me they are preserving his rights. Even now I can't do anything with the house. If I need to do anything I need to go to the courts, and it is very difficult." (Yakinthou 16)

In most cases, the status of "missing person" is not recognised[8], which means that the families lack legal entitlement for any support. This unclear status also has ramifications in terms of property rights, child custody, inheritance, or remarriage (ICRC, *Missing Persons* 11).

Furthermore, families are often unaware of their rights and of the formal procedures they have to go through in order to obtain financial, material or legal assistance. Sometimes, authorities do not know enough about the difficulties the families face or are unfamiliar with legal applications. These processes can be long and full of bureaucratic obstacles or corruption, adding to the family's burdens (ICRC, *Living with Absence* 11; *Missing Persons* 10).

One way out of the unclear legal status of the victim would be a death certificate. However, many families refuse this option as long as they do not get substantial evidence of the death, not wanting to give up on their loved ones (ICRC, *Living with Absence* 11). For many interviewees of the ICTJs publication, requesting a death certificate "was perceived as an act of killing their husband" (Yakinthou 18). Several of them brought up a story of a woman who had declared her husband dead, remarried, only to have her husband reappear – a story which shows feelings of fear and guilt associated with moving on (ibid).

[8] As established in chapter 2.2, Lebanon is among the countries that have a definition of missing since the promulgation of Law 105 in 2018.

2.5.5. Needs of the Families of Disappeared Persons

> "We need to know, we can't just stay lost and uncertain. If someone told me anything, I wouldn't believe it and I will remain lost until I see the body."
>
> - sister of a missing person (ICRC, *The Families of* 12)

Due to the topic of this thesis, this section will focus specifically on the needs of families of the disappeared of the Lebanese Civil War, which have been thoroughly assessed by the ICRC in 2011 and 2012. Interviews and group discussions were conducted with 324 families of disappeared persons in connection with the armed conflicts in Lebanon. Despite the diversity of participants in terms of social background, geographical location, age, gender and varying circumstances of the disappearances, their needs were "extraordinarily consistent" (ICRC, *The Families of* 11).

The overwhelming majority of interviewees expressed the need to know the fate and whereabouts of the victims: The preferred actions were knowing the fate of the missing persons (37%), searching procedures to get them back (31%) and knowing the truth (17%). Meanwhile, only a few expressed that financial assistance (5%), compensation (3%), or punishment (3%) would be their preferred action (ibid 11). The survey also showed a need for psychological or psychosocial support: between 60–85% of participants talked about psychological problems, which they directly attributed to the uncertainty about their missing loved ones (ibid 14). A majority of the families (78%) also discussed financial problems on many levels due to the disappearance. However, they expressed the fear that financial compensation could be used as a pretext for refusing to search for the truth, which is why they considered it as their right but not as a priority (ibid 15, 19).

Further, the survey illustrates that the topic of memorialization is a sensitive one: While 60 % of the participants could imagine some form of remembrance for the victims as long as it was not a memorial, almost 40 % rejected a tribute because they feared that it would be seen as a substitute for an actual search (ibid 19). A major concern of the families was the feeling that the authorities had not sufficiently recognized their situation and that they felt left alone in their search for their loved one. Concluding, the main result of the study was that the families first and foremost expected the authorities to install a search process which would shed light on the fate of their relative and wanted recognition of the suffering of those left behind (ibid 18).

2.6. Gender and Enforced Disappearance

> "[They'd say] 'wife of the kidnapped,' poor her, poor her. In the beginning these words 'poor thing' used to kill me. Then, when I stood on my own two feet . . . [they'd say], 'Bravo, you are the sister of men.' Who said I am? Why is a woman not allowed to be? . . . Because she is standing on her feet it means [she is a sister of men]? . . . No, I am not a man." (Yakinthou 16)

In the previous chapter, it became apparent that the issue of enforced disappearance raises particular challenges for female relatives. Because of their traditional gender role and structural inequalities, they confront intersecting psychological, social and economic harm in different ways than male family members. When the disappeared is the main breadwinner, women experience more severe poverty and victimisation (Dewhirst and Kapur 6). The gendered aspect of enforced disappearance however does not only impact the private, but also the public and therefore discursive sphere. In most cases around the globe, forcibly disappeared persons are predominantly adult men – inquiries suggest that men comprise between 70 and 94 percent of the victims (Dewhirst and Kapur 4).[9] Consequently, their female relatives, especially wives and mothers, take on the role of fighters for the cause of the missing and disappeared. As Comaty (69) puts it: "Searching for the disappeared is regarded as an act belonging to the women's sphere." Regarding this, three elements are deserving of a closer look: womanhood/motherhood, stepping from the private into the public realm, and depoliticisation.

2.6.1. Womanhood/Motherhood

> "But what if a government's actions deny a mother her "natural" role? What if the state systematically destroys the family in which so many women define themselves? What becomes of the mother then? Thousands of mothers (…) were forced to answer these questions that religion and society could not answer. They answered those questions with action." (Malin 193)

When women form groups to find their missing relatives, even more so when the relatives are sons and daughters, this common attribute holds special significance. They are not just people, not even just women, they are mothers: a label that is powerful, emotional, unifying and universally recognized. Motherhood is a label that may emerge naturally and obviously for the

[9] There are exceptions, for example the female maquiladora workers abducted, tortured and killed in Juarez, Mexico (Bejarano 126-27). Also in Lebanon, women were subjected to disappearances – taken from hospitals, detention centers, checkpoints, from the streets or during massacres. However, men constituted the vast majority of the missing and disappeared persons (LAW 33-35).

victim groups, but is sometimes also strategically used as an advocacy tool, as it creates legitimacy, identification, emotionalisation, and depoliticisation. From the Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina to the Mothers of Srebrenica in Bosnia Herzegovina, the Mothers of Soacha in Colombia or the Saturday Mothers in Istanbul: Many groups frame their initiative within the framework of motherhood by explicitly naming themselves as such. They use cultural notions connected to motherhood as both a shield and a weapon, altering not only themselves, but also others' perceptions of them (Malin 189).

The mothers of the disappeared in Argentina serve as a good example for using the performance of *womanhood/motherhood* as a tool. As one of the most successful nonviolent protest movements in the twentieth century, it has been thoroughly analysed by scholars and served as a model for human rights movements around the world (Dewhirst and Kapur 12). In her paper "Mother who won't Disappear", Andrea Malin uses the Argentinian case as a model to discuss the transformation of mothers into human rights activists. Malin describes how they boldly "brought their private suffering into the open to confront the military dictatorships when no one else dared" (188). While doing this, they could no longer carry on their culturally prescribed roles and transformed themselves: "Using traditional notions of motherhood, they created a new collective motherhood devoted to human rights" (ibid). It can be observed that their womanhood and motherhood play a powerful role in how they were perceived; as "more determined, more passionate, and more profound" than any political opposition (ibid). Kovras (66) describes how this appealed to the international community, who sympathised with the grieving mothers: "Global media were inundated with images of their weekly vigils, women carrying photos of their children, with their children's nappies used as white headscarves." He notes how hearing the voices of individual victims rather than abstract statistics of human rights abuses allowed for more identification. "The fact that a number of disappeared were citizens of the United States and other European countries did not hurt either…" (Kovras 69).

2.6.2. From Private to Public

When searching for the disappeared becomes a women's issue, these women publicly take on roles not traditionally connected to the image of womanhood, like the role of political activists (Malin 197). It is a step out of the private sphere, which is commonly connected to womanhood, into the male dominated public and political sphere. In "Las Super Madres", Cynthia Bejarano explores the transformation of gendered citizenship into forms of resistance. "Mothers walking

the streets with posters and banners…penetrated the public sphere, and transformed prior gendered notions of citizenship into the evolution of maternal citizenship" (Bejarano, 130). She uses the example of the Latina mothers of the disappeared women in Juarez, Mexico[10] and compares their activism with similar groups in Argentina and El Salvador (126). She observes how in each country, the mothers transfer empowerment from the private sphere reserved for mothers and housewives to the public sphere of motherist activism and develop new tools of resistance (ibid). One of the most symbolic examples of this is what Bejarano calls "household tools of activism" (140). Items like children's diapers embroidered with their names worn as kerchiefs or photographs hung around the mothers' necks exemplify how private matters are taken from the place of their belonging – the family home – into the public and political realm (138-140).

2.6.3. Backlash and the Tactic of Depoliticisation

> "Suddenly, they were no longer mothers looking for their children; they were defying the traditional patriarchal society." (Malin 207)

As much as breaking the barrier between private and public is necessary for demanding action, passionate women who enter the sphere of politics and activism often face difficulties. Especially when the women get more and more attention locally and globally, authorities can perceive them as a greater threat (Malin 206-207). Bejarano (131) describes how Latino mothers were often criticised for their politicisation as soon as they not only demonstrated their love for their missing children, but also tried to make officials respond to their pleas for investigations. She argues that traditionally, mothers had been considered "silent" citizens whose role was to stay passive about larger political issues. Hence, activist mothers were seen as part of the problem; as "good mothers" who had turned "bad" and acted against state control and ideologies (ibid). Therefore, some groups decide that it might be beneficial to lessen the weight of the political dimension in order not to stir up controversies or resistance with political players.[11] To achieve this is a sensitive issue: How can such an inherently political act as lobbying against a regime become less so, at least in the sphere of the discourse? The argument

[10] The direct victims in Juarez were young women, as opposed to adult men in most other cases of disappearances that occur in violent conflicts. This brings up an interesting additional gendered layer: a second victimisation of the women who were kidnapped, tortured, raped, killed, and buried by victim-blaming. The women have often been portrayed as "deviants" and public figures have accused them of being involved in prostitution and drug trafficking, placing the blame on them by questioning their integrity as "respectful young ladies". (Bejarano 129) An analysis of the discourse around victims of enforced disappearances through the lens of gender would be an interesting research topic in itself, which cannot be included within the scope of this thesis.

[11] This can also be seen in Lebanon, see chapter 4.

here is that the cause of depoliticisation makes use of the notion discussed earlier: womanhood/motherhood. By activating the gendered role as a tool, it is easier to transport an otherwise highly political issue into the humanitarian sphere. The simultaneity of fighting for a political cause while trying to be perceived as apolitical however can become a dangerous balancing act, as is exemplified in the experiences of several movements.

The responses from opponents can range from disregard to ridicule and threat of life. In Chile, Pinochet's military deliberately manipulated the ideology of womanhood and motherhood: While the woman was said to have a "natural role", those women who went outside of this womanly sphere and criticised the regime were labelled "unnatural", which led to inhuman treatment of many of the Chilean mothers (Kavras 208). One leader of the Sri Lankan Mothers' Front received an anonymous death threat, telling her to mourn the death of the "traitor" as a mother must do, but doing so in private (Coll, qtd in Malin 207). Another tactic that can be observed is the rape of women protestors, which happened for example in El Salvador as a strategy to taint the disobedient women who were viewed as "subversive whores" (Bejarano 137). Initially, the Argentinian mothers and grandmothers had not been perceived as a threat by the military and had simply been dubbed "locas" (madwomen) – at that time, they were careful to highlight their lack of political motivation (Kovras 66). As their image transformed into that of political figures however, they were punished harshly: In December 1977, eleven of the *Madres* disappeared, amongst them two nuns and Azuena Villaflor, one of their founders. Eight were set free after an international outcry, but the two nuns had been murdered by being thrown into the sea from an aircraft and Azucena Villaflor was never seen again – she remains among the disappeared herself now (Malin 207-208).

After acknowledging these severe implications the women faced, it is still notable that the movements were not shut down by the governments – something that would probably have happened had the movements been comprised of fathers. As Malin (209) writes, "ultimately, their resistance was more effective because it was feminine traditional, and so unexpected."

2.7. Transitional Justice: Dealing with Disappearances

Considering that the crime of making opponents disappear is widely perpetrated during violent conflict and/or by repressive states, the concept of transitional justice (TJ) plays a major role in societies that have suffered under the systematic use of enforced disappearances. The following chapter will therefore provide a brief overview of the field of TJ and its mechanisms,

specifically those concerned with the right to know and truth-seeking, considering that they are central to the Lebanese case: The assessments of the needs of victims' families show that knowing the fate and whereabouts of their relative is most important (see chapter 2.5.5). Furthermore, lobbying for truth-seeking rather than prosecution is more realistic in Lebanon for two reasons: firstly, due to the Amnesty Law concerning crimes committed during the Civil War, and secondly because there was no regime change, which means that many key players of the war are still in power and are "naturally reluctant" (DPI 34) to investigate their own crimes.[12]

2.7.1. Definition and Emergence

TJ has gained global significance as an approach of dealing with the past. It is understood as a restorative framework to address past violence and human rights abuses in societies undergoing some form of political transition (Bell 7). The United Nations describe TJ as

> "the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation." (UN Secretary General 2)

A significant notion of TJ is the speed in which it emerged; scholars such as Christine Bell (6) describe it as "the incredibly fast field". Paige Arthur (321) argues that the field began to emerge in the late 1980s, when the turn away from the practice of "naming and shaming" towards accountability was brought to the international level. The term "transitional justice" has been used since the mid-1990s during the transitions from authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe and Central America, growing into a multidisciplinary field in a matter of years (Bell 7). One of the main reasons for the development of the concept was the debate around how a successor regime should deal with the crimes of their predecessors, and the need for post-conflict accountability (ibid).

The mechanisms and processes of TJ can both be judicial and non-judicial, however, they must be in conformity with international law and its obligations (UN Secretary General 2). Examples are criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programs, institutional reform or memorialisation efforts (ICTJ 1).

[12] For more details on the specifics of Lebanon and its advocacy struggles and strategies for truth, see chapter 4.

While this chapter highlights the right to truth, there are other elements to victims' rights that should be mentioned here: Victims of enforced disappearances have the right to justice, which means that the state has an obligation to prosecute and punish. Another aspect is the right to full reparation, which not only means financial compensation but also the return of those disappeared who are still alive or their remains if they are dead. Additionally, there is the right to redress, which can be measures such as the state officially asking for forgiveness for past atrocities, creating a memorial to honour the victims, or commemorating the disappeared by naming a square or setting an official day (Calvet Martinez 21). The guarantee of non-repetition is another important aspect in the context of the transition to peace, which means that the state is obliged to carry out necessary institutional reforms (ibid).

2.7.2. The Right to the Truth

The right to know the truth in relation to human rights violations is widely recognised in International Law (IL), as stated in a General Comment of the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (UNWGEID 1). It is not only repeatedly acknowledged as an autonomous right internationally (see chapter 2.2), but also at the national[13] level (ibid).

The right to truth includes two aspects: The victims' families' right to know the fate or whereabouts, and if the disappeared person is dead, the right to the restitution and identification of their remains. While the state is not obligated to successfully find all missing persons, it must do everything possible to try to find the individuals (Calvet Martinez 19). Despite this clear obligation, it must be noted that in many cases, state authorities may have no interest in providing information, for example, because they did not stop the disappearances or are the ones responsible for them (ibid 16-17). Due to this difficulty, scholars urge to treat enforced disappearances as a humanitarian issue: "[T]he perpetrators of such crimes must be held to account" (ibid 17).

[13] In Lebanon, the right to truth is affirmed in the 2018 ratified Law 105.

2.7.3. Truth-Seeking

In some cases, the issue of enforced disappearances is included in peace agreements after hostilities end. When there are many individuals who have been disappeared, the authorities may establish a body to communicate information about the fate and whereabouts of the victims, and to look for their remains should they be dead (Calvet Martinez 16).

Commissions dealing with truth and reconciliation vary from country to country[14], which is why no strict definition can be found (DPI 9). Some characteristics of a truth commission according to Hayner (11-12) are: It is focused on past rather than ongoing events, it investigates a pattern of events that took place over a period of time, it engages with the affected population, and it is a temporary body and aims at concluding with a final report. The methods and questions that determine a commission's scope and effectiveness are usually defined by the commission itself, which may result in disagreement within and outside a commission (ibid 210). Hayner suggests that truth commissions should be "nationally rooted, unique to each place" (211). In practice, the members of the commissions conduct investigations, gather archival evidence, collect testimony from victims, survivors, or witnesses, and publish their findings and recommendations in final reports (Dewhirst and Kapur 13). Lastly, truth commissions should be officially sanctioned by the state (Hayner 12). This notion is considered essential to promote a long and lasting peace:

> "Enforced disappearances are crimes committed by state agents, and the refusal of the authorities to provide information and to conduct an investigation to find out the fate or whereabouts of disappeared persons causes suffering and distrust in the institutions of the state. Therefore it is important that the state, once the conflict is over, takes the initiative …." (Calvet Martinez 22)

[14] For an analysis of more than 20 truth commissions around the world, see Priscilla Hayner's acclaimed book *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*.

3. Analysing Political Advocacy

Before delving into the case study of Lebanon and exploring the discourse around the disappeared in chapter 4, the following parts will give insights about the chosen method of content analysis and the field of political communication and advocacy.

3.1. **Qualitative Content Analysis**

In her book *Qualitative Research Methods*, Sarah J. Tracy describes the phrase "qualitative methods" as an umbrella concept covering interviews, participant observation, or textual analysis (4). To provide a better understanding of what qualitative research constitutes, she compares it with quantitative methods. The latter transform data – which can be conversations, news stories or any physical or social activity – into numbers by using measurement and statistic to develop mathematical models and predictions. Quantitative research is often driven by quantifiable questions such as "How often?" or "How much?" (ibid 5). One decisive distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is the instrument: While in quantitative methods, the researcher is separated from the instrument, for example a survey that measures participant attitudes, in qualitative methods, "the researcher *is* the instrument. Observations are registered through the researchers mind and body" (ibid). The representation of the work differs as well: In qualitative research, the findings often include creative data displays which go beyond simply reporting results, and qualitative works tend to have a shorter literature review but longer discussions (ibid). Tracy however emphasises that one work can combine quantitative and qualitative methods and that some of the strongest research programs use multiple methods of data collection (5).

Qualitative research methods have the advantage that they can "provide insight into cultural activities that might otherwise be missed in structures surveys or experiments" (ibid 7) and can provide an understanding about the world or societal issues. Qualitative research is holistic, offers more than a snapshot, and can interpret viewpoints, stories or quantitative data (ibid). Keeping these notions in mind, qualitative research is best equipped to answer the research question of this thesis, which requires to engage in thorough analysing, interpreting, and reflecting.

Regarding the method of content analysis, Michael Lewis-Beck writes in the introduction of the second edition of Robert Weber's book *Basic Content Analysis*:

> "Social scientists who must make sense of historical documents, newspaper stories, political speeches, open-ended interviews, diplomatic messages, psychological diaries, or official publications – to name a few – will find the technique indispensable." (Weber 5)

Having emerged in the communication discipline, content analysis is described as an "extremely important method for research into political communications" by Benoit (268). Definitions of this research method have been developed for more than 70 years. In 1952, Bernard Berelson describes content analysis a technique "for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (qtd in Benoit 269). This definition can be critisised due to the use of the term "objective" – Benoit notes that while content analysis strives for objectivity, "practitioners are human beings who attribute meaning" (269). Weber defines content analysis as a method which "uses a set of procedures to make valid inference from text" (9). In Krippendorf's definition, the relationship between the content of texts and their institutional, societal, or cultural contexts is emphasised – he describes it as a technique "for making replicative and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use" (Krippendorff, *Content Analysis* 18).

Asa Berger notes that content analysis can be applied to all forms of communication, whether mass mediated or personal. However, it "tells us what is in the material being studied, not how it affects people exposed to this material" (Asa Berger 392), highlighting the limitation that content analysis does not provide insights in the effects of the source on audiences.

Since content analysis measures dimensions of content of groups of messages, the researcher has to identify a sample of texts. There are various types of sampling: A census sample for instance includes all members of a population, while a random sample of the population gives every member an equal probability of being included. A convenience sample consists of texts that are easily available to the researcher, and purposive sampling involves the selection of texts with a particular goal in mind (Benoit 271-272).

Some of the purposes for content analysis can be to disclose international differences in communication content, to identify the intentions of the communicator, to detect the existence of propaganda, to reflect cultural patterns in groups or societies, or to describe trends in communication content (Weber 9, adapted from Berelson). Weber also states that there is "no simple right way to do content analysis" (13), but that investigators must judge what methods

are most appropriate for their problems. He highlights the wide range of techniques that have been used by researchers: While according to the scholar, some of these procedures are highly complex and done with statistical methods, others are "quite simple and, in a sense, linguistically naive"[15] – which does not mean that they cannot still be highly reliable and valid indicators of symbolic content (ibid 12). One practice that is shared by literary scholars, journalists, and qualitative researchers is to identify sections of text the person considers relevant and intends to revisit or quote as an example of their argument (Krippendorff, "Measuring the Reliability" 789). Some ways to achieve this is underlining relevant sections, making notations on its margins, collecting quotations on index cards, or finding ways to categorise. If needed, qualitative text analysis software enables to highlight sections and assign them to codes or categories (ibid). In this research, a qualitative approach of content analysis is used: Even though a table with categories was developed in order to register, analyse and interpret the messages of the primary sources (see appendix), the use of numeric values or quantitative programmes were not necessary to answer the research question.

3.2. **Political Communication and Public Discourse**

"The crucial factor that makes communication 'political' is not the source of a message, but its content and purpose" (Denton and Woodward, qtd in McNair 3-4). This quote exemplifies that it is difficult to define political communication, but beneficial to characterise it along the lines of intentions of its senders. McNair calls this notion "purposeful communication about politics", which he sees encompassing not only communication undertaken by politicians, but also communication addressed to these actors by non-politicians, as well as communication about political activities (4). Similarly, Feldman and Zmerli note that communication in the public sphere can flow along three paths: downward from politicians to the general society, horizontally among political actors or the media, or upward from citizens' groups to decision-makers (1). The goal of all types of these communicators is to place their issues on the public agenda and influence their representation in public discourse. This discourse, Feldman and Zermli explain, is

[15] In „Measuring the Reliability of Qualitative Text Analysis Data", Klaus Krippendorff suggests measures to raise the standards of qualitative content analysis.

> "an essential ingredient of liberal democracies, is constituted in the public sphere where interests are articulated, opinions expressed and formed, arguments and counterarguments exchanged, and information circulated." (ibid)

Political communicators strife to influence citizens' opinions, attitudes, and behaviour. Beliefs, value orientations or attitudes can be either reinforced or transformed and actions initiated by the means of rhetoric, which is the art of persuasive speaking or writing (ibid). When this form of persuasion is used in the political process – via strategies by decision-makers, political groups, journalists or other actors – the term political rhetoric can be applied. One signifier of political rhetoric is that it appeals both to reason and emotions: It creates knowledge or frames a political situation in a particular way, and at the same arouses a sense of compassion, solidarity, anger, or even hatred (ibid 1-2).

This thesis does not analyse a discourse created by politicians, but by actors and activists within the sphere of civil society: local NGOs, international organisations and news outlets, and relatives of victims. To provide a brief insight into the strategies and challenges of this type of horizontal and upward communication, a few practical examples and findings from human rights and transitional justice advocacy practitioners are beneficial.

> "Human rights advocacy is an art, not a science. There is no one formula that will work for every situation, nor a guarantee of success. Each advocacy effort must be based on an individual assessment of the opportunities for change and the tools and strategies that are available, and adapted as situations unfold." (Becker, "Conclusion")

In her book *Campaigning for Justice*, Jo Becker reacts to a perceived gap in the literature between human rights theory and the practice of human rights advocacy by portraying and analysing numerous case studies. She identifies five factors which have positively impacted advocacy campaigns: First, alliances with like-minded groups and stakeholders have been at the core of the most effective lobbying campaigns in recent years. Second, individuals and relatives who have been most significantly impacted by violations of human rights have spearheaded many movements – the most convincing and successful campaigners speak from personal experience. The third factor concerns timing and "opportunistic advocacy": Advocates have frequently taken use of special opportunities made possible by particular events or developments to advance their causes, start new campaigns, or use the leverage they offered. The fourth identified success factor is credible research and documentation as powerful tools of human rights advocacy. Lastly, almost all the campaigns of Becker's sample have relied on a multifaceted approach and multiple points of leverage to create and maintain pressure for

change, “often not knowing what might create the ‘tipping point’ that would ultimately achieve their goal” (Becker, chapter “Lessons for the Future”).

Adding to these outcomes, Becker notes that many cases had utilised the media effectively to raise visibility and build pressure, or systematically used one-on-one meetings with individual representations. Some of her interviewees emphasised the importance of crafting their message, which should be simple and clear. It is also noteworthy that all of the depicted campaigns had been multiyear efforts, which is why Becker highlights the importance of persistence and long-term commitment (ibid).

In regard to media and communication strategies, scholars and practitioners highlight the potential and at the same time criticise that there is a major research gap as well as underestimation, especially in the field of transitional justice[16]. Some see these challenges arising due to mutual mistrust and a general “troubled relationship” (Hodzic and Tolbert 1): On the one hand, media can support transitional justice efforts and promote the demands of victims. However, there is the danger of a destructive impact through negative media coverage, “which has seriously undermined the work of truth commissions or trials in certain countries, diminishing any lasting societal impact they might have” (ibid 2).

All in all, a lot of suspicion can be observed between the lines in papers about cooperating with the media. In this context, the Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT) claims to detect a “philosophy of ‘our work speaks for itself’”. It criticises the field of transitional justice in this regard, stating that institutions

> “have tried to tell too much of the storyline of the legacy of mass abuse on their own, disconnected from a larger national conversation and societal narrative that seek to reimagine a different future in the aftermath of conflict or authoritarian rule. Some of the most powerful voices shaping such narratives – media, public intellectuals and artists – have been treated as just one more type of ‘stakeholder’, rather than as distinctive protagonists in creating the possibility of transformative results.” (1)

The IFIT essay argues that communications and narrative must occupy a more central part of transitional justice efforts, a work that must be understood creatively in order to produce the needed national conversation (ibid 1-2).

[16] See for example „Media and Transitional Justice” by Price and Stremlau, “Mediating Post-Conflict Dialogue” by Laplante and Phenicie or “Changing the Narrative” by the IFIT.

4. Case Study: Lebanon

The case of the disappeared should be understood in the context of Lebanon's recent history. The Civil War and its consequent Amnesty Law continue to have a drastic effect on the country, its institutions and citizens even after three decades – an ironic circumstance, since the ending of the war was built on a hopeful promise to leave it behind. Before analysing the discourse around enforced disappearances in Lebanon in chapter 4.5, it is therefore important to provide a historical contextualisation of the issue's setting. A special focus will then be laid on the Committee of the Families and other local organisations, as well as on recent developments such as the creation of a National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons in Lebanon.

4.1. Enforced Disappearances in the Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990

It is not within the scope of this thesis[17] to provide a summary of the 1975-1990 Civil War, however several key features are helpful to understand the issue of enforced disappearances. One important note is that the Lebanese Civil War[18] was not a straightforward conflict of one party against another. Eight years after the war, military journalist Edgar O'Ballance describes this as follows:

> "During the years of turmoil observers had frequently remarked that they could not understand the complexities of the civil war – who was fighting whom and why, who wanted what, and indeed who got what. Their confusion was understandable as the Lebanese themselves had at times been bewildered by the abruptly changing allegiances of their warlords." (O'Ballance 218)

The reasons for the war are described by Sami Hermez in his 2017 book *War is Coming* as being "about how to share internal political power and how to adopt a posture vis-á-vis the Palestinian cause of liberation" (24). The Democratic Peace Institute (DPI) describes the Civil

[17] For a more comprehensive overview, Robert Fisk's acclaimed book *Pity the Nation. Lebanon at War* combines political analysis and war reporting of the Lebanon conflict. In *Martyr Cults and Political Identities in Lebanon*, Bonsen provides a concise overview of the actors and events in four phases (80-90).

[18] This term is the most prominent one and is also used in this thesis, however there is disagreement between scholars about naming the period of 1975-1990. Some critique that "Lebanese Civil War" suggests that the entire period was only a war between Lebanese and obscures the counterinsurgency operations by states such as Syria and Israel. Some alternative suggestions are "the Events", "the War of Others", "Lebanese Wars" or "Lebanon's War" (Hermez 23-24).

War as a mixture of domestic, regional and international actors and as influenced from a range of issues like the Arab nationalism, the Cold War, or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to domestic problems like the conflicts between Maronite Christians, Sunni and Shia Muslims, or how to deal with Palestinian refugees (34-35).

After the war ignited in April 1975 when the Christian Phalangists attacked a bus carrying Palestinian refugees, a cycle of violence was set in motion. Johnson sums up the different conflicts as follows:

> "First, there was the dispute between the Palestinian commando movement and those Lebanese 'rightists' who acted as 'surrogates and defenders' of the Lebanese state. Second, there was the breach between the Lebanese nationalism of the rightists and the wider Arab nationalism of the Nasserists and other 'leftists'. Very importantly, there was a class conflict between the menu people and the bourgeoisie, but this was often obscured by the confessional malevolence between Muslims and Christians. Finally, there were the factional quarrels between political activists at all levels of the clientelist hierarchy, and between the established political elite and new concentrations of power and leadership." (159-160)

The conflicts were marked by successive rounds of massacres, killings, forced displacement and abductions[19]. Lynn Maalouf describes that between 1975-1977, local media featured special sections dedicated to reporting abductions (1). The kidnappings generally either ended in enforced disappearances or in release through negotiations between militias (ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of* 57). They were practiced "by all armed groups" (Maalouf 1) and often in coordination between groups – for example, members of the Lebanese army or militias handing over victims to Syrian or to Israeli forces (ibid). The victims were predominately civilians and the locations of the kidnappings mostly checkpoints, or else homes or streets. Reasons for forcibly disappearing individuals ranged from prisoner exchanges, money, revenge, or "for the very purpose of creating internal displacement that separated people along sectarian lines" (ibid). Additionally, many disappeared are presumed to be the victims of mass killings or armed conflict and buried in mass graves, or else to having been thrown into the sea (ibid).

When the war ended, approximately 90,000 to 120,000 people had died (DPI 34-35) and more than 17,000[20] had gone missing (Siega Battel 140).

[19] The 2013 ICTJ project *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence* documented hundreds of serious violations of IHRL, IHL and regional laws committed against civilians, providing a glimpse into the sufferings of Lebanon's population during and after the Civil War.

[20] The official number according to a 1991 police report is 17.415, however some argue that a thorough documentation effort would probably see it downsized, since it is only based on relatives' reports who sometimes reported to several police stations (Siega Battel 134, Maalouf).

4.2. Amnesty and Amnesia

The National Reconciliation Charter (also called "Taif Agreement") brought a formal end to the Civil War. The internal Lebanese agreement was negotiated in Saudi Arabia in 1989 under the auspices of Riyadh and the Arab League, supported by the US and supervised by Syria (Karam 36). It symbolised reconciliation objectives and introduced reforms to support the consolidation of the Lebanese state. At the same time, it "reconfirmed power sharing among religious communities" (ibid) that had been in force since the adoption of the Constitution of 1926[21].

There was no reference to installing TJ measures in the Reconciliation Charter (Siega Battel 145), however one method dealt with the past: A general Amnesty Law was adopted in 1991. It covers crimes committed before March 1991, including "crimes against humanity and those which significantly trespass upon human dignity" (Saghieh, translated by Haugbolle 69). Regarding the topic of this thesis, it has to be noted that according to article 2.3.f, judicial procedures are in fact possible if the crimes are repeated or uninterrupted. This means that technically, disappearances could be charged if there was a will: when there is no body, the crime is still ongoing (Maalouf 3). Nevertheless, due to the Amnesty Law, leaders who might otherwise have faced charges were able to remain at large after the Civil War, and several are until this day.[22] The phrase "la ghalib la maghlub" (*no victor, no vanquished*) was used to justify this transition from war to peace. It implies that everyone was equally responsible, and that the Lebanese should move on with their lives (Haugbolle 70) – or as phrased by Joey Ayoub: "the best way forward is to forget – without solving – the past" (56).

To contextualise this development, three aspects must be taken into account. First, no Arab country had any experience with transitional justice institutions at the time, and the Lebanese regime was unlikely to be a forerunner since there was no external pressure. Since many of the militias and ruling classes would have faced charges, they were not interested in justice. To add a more pragmatic argument, Lebanon would have come to a standstill if so many individuals belonging to the ruling class had been facing trial (ibid 71). Second, the strategy of forgiving and forgetting was not new in Lebanon: It had been imposed in every Lebanese post-war situation up to this point. Even the same motto of "la ghalib la maghlub" had already been deployed in 1958 (ibid). Third, many Lebanese preferred not to question the post-war system

[21] One particularity of Lebanon's power sharing sectarian system is that the president is always a Christian Maronite, the prime minister is from the Sunni community, while the speaker of parliament is a Shiite.
[22] In contrast, crimes committed against religious or political leaders were exempted from the Amnesty Law (Haugbolle 69-70).

but rather wanted to give the prospect of peace and security a chance (70-71). While there was still much to be done, some scholars remark that an optimistic beginning was being made: O'Ballance even writes that "the mood of the people had changed from hopeless despair to hopeful expectation" (218) as the construction cranes were at work in Beirut, supported with loans from Arab Gulf states. Regarding the lack of public discourse and memorialisation efforts, Haugbolle writes:

> "The unwillingness of leading politicians to probe the misdeeds of their past was not the only hindrance to a national debate about the war. Lebanese society itself showed reluctance towards remembering, even if some people were more willing to look than others." (Haugbolle 69)

This lack of dealing with the violence that had happened on a national level caused competing sectarian narratives with different versions of what had happened from 1975-1990: "The Lebanese found themselves in the uneasy position of adopting narratives created or developed during the Civil War in a public sphere that pretended the Civil War never really existed" (Ayoub 56). This, according to Ayoub, reflects a paradox in which national unity is only sought in mutually exclusive spaces (ibid 57).

Keeping this environment of collective amnesia – which was imposed but not really contested by the society – in mind, it is easier to comprehend how challenging it has been for activists in Lebanon who advocate for dealing with the past.

4.3. Truth-Seeking and Advocating

As established in chapter 2.7.3, truth-seeking bodies can assist in dealing with the crime of enforced disappearances. However, while such transitional justice mechanisms have become a basic principle throughout the past decades when it comes to transitional democracies, the Lebanese amnesty was granted without such a process (Haugbolle 194).

There have not been many formal efforts by the Lebanese authorities to get to the bottom of the disappearances over the years. Those mechanisms that have been established are mostly regarded as unsatisfactory or "designed to fail" (Maalouf 7) by civil society. In the 1980s, while the Civil War was still taking place, the administration had set up several committees to look into the issue, but the single outcome was that the names of 764 individuals who had been arrested by Lebanese authorities were revealed (Siega Battel 140). Another example is the formation of the Official Commission of Investigation into the Fate of the Abducted and

Disappeared Persons in the year 2000: After merely half a year, the only result was a two-page-long document with a death declaration of the disappeared – an official report of investigations was not released. When a few months later, the Syrian authorities released 54 Lebanese who had been detained, some of the prisoners were among those who had been established as deceased by the commission (Maalouf 7). The public outrage prompted a new Commission in 2001. After conducting hearings covering 700 cases, its results were once more not shared with the public (ibid). A Committee that was jointly set up by Syria and Lebanon in 2005 was supposed to investigate what became of 600 individuals who were supposedly detained in Syria – and again, no results were disclosed (Siega Battel 141).

Members of civil society, however, have been urging investigations into what became of the disappeared. The cause has been spearheaded by the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon, more specifically by the person of Wadad Halwani: Two months after her husband Adnan had been abducted from their family home in front of his wife and two sons, she made a radio call. The then 31-year-old high school teacher invited everybody who was missing a member of their families to gather at a location in Beirut. More than a hundred persons showed up. She founded the Committee of the Families and soon realised that men, women and children across all religious, geographic and political divides were affected by enforced disappearances (Maalouf 1-2).

The founding of the Committee of the Families was followed by years and decades of relentless activism: During the Civil War, the members held sit-ins and symbolic meetings at the demarcation line where many of the kidnappings had taken place. After one mother committed suicide due to the disappearance of her 13-year-old son, they burned tires and blocked roads linking East and West Beirut. When the war was over, they continued to put the cause on the legal agenda through street pressure, lobbying and different forms of activism. It was them in cooperation with other NGOs and supporters who put pressure on the government to establish commissions, and they publicly commemorate the start of the Civil War annually (Maalouf 4 and Touma and Zaghbour). A main strategy has been the “attempt to transcend sectarian and partisan lines and portraying the issue as a uniting, national, emotional and legal issue” (Huijgen and Touma).

Even though the Committee of the Families is at the center of the cause and the discourse analysis in this thesis, several organisations have been working on the issue and the web of civil society alliances that has been spun is far-reaching. Since the fate of a victim is thought to depend heavily upon the identity of the perpetrator, different victim groups have emerged

(Maalouf 4). One example is SOLIDE (The Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile), an NGO which was founded in 1989 with a focus on the disappeared who are believed to have been detained in Syrian prisons (Touma and Zaghbour). Maalouf writes in 2009 that while these different victims groups started with separate solutions and advocacy, they have come together to work on a collective strategy that focuses on the right to know of the families (4). Other bodies supporting the families are UMAM Documentation and Research, ACT for the Disappeared, the Legal Agenda, the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH) and international organisations such as the ICRC and the ICTJ.[23]

One phase during these four decades is pivotal to the topic of this thesis: Up until the 2000s, the Committee of the Families and SOLIDE were "mainly raising awareness for pushing it onto the policy agenda" (Huijgen and Touma). Starting after the withdrawal of the Syrian occupation in 2005, the discourse saw a process of "NGO'ization and internationalization" (Comaty 143). Jaquemet describes a "much freer political and social atmosphere that has encouraged the country's fledgling civil society". (2) Adding to this, the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in the same year initiated nationwide demands for 'the truth' (ibid). Commemoration practices were normalised and civil society initiatives that worked on the cause for the disappeared were increased. International actors offered funding to these initiatives and generally made the discourse more technical and professional (ibid). Starting in 2009, the issue was portrayed through legal rights, rather than as political (Huijgen and Touma).

The 2008 paper "Fighting Amnesia" by Iolanda Jaquemet gives an illuminating insight into this turning point at which the strategy of a humanitarian framing was emerging. The author suggests three parameters: First, to present it as a humanitarian issue which objective is to find the truth "to the exclusion of naming individual perpetrators and seeking retribution" (Jaquemet 21) and to not challenge the Amnesty Law. Second, to focus on the families' "moral torture" (ibid), which cannot end without knowing the fate of their loved ones. Third, to highlight that the right to know is grounded in international law and that Lebanon cannot set itself outside the law (ibid). Jaquemet acknowledges that this approach may appear highly unsatisfactory, but argues that it is the only realistic way forward. "Even so, it can only be successful if the political

[23] For a detailed depiction of this collaboration effort, see Huijgen and Touma's *Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making*. Through their Case Study about Lebanon, they describe the multiple levels on which this civil society action has taken place – from governmental lobbying to documenting, mapping grave site locations, and collecting information on the disappeared.

class is convinced that the truth can be revealed in ways that do not threaten either their individual positions or civil peace." (17)

Lyna Comaty notes that the process of internationalisation brought a stronger vocabulary of human rights: "The language that came to be used was international, normative, and, more importantly, in the continuation of the narrative of *civility* longed for by post-conflict organizations in the country" (ibid). A physical illustration of this internationalisation was the setup of a tent in front of the UN Economic and Social Council for West Asia (ESCWA) in downtown Beirut from 2005 to 2015:

> "The tent served as an image of the humanitarian situation of victims, unprotected by their local laws and seeking the protection of international law. It served as a portrayal of victims under a tent in front of the UN, camping close to international law until human rights, their salvation, returns them home." (ibid 149)

4.4. Recent Developments

Decades of effort and intensive lobbying for the right to know culminated in a breakthrough on two levels when in 2018, the Lebanese parliament approved Law 105, which had been drafted by in a combined effort of civil society organisations. The right to know of the relatives was now officially recognised by the Lebanese government. Law 105 paved the way for a National Commission with the mandate to investigate the fate of the disappeared (Touma and Zaghbour 4). The mandate of the National Commission covers tasks such as conducting investigations to trace missing and forcibly disappeared persons (art. 26/1), ensuring verification of the DNA database (art. 26/6), setting in motion a process for burial site exhumations (art. 26/8), suggesting reparation mechanisms and support for the families (art. 26/12), and raising awareness (art. 26/16) about the issue of the disappeared (UMAM, *Law 105*).

The members for the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared in Lebanon were appointed by the Council of Ministers in June 2020 (Elghossian). Since then, the Commission has not made significant progress due to several difficulties: Two members left because of other commitments and had to be replaced in April 2020, and four further commissioners collectively resigned for in July 2020 for unknown reasons. Furthermore, the National Commission has not been provided with a budget or even a place to hold meetings (Ghaleb). Carmen Abou Jaoudé, who is a member of the National Commission, explains that they formally started their work in June 2021. The members have since been preparing bylaws,

a code of ethics and other interior regulations with the support of the ICRC and the OHCHR. Additionally, they have had workshops with the support of the Swiss embassy and regular meetings with relatives of the disappeared. However, they still do not have resources, which is why negotiation efforts with the Council of Ministers as well as fundraising and communication strategies are being developed. "We are trying our best in very difficult circumstances, knowing that it is a big responsibility" (Abou Jaoudé, *interview*).

Looking at Lebanon's history regarding its lack of functioning mechanisms to deal with its past, the establishment of the National Commission can be seen in two ways: On the one hand, it can be celebrated as a "landmark success" (Touma and Zaghbour) which shows how civil society can be a driving force even in unlikely circumstances. On the other hand, the National Commission is observed with a high degree of scepticism. Two of the expert interviewees of this thesis are torn between hope and pessimism:

> "I do not believe that they are going to be able to work very seriously, because they [are not given] the capacity to do so – but at least I think that it opened a new path … for example, talking about grave sites is much easier than before". (di Mayo, *interview*)
>
> "It is an ongoing topic and nothing is really happening … They [the National Commission] do not even have an office, and they do not even have a budget. This is part of this whole culture of impunity which we have here in Lebanon". (Borgmann, *interview*)

Wadad Halwani's words on the preface of a brochure about Law 105 capture this cautious approach: "Yes, we have won, however our battle is far from over. True victory will only be achieved when this law is properly implemented; otherwise, it will remain ink on paper" (ICRC, *Guide to Law 105* 5).

4.5. The Discourse around Enforced Disappearance in Lebanon

In the following subchapters of the thesis, the research question will be answered by analysing the discourse around the issue of the disappeared in Lebanon. The main sources are eight materials that have been published by various actors – local NGOs, international organisations, international media and family members of the disappeared. First, each publication is briefly described individually to provide an overview. Then the portrayal of enforced disappearance and its direct and indirect victims are analysed in greater detail by using dichotomies as categories: weak/strong, visible/invisible, active/passive, male/female, emotional/rational, private/political and internal/external. Subsequently, information and excerpts from the four

interviews will be used to discuss the outcome of the analysis. These inputs will facilitate a broadened understanding of the strategic intentions that have shaped the narratives, as well as the local political and societal circumstances in which the discourse takes place.

4.5.1. Description of the Analysed Materials

Fig. 1. ACT for the Disappeared, Video still, “Dinner”
Fig. 2. ACT for the Disappeared, Video still, “The Car”

The first of the eight analysed sources was published in 2012 by ACT for the Disappeared. The Lebanese human organisation was founded in 2010 with the mission to contribute to the clarification of the fate of the disappeared, foster a reconciliation process and to prevent the recurrence of violence in Lebanon. Together with the Committee of the Families and in cooperation with other regional and international organisations, ACT has been lobbying for the creation of a national commission. Their work aims at generating public visibility for the cause and for the demand of the right to know, for instance through disseminating informational materials, publications, creative campaigns or TV spots (ACT, “About Us”).

The five short videos are 45 seconds long each and part of a campaign titled “Enough Waiting – We Want to Know”. The campaign highlights the ongoing impact of enforced disappearances with the message “Enough Waiting. 17.000 disappeared. It’s the right to know their fate.” In the spot “The Magician”, a woman on stage gets disappeared but not returned during a magic trick. The text reads “Making a person disappear is just an act. But how can 17.000 people just vanish into thin air? No more tricks. We want to know the truth.” The other four spots display the agonising state of waiting by a family member: In “The Bedroom”, a mother is carefully maintaining the room of her disappeared son to keep it in the same state as he left it many years ago. In “The Car”, a young man is cleaning his disappeared father’s old car diligently in the hope for his return. In the process he discovers mementos like a photograph the father had

apparently kept in the sun visor. In “Telephone”, a father is picking up the telephone at night hoping to hear his disappeared son on the other end before realising that somebody had called the wrong number. “Dinner” shows a woman eating at her dinner table with her husband’s empty plate next to her.

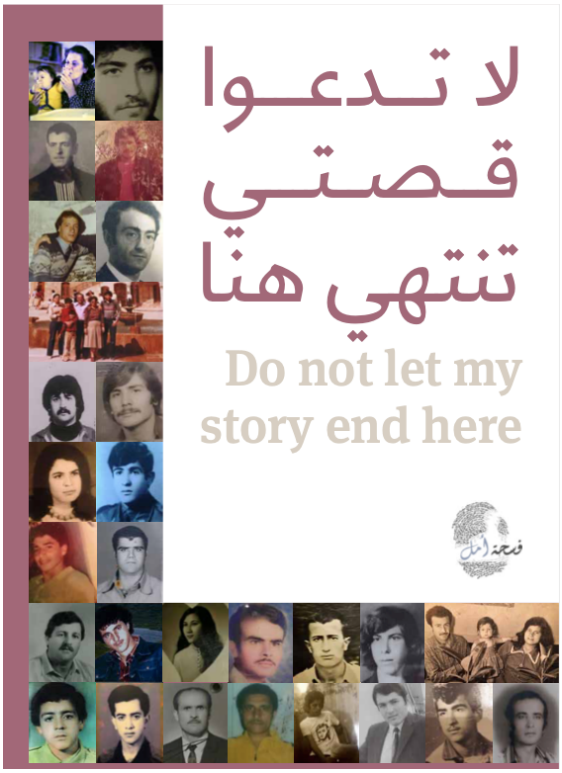


Fig. 3. ACT for the Disappeared, screenshot, *Do not let* Front Cover

Fig. 4. ACT for the Disappeared, screenshot, *Do not let* 26

The second analysed source was also published by ACT. The 2018 publication called *Do not let my story end here* is 44 pages long and written from the perspectives of thirty direct victims. They speak in a collective voice in the introduction, and then each of their individual stories, accompanied with a photo, is told in the first-person narrative. The front and back covers are filled with more than 60 photographs of disappeared persons. The whole report is written both in Arabic and English, making it accessible to a broader audience. Every disappeared gets one page, comprising their name, photograph, and their personal story in the two languages, always concluding with the words: “My name is (name). My story does not end here” or “My name is (name). Do not let my story end here.” Justine di Mayo, founder and director of ACT, shared how the team approached the task of speaking for the disappeared in projects like this: “We went to the relatives, … we explained what we meant to do, and it’s the families who told us

the stories" (*interview*). After the team drafted the stories, they reached out to the families again to make sure they consented to what was written and that it would be published (ibid). The publication aims at making the readers relate to the missing and their families and to show the Lebanese that they have the responsibility to find a solution to the issue (ibid). The approach of identification and unification is apparent especially in the introduction: "We, the disappeared, belong to all communities, sects, and regions of Lebanon…" (ACT, *Do not let* 5). The report thus calls citizens to "take a step out of the collective amnesia and rally behind the right to know their fate and whereabouts" (8).

Fig. 5–7. W. Halwani, Video stills, "The last picture… while crossing"

The third analysed material is a documentary by Wadad Halwani, who is the founder of the Committee of the Families as well as the wife of a disappeared person. The 15-minute-long film "The last picture… while crossing" was published in 2009 and uploaded on *Youtube* in 2012. It focuses on the humanitarian aspect of the issue of the disappeared, especially on the suffering and political activism of the mothers. In particular, it shows their resistance through the tent of the disappeared, which was erected in front of the United Nations building in Beirut in 2005. The video is narrated by Wadad Halwani, who speaks directly to and about one of the mothers, Odette Salem, who is portrayed as the life and soul of the tent and who was fatally hit by a car on her way to the tent in 2009. The documentary shows an extensive number of pictures – of Odette, her disappeared children, other disappeared, or from sit-ins and other projects of the mothers and wives – as well as snippets of video interviews taken from other documentaries.

Fig. 8–10. G. Halwani, Video stills, *Erased__ Ascent of the Invisible*

The fourth source is a 75-minute-long movie from 2018 by Ghassan Halwani, who is an artist and filmmaker as well as the son of a disappeared. *Erased___Ascent of the Invisible* is described by G. Halwani as "historical, materialist, poetic and reflexive" (*interview*) and covers the issue of the disappeared in an artistic way. The film is not focused on a particular story or personal implications of a disappearance. Instead, it symbolically explores the issue of enforced disappearance in the city as well as the public discourse.

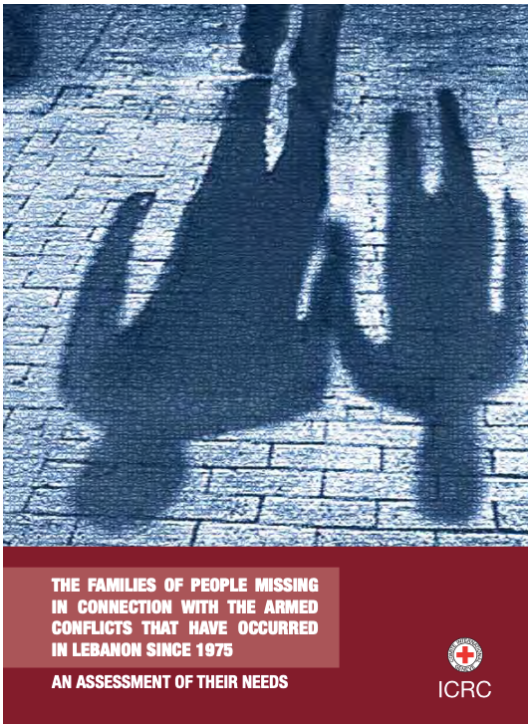
The film presents the topic in a very slow manner, not using quick cuts, instead lingering for long periods of times on the different scenes. There is no background music. It changes between scenes from G. Halwani's atelier or the streets in Beirut, stop-motion drawings of disappeared done by the artist, or him showing documents and the process of his work from a bird's eye view.

According to G. Halwani, he made the film because he had "started to have a critical reaction towards the representations that were employed around the disappeared" (*interview*) and aimed to present it in a different way.

Fig. 11. Yakinthou (ICTJ), screenshot, Front Cover

The fifth analysed material is a 2015 report by the International Center for Transitional Justice. *Living with the Shadows of the Past. The Impact of Disappearance on Wives of the Missing in Lebanon* tells the stories of 23 wives of missing or disappeared persons who were interviewed for the study. In 46 pages, the report comprises outcomes of the study and personal quotes by the women.

The publication not only sheds light on the impact of disappearances on women within a patriarchal environment but also provides recommendations from the women, addressed to Lebanese policy makers and civil society. Except for the front cover, the report contains no images.



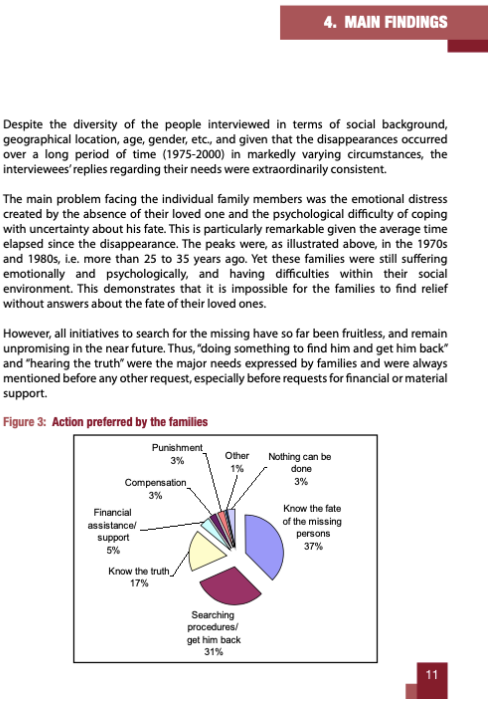


Fig. 12. ICRC, *The families of* Front Cover, screenshot

Fig. 13. ICRC, *The families of* 11, screenshot

The sixth analysed source is a report that was published in 2013 by the International Committee of the Red Cross: *The Families of People missing in connection with Armed Conflicts that have occurred in Lebanon since 1975. An Assessment of their Needs*. In 27 pages, it reflects on the needs of the families of missing people in Lebanon, as assessed by the ICRC between August 2011 and June 2012 through interviews with 324 families and group discussions. It reports the findings of the assessments and gives recommendations, addressed to all stakeholders, the families, the family associations, NGOs, embassies, UN agencies, charities and private companies interested in financing projects for the needs of the families.

Similar to the aforementioned publication of the ICTJ, the report combines its findings and statistical data with personal direct quotes by relatives of missing persons. The only picture is on the front cover: two shadows walking hand in hand, one being attached to the feet of a person, the other one invisible, symbolising a disappeared person.

Fig. 14–15. Al Jazeera, “Families of Lebanon’s”, video stills

The seventh material is a 3-minute-long journalistic video. It is published by Al Jazeera, a news organization funded in part by the Qatari government. Al Jazeera Arabic was launched in 1996 and Al Jazeera English followed in 2006. The Al Jazeera Media Network consists of more than 70 bureaus around the world and seeks to “provide a voice for the voiceless in some of the world’s most unreported places” (Al Jazeera, “About us”).

The video was uploaded to the Al Jazeera English *Youtube* channel on 5 November 2016, reporting about the issue of the missing and disappeared. In the beginning, a woman is introduced, showing her in her home writing notes about her day and her feelings addressed to her disappeared husband, a ritual she does every day. She describes how her husband was disappeared during the final year of the Civil War and about the pain, agony and a nervous breakdown she suffered consequently. The journalist then reports from the tent that the families of the disappeared set up in front of UN Headquarters in Beirut. After a representative of the ICRC is interviewed about the importance of a mechanism with the capacity to find the disappeared, the video ends with the wife continuing to write into her notebook.

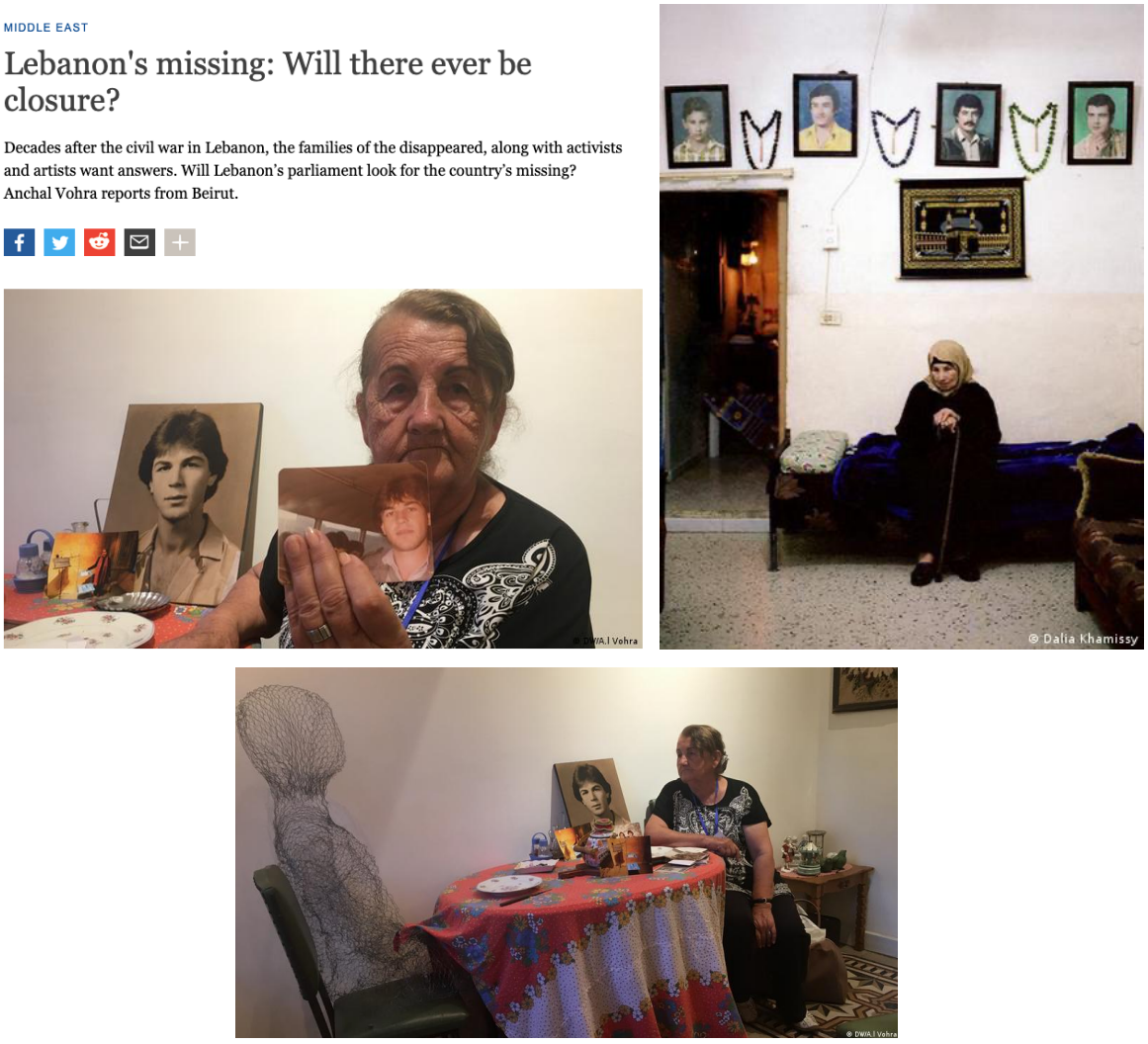


Fig. 16–18. Vohra / Deutsche Welle, screenshots

The eighth analysed source is an online article published on 16 September 2018 and written by Anchal Vohra, journalist at DW (Deutsche Welle). DW is an international media outlet from Germany that provides journalistic content in 32 languages. Founded in 1953, the public broadcaster is financed by federal tax resources and currently employs 4,000 people worldwide. With the DW Akademie and other initiatives, DW promotes freedom of expression, human rights and the development of functioning media systems (DW, "About DW").

The article is titled "Lebanon's missing: Will there ever be closure?" and consists of 986 words. Vohra reports about the issue of the disappeared, asking the question: "Will Lebanon's parliament look for the country's missing?" The persons appearing in the story are two mothers of disappeared, representatives of the ICRC and ACT, as well as a photographer documenting the stories of the missing.

Three of the photographs depicted in the article are from mothers of the disappeared. The cover photo shows one mother, looking at the camera with a serious expression, holding a picture of her son, while sitting next to a bigger picture of her son leaned against the wall. The second image shows the bigger picture of the dining table, her sitting at one end looking at the photograph of her son leaned against the wall, while on the opposite side, a large human-shaped crafted figure is sitting on the chair representing her disappeared son. There are two plates on the table, one for her and one for her son. The third picture shows the second mother, sitting on a bed looking down and holding a walking cane. Above her, there are four framed photographs of her disappeared sons.

4.5.1.1. Weak/Strong

The first category takes a detailed look at the materials in terms of how weak or strong the protagonists – either the direct victims of enforced disappearance or their families – are portrayed or portray themselves through direct quotes or imagery.

The direct victims of enforced disappearance are always described as being in a state of weakness, or else as active and strong persons who have been robbed of their power through the violent act of their disappearance. During the crime itself, they are for example "terrified" in the passenger seat of the car abducting them (ACT, *Do not let* 20) or "frightened to the point of collapse. He can't even stand on his own two feet. He is on his knees, and they are dragging him by his arms" (*Erased* 00:06:40-00:06:49). Since they have been gone, the victims are all the more powerless, as they are not here anymore to give strength to their family (ACT, *Do not let* 11).

Concerning the indirect victims, it is more ambivalent. The families embody both weakness and strength, which is dealt with differently in the sources. In the short videos of the ACT campaign, all family members are exclusively shown in a state of weakness and suffering, unable to act until others – the viewers, Lebanese society and politics – grant them their right to know. In *Do not let*, there are examples of mothers who have lost their strength (17), but also many stories of family members not giving up, torn between suffering and searching.

The publication of the ICTJ was produced to show the difficulties that 23 wives of disappeared have been facing in their personal lives, which is why their direct quotes are focused on hardship, pain, panic, and memories of "that day" (23). One woman describes how scared she

was during her search, for example when waiting for an informant in a car in the darkness "thinking someone would come kidnap me, slaughter me, rape me, and no one would know" (11). In the introduction, the ICTJ frames them as strong individuals, not giving up and finding strength regardless of their situation: "Through their stories, we perceive these women not as victims but as survivors" (1).

The reasons for the women's strength are also explored in some of the materials. Some are described as being united in common goals ("The last picture") and relying on this community by standing "side to side with other families of missing" (ACT, *Do not let* 33), or breaking down until "my mother's words gave me strength" (Yakinthou 21). In Wadad Halwani's documentary about her friend Odette Salem, she asks herself "… how could this woman still walk, talk, sleep, where does she get the strength?" ("The last picture" 05:29-05:36). Odette replies with "How do you manage to live? People often ask me. Ask God, I reply" (ibid 05:36-05:40). The documentary is an interesting example regarding the dichotomy of weakness and strength: Its content shows how Odette and the other women within their activist milieu have been resiliently fighting for their cause for decades, facing many obstacles and powerful opponents. The manner in which this story is presented however is largely through tragic personal stories, photographs or interviews of suffering, mourning and pleading women, accompanied with solemn background music.

It is notable within the selected materials that the balance between the women's weakness and strength was almost non-existent in the ICRC publication, as well as in both journalistic sources. The ICRC describes the situation of the families solely with phrases corresponding to weakness: "desperately searching", "not knowing", "impossible to move on", "scars run deep", "suffering", and "anguish" causing physical illness and other problems (5). The personal examples often show how the families are left in a state of weakness, for example, a mother suffering a stroke resulting in a coma after the family's main breadwinner disappeared (15). In the Al Jazeera video report, the powerful role is taken up by the ICRC representative who is lobbying for a legal mechanism and demands action. Meanwhile, the wife of a disappeared is shown in a weak, helpless and powerless state. She talks about her agony and pain and her nervous breakdown with tearful eyes and a brittle voice: "I started banging my head against the wall. I just didn't know what to do" (Al Jazeera, "Families of Lebanon's" 01:13-01:19). The same applies to other family members, who are not shown in the video but portrayed as defeated because they gave up their tent in front of the UN building – "after so many years without answers, many protestors have either died or are too old to come here anymore" (ibid 01:33-

01:40). In the DW article, the story focuses on two mothers whose lives are determined by hoping for their missing family member's return – they are described as sitting in their homes, waiting, crying, suffering, and remembering them.

Regarding visual representation, the women are overall shown in a complete state of weakness. Even when their strength and willpower is described with words, the iconic imagery of mourning women surrounded by memorabilia and photographs of their disappeared dominates the discourse. Within this sample of sources, the international organisations as well as the film *Erased* are not using photographs of family members to illustrate the topic. The ACT awareness campaign, Wadad Halwani's documentary and both journalistic sources, however, heavily rely on imagery and videos of wives and mothers in their sorrow. In the DW article, a project of a photographer is described as capturing "the pain and longing of aging, ailing mothers" (Vohra).

To conclude, the families of the disappeared are not portrayed one-sidedly as weak and powerless when one takes a closer look. Nonetheless, their relentless activism and strength is often overshadowed by their personal suffering. This is even more emphasised through the visual representation.

4.5.1.2. Visible/Invisible

The concept of (in)visibility plays a major role within the issue of enforced disappearances and how *we* talk about it. In the sources of the sample, the symbolic play with visibility and invisibility is applied to the direct victims, their families, as well as the perpetrators and the whole topic.

The most obvious place to look for invisibility is with the people who were forcibly disappeared: Through their state of being missing, they are never present themselves – not in daily life and not as actors in the discourse. However, as the direct victims they are the very representation of disappearance and invisibility, and therefore seemingly all the more visible whenever the discourse arises.

In the materials, this fact becomes apparent several times. In the ACT campaign, invisibility is represented most blatantly with a magician disappearing a woman, but then leaving the stage before making her reappear again ("Magician"). The other four videos show belongings of the disappeared – the father's car cleaned by the son ("the car"), the photograph on the wife's table

("dinner"), or the clothes the mother folds for her son ("the bedroom"). In Wadad Halwani's documentary, direct victims – at least the photographic version of them – are also very present:

> "You came and brought [your disappeared children] with you, you placed them next to those who became existent only in pictures, just like them. Your life revolved around pictures. You took snapshots with them, you shared with them your meals, you slept and got up with them sharing the same residence". ("The last picture" 10:41-10:58)

In the journalistic video, the husband is shown through photographs, the wife's wedding ring, and the woman voicing her wish to make him present in her life: "I write to remind him that he's still with us and lives among us" (Al Jazeera, "Families of Lebanon's" 00:24-00:31). The dinner table of the woman in the DW article almost resembles a shrine. In addition to photographs, a human-shaped figure is sitting with her at the table representing her son, almost forcibly making him reappear in her life and in the story. The ICTJ publication quite literally sums up the lives of those "living with the shadows of the past" in its title, and the ICRC report uses invisibility to represent the issue: On the front cover, one of two persons is photoshopped out of the image, while their shadow remains. In *Do not let*, the purpose of the report is to make the disappeared visible – (seemingly) letting those speak who are usually speechless. Justine di Mayo, founder of ACT, explains the reasoning behind this: "… the purpose of disappearances is making them invisible, and making the crime invisible. So we [tried to make] the missing person visible and we claimed their identity."

It has to be noted, however, that the visibility of the direct victims is only reached through proxies – objects, photographs, memories or descriptions given by others. This is explicitly addressed by Ghassan Halwani in the beginning of his film:

> "The persons appearing in this film are made visible only for the duration of the screening. When the film ends, these persons will plunge back into their state of invisibility. However, this will not prevent them from existing. They linger silently somewhere beneath the bustle of daily life. They are not allowed to be visible." (*Erased* 00:13:02-00:13:25)

The artist explores this state of invisibility experimentally in various ways during the film. For example, he draws their portrait from different perspectives, or makes them move within a scene through stop-motion technique. In one scene, the artist carefully peels away the many layers of an old poster wall in Beirut, until an image of the disappeared from years ago is resurfaced. In another scene, G. Halwani argues that there is an erasure of the disappeared individuals perpetrated by the dominant discourse itself. He cuts a single small portrait from a poster of many disappeared and realises that the persons are not recognised individually

anymore, but only in the context of the bigger picture: “This arrangement gave birth to an icon. And for them to become this icon, the disappeared persons [all had] to die, at once …” (*Erased* 00:29:04-00:29:13). Similarly, G. Halwani also criticises the iconic imagery of the wives and mothers: “Showing a mother who is showing the image of her son … is a continuity of the crime” (*interview*). He explains how the meaning of this representation changed along the years: “It didn’t have any more forensic content of ‘Have you seen this person?’ and shifted into the picture of the disappeared with the one holding it becoming one” (ibid).

In a key scene of his film, G. Halwani discusses a photograph of two persons kidnapping a third individual in which he had sloppily erased the disappeared as well as the perpetrators:

> “I am searching for the official narrative of the war. And in my opinion, the story that’s maintained until this day resembles this image ... The victim, the person being kidnapped, is missing. And his body is also missing. And the two kidnappers are also missing. We lost them because of the general amnesty law. Therefore, the three components of the crime that we see before us are missing. Therefore, in this context, the whole crime goes missing.” (*Erased* 00:17:00-00:17:51)

Contrary to the scene in *Erased*, the discourse usually allows the topic of perpetration to be invisible. Hence, none of the other sources except one touch upon the topic: In the DW article, the mother refuses to talk about who kidnapped her son, and it is also explained that the activists worry about pointing fingers (Vohra).

Another issue is the invisibility of mass graves: Not only because they are “never really talked about” (di Mayo, *interview*) in public discourse, but also because they are underground, they remain invisible even though they are present. This topic is only picked up in *Erased* – for example through showing newspaper articles, interviews with a general, or pictures and videos of areas and buildings in Beirut which are unofficially known to hide mass graves underneath. G. Halwani explains how real estate companies have erected buildings on top of the mass graves and brings up the example of the Normandie Dump in Beirut: It “bears witness to the acts of the disposal of bodies, whether buried or thrown into the sea. It was necessary to eliminate the witness” (01:04:53-01:05:07).

The family activists themselves face the problem of being seen and getting awareness of the local society and the international community. In “The Last Picture”, it becomes apparent how the families fight for their own visibility through the means of a tent in downtown Beirut. They grapple with the fact that they are still being ignored even though it had strategically been placed right next to the UN building:

> "You implanted a solemn mint stem. It grew to be a garden. It could supply the entire UN staff in the building next to you. For sure, you did not ask for Ban Ki-moon's permission to grow the garden nor consulted with him on that. Why bother, he did not ask about you, to start with. He never cared." ("The Last Picture" 10:07-10:27)

The same tent appears again in the journalistic video that was made seven years later in 2016, however, without any family activists. The issue – and somehow their defeat – is visible by the empty and abandoned tent (Al Jazeera, "Families of Lebanon's" 01:20-02:00).

4.5.1.3. Active/Passive

The dichotomy of active/passive is closely connected to the attribute of "waiting", which has shaped the social time of the families of the disappeared to the point where it has become its main identifier, as Lyna Comaty writes: "This is revealed directly as the relatives always start their personal story with unfolding narratives of 'the day of,' day zero of their journey in-between" (62). This state of being trapped between waiting and moving on, of being active and passive, is found extensively within the selected materials.

Examples for this are a mother keeping all clothes the way her son left them in his wardrobe (ACT, *Do not let* 26) or standing at the door looking out at the road, wondering if she could have stopped the kidnapping if she had been present (idib 28). One woman describes how she put her life on hold: "I dream of continuing my education. I dream of doing something, earning a degree" (Yakinthou 20), another one talks about not going to weddings or parties anymore (ibid). The families describe themselves as staying "lost and uncertain" (ICRC, *The Families of* 12), in a "killing state of waiting" (ACT, *Do not let* 3) and that it is "impossible to move on" (ICRC, *The Families of* 5). The wife in the Al Jazeera video has ritualised the wait, writing to her husband every day for 28 years (00:04-00:20). In the DW article, the mother is described as always keeping an eye on the door even after 36 years, just in case her son returns (Vohra). In the accompanying photographs, the women sit beneath portraits or at a table with an empty plate for their disappeared.

The ACT campaign with its slogan "Enough Waiting" presents the topic most vividly through somber music and the slowness of the camera and the protagonists. The lives of the families are shown in an almost static way – the wife is eating her soup in slow-motion, while the sound of a ticking clock is heard in the background (ACT, "Dinner" 00:11-00:25). The length of their period of passivity is told in each video: "25 years later, Samer's father is still waiting for a

message of hope" (ACT, "Telephone" 00:30-00:35). This quantification of waiting is also made in W. Halwani's documentary:

> "Odette, I do not think anyone could imagine how much you were worried then and what you passed through throughout long 24 years from 2 pm 17th of September, 1985 till 4:45 pm, 16th of May 2009. You were waiting for them for the bell to ring at any moment. You will open the door, they will come in." ("The last picture" 02:22-02:48)

The other part of the dichotomy – active – is also part of the discourse. The family members are shown doing chores like cleaning a car, folding clothes, setting a table, or engaging in administrative issues and in political activism:

> "The presidents did not talk. The state did not address this issue at all. Never. We knocked on their doors and they wouldn't meet with us. We would gather and protest in the rain and in the cold" (Yakinthou 11).

These movements, however, are not for themselves but for the disappeared, connected to a hope for answers or their return. The indirect victims are portrayed as being active only within the sphere of waiting and for the sole purpose of setting a process of truth in motion, thus finally ending the wait. This act of moving while waiting is also described by Lyna Comaty: "Though passive, the notion of waiting is full of meaning and social agency for the families of the disappeared. They push their own boundaries to the maximum" (64). In W. Halwani's documentary, this is particularly visible through the portrayal of Odette Salem. She describes how every day since her children's kidnapping, she has tried everything to get information about them: "Such has been my life, 10 years of appointments, reassuring promises, from one contact to another and from one leader to another" ("The last picture" 05:14-05:28). When the members of the Committee of the Families set up the tent, she even finds purpose in her new role as a leader, as described by Wadad Halwani: "In the tent, I noticed you became diligent. The sun tanned your face. It gave it expression. Even your looks changed. I felt like I am getting to know a new Odette" (ibid 09:20-09:35).

Due to the nature of the crime, the direct victims are usually in a state of passivity. The only publication where the disappeared are presented as being active through speaking in the discourse is ACT's *Do not let*. In the introduction, "they" get to describe this passivity as "still entrapped in this abyss, hanging on the ropes of the unknown, and forgotten by negligence" (4).

Another notion of passivity is suggested in connection to the government, which is described as having done "little to nothing in finding out what happened to them and where they are" in the DW article (Vohra). In G. Halwani's film *Erased*, the excruciating state of waiting and

passivity surrounding the issue of enforced disappearance can be felt by the viewer through the slowness of the movie's scenes.

4.5.1.4. Male/Female

As discussed in chapter 2.6, gendered aspects are important attributes within the issue of enforced disappearances around the globe. Whether strategic or instinctively, they become a tool in communicating: "The mere fact of being a mother whose child has disappeared serves to justify any emotions, especially hope and waiting" (Comaty 67). This is why through womanhood – and even more through the stronger notion of motherhood – they "ask for sympathy" but are also "able to express their demands" (ibid). This circumstance is exemplified in the selected sources.

The disappeared being predominantly male, their loss is described as causing problems due to their role as breadwinners and fathers. Without them, sons have to take over as head of the family (Yakinthou 16), or wives have to juggle work, childcare and housework until late at night (ibid 14). The women talk about legal issues (Yakinthou 15), about having to play the role of both parents – "I became a mother and a father at the same time" (ICRC, *The Families of* 13) – or about having to "bury" their feminine side and losing their life as a woman (Yakinthou 20). When the husband is lost, "[y]ou had become defenceless, unprotected, you and the children, …" ("The last picture" 03:16-03:20). In ACT's *Do not let*, which is told from the perspective of the disappeared, fatherhood is emphasised:

> "We shall choke the anguish of our longing for our families, and the yearning to meet our children. Oh our children! How many of you grew up without us? How many were born after our absence so that you neither know us, nor do we know you? How many of you are boys, and how many are girls? What are your names? What are the colours of your eyes?" (4)

Qualities and characteristics usually connotated with womanhood or motherhood of those left behind play a major role in the materials. Their strong emotional bond and inability to let go of the disappeared is portrayed by a wife writing to her husband every day (Al Jazeera, "Families of Lebanon's"), another one still cooking for her husband (ACT "The dinner"), or quietly suffering in the private realm of the home:

> "My mother spends most of her time at home. She looks after my room and makes sure it stays as I left it. She doesn't stop telling herself that the worst pain one can inflict on

> a mother, is the knowledge that her son is suffering and she is unable to help." (ACT, *Do not let* 20)

The documentary "The last picture" also shows that the struggle around enforced disappearance is a women's issue. Odette Salem's story, told by Wadad Halwani, starts with motherly qualities on the day her children disappeared: "You had prepared lunch and set the table. Everything was ready to be served except for the salad you didn't add the seasoning to keep it fresh and flourishing just like them" ("The last picture" 00:50-01:03). When the family activists set up the tent, Odette is described as the "lady of the tent", decorating it like a home, cooking and gardening for everybody else:

> "You took care of all of us and inquired about those who didn't show up. So many times I stopped by the tent upon your persistence just to get a kiss or to pick up my share of your cooking" ("The last picture" 07:19-07:34).

It is clear that the discourse is dominated by female indirect victims. In the ICRC publication, out of the ten personal quotes used, seven are those of wives or daughters and three are those of fathers or brothers. Out of these three, however, only one talks about his personal emotions of feeling incomplete without his father (13). The other two demand facts and truth (ibid 12) and describe motherly suffering: "Whenever she cooked for us, we ate her tears with the food, because she never stopped crying" (ibid 3).

4.5.1.5. Emotional/Rational

Even though the topic of enforced disappearance is one of great personal tragedy, the demands are of a legal, political nature, based on rational claims. This brings up the question of how this is dealt with within the discourse. It also has to be noted that emotion is closely intertwined with womanhood due to social expectations, hence the dichotomies of male/female and emotional/rational go hand in hand.

In some communication tools, the emotional part is clearly separated from the rational part, most evidently in the journalistic sources: While the wife shows her agony and pain in the Al Jazeera video, the facts, legal circumstances and demands are presented by the reporter and the ICRC representative. Similarly, in the DW article, the ICRC and ACT talk about drafting a law and collecting data, while the mothers are portrayed in their in-between state of waiting for their disappeared (Vohra).

The reports published by the ICRC and ICTJ mostly function in a similar way. Even though the family members also voice demands or provide facts, their quotes and descriptions of their personal lives depict the emotional side of the issue: A mother barefoot, screaming on the street (Yakinthou 1), another one having to tell her child about the kidnapping of the father (22), or a sister saying she will stay lost and uncertain until she sees a body (ICRC, *The Families of* 12). The stories are then utilised by the authors of the studies who give facts and figures and explain the importance of demands such as establishing mechanisms to clarify the fate of the disappeared (ibid 20-24). The ACT video campaign exemplifies this by first showing the family members in their pain, despair and sadness, before stating facts and demands for truth with their slogans.

In other cases, both parts – emotion and rationality – are incorporated by the same material or persons. In ACT's *Do not let*, the written perspective of the disappeared is both emotional – "We, the disappeared, paid dearly, with our lives and our dreams" (5) – and rational, explaining why the right to know is important (ibid). In Wadad Halwani's documentary, the content of the story is one of political activism – the Committee of the Families fighting for awareness and support with the tent near the UN headquarters. The video, however, is framed within an emotional letter from one woman to another, telling her life story up to her tragic death in detail. In the end, the person of Odette is presented like a martyr among other wives and mothers who have died before learning the truth about their loved ones (14:05-15:49). Emotional acts of remembrance are also common at events such as a conference on May 28, 2022, with students and youth representatives of political parties, where W. Halwani asked for a shared minute of silence for the dead wives and mothers ("Clarifying the fate").

In *Erased,* however, a different use of emotion and rationality can be observed. Even without any background music or the usual narratives, it creates a disquieting atmosphere. Yet, it stays away from the iconic images of the women or from demanding sympathy. The film implicitly asks questions such as what should be done with the issue of mass graves unofficially existing all over Lebanon. One scene describes the personal story of Odette Salem's kidnapped children, but it does not linger on the level of a personal tragedy. The story instead points out administrative issues that arise in the country due to the unknown civil registry status of thousands of citizens "who do not die" (01:09:05-01:12:25). There is no call to action for a specific demand, leaving it up to the viewer to decide how to deal with this information.

4.5.1.6. Private/Political

As discussed in chapter 2.6.3., it can be a conscious strategy to depoliticise the issue. Therefore, the following part takes a closer look at where politics come into play and where they are made invisible within the discourse, and which mechanisms are used to achieve this.

Regarding the indirect victims, depoliticisation is achieved through focusing on the interconnected attributes of womanhood or motherhood, emotion, passivity, and their placement in the private sphere. One of many examples for this can be seen in "The last picture", where the tent – a most public display of political activism – is described as becoming a "home" (06:56-07:03) when it is furnished, decorated and inhabited by passionate and caring women like Odette Salem. Through their focus on the private and personal, the members of the Committee of the Families, whose cause is nothing if not political, do not appear as a typical activist group. This does not mean that the political demands are not voiced loudly and clearly, but the members of the group first and foremost frame themselves as mothers and wives missing their loved ones. It can be argued that similar to other victim groups such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, they are perceived as less threatening to the authorities due to this focus on the private sphere.

The depoliticisation of the direct victims can be observed many times in the materials. For example, the documentary portrays Odette's disappeared children as apolitical and without fault: "They were kidnapped for no reason, that's what's so revolting" (ibid 04:46-04:49). However, no publication exemplifies the erasure of politics better than ACT's *Do not let*. As described in chapter 4.1, Lebanon is a sectarian state and the militias of the Civil War were formed along the lines of political and religious affiliations, which naturally determined who was forcibly disappeared by which group. Considering this, the complete lack of mentioning any political militias, opinions or religious aspects is striking. Every story revolves around nothing more than the fact that the person has been disappeared – it is never told or assumed why or by whom. Readers learn about the victims' private lives and about their relationships with family members and friends. Their occupations, their hopes and dreams for their future, their taste in music or their hobbies are described in loving detail: Abed Hamadi had just gotten his degree in Mechanical Engineering and was enjoying a coffee "and the warmth of the autumn sun", when "armed men erupted" in front of his house and took him and his brother (ibid 28). Issam Faytarouni loved working with his hands and helping others, and never came back from giving his best friend's son a ride to a hospital (ibid 26). Mostafa Safa, a 14-year-old student with a passion for movies, liked to make his friends laugh with funny caricatures he drew into

his sketchbook and was disappeared after going to the cinema (ibid 35). Only when the victims had refused to participate in the war or had left the army for moral reasons, it is explicitly mentioned: “I was however very patriotic but my impulsive character and my love for freedom did not suit the good soldier’s uniform” (ibid 34).

Because the perpetrators cannot be excluded while describing the act, they are labelled with neutral terms such as “a group of men” (25) or “those armed men” (ibid 11). The only exceptions are whenever they did not have ties to Lebanese militias: Some kidnappers are said to belong to the Syrian regime (ibid 20, ibid 32), which constitutes an important difference for the families, as it presumably places the victims into the group of detainees of Syrian prisons. Furthermore, it is mentioned when the kidnapping took place during the Israeli invasion (ibid 26).

Whenever political matters are brought up, they are framed or combined with the private sphere:

> “We wish for the return of the state that is being eroded inside and out, day by day. We wish that true peace would be reached and enjoyed by our children and yours, and our grandchildren and yours.” (ibid 5)

Connected to this, the materials clearly show that the demands of the families focus on a humanitarian victim-based right to know what happened to the disappeared, as opposed to investigating and prosecuting the perpetrators. In “The last picture”, W. Halwani says: “Let the kidnappers return our relatives. We want them back, whatever side they’re on” (04:04-04:10). The ICTJ report almost humbly states: “In a context of tremendous loss, what they ask for is a basic remedy” (Yakinthou VII). In several quotes, political figures and even the president are blamed for stalling the process – the wives speak of knocking on many doors but being ignored (ibid 25). However, their demand is never communicated as more than the “basic human right” (ACT, *do not let* 5) of knowing the truth: “I don’t even want to know who did it. I just want to know if my husband is alive” (Yakinthou 24). The ACT publication makes it clear that the Committee of the Families never opposed the Amnesty Law or demanded its repeal, and that their goal is not to hold the perpetrators accountable for the past (ACT, *do not let* 5). They stress their non-threatening agenda: “Our families are agents of peace, not fans of riots” (ibid). Throughout the whole publication, the word “justice” is not to be found, while phrases such as “need to know”, “right to know” or “know the truth” appear eleven times. The DW article is the only one addressing this cautious approach by mentioning that the activists fear that if they point fingers, the law they are lobbying for will not be passed (Vohra).

Regarding the notions of private and political, it is notable that in *Erased*, the filmmaker uses another tactic. Being the son of a disappeared, it can be assumed that it is a private issue for him, but he never frames it as such or even addresses his own affiliation. Instead, he makes it a public topic, pointing out issues such as the presumed mass graves on Lebanese territory. G. Halwani also notes that due to political reasons there seems to be an imbalance of which victims get to be discovered: He argues that Palestinian fighters, those of the Lebanese National Resistance Front and thirteen Lebanese army officers were "authorised" to be found in mass graves, because they were buried by the Israeli and Syrian army. In contrast, two kidnapped European citizens proved to be "harder to find" because their cases implicated prominent figures of the Lebanese authorities. Regarding those thousands killed and buried by Lebanese militias, "the Lebanese authorities have not granted permission for them to be found yet" (00:58:25-01:00:23).

4.5.1.7. Internal/External

Lastly, it becomes apparent throughout the sources that the Committee of the Families and their supporters often feel ignored by the rest of the Lebanese society or the international community. In 2015, the ICTJ writes:

> "In more than two decades since the war's end, there has been no real societal support for addressing the issue of enforced disappearance, nor has there been serious support from confessional groups or their leaders. The few gains that have been made are the result of the mobilization of a small group of actors or the byproduct of exploitation by particular politicians seeking electoral office." (Vakintou 1-2)

It can be argued that this is one of the issue's key problems: Why has the discourse never been appropriated by the Lebanese citizens and made into a common national cause, even after the families have been lobbying for all these years?[24] To explore this issue, it is beneficial to analyse the discourse in terms of its internal and external dynamics. This category applies to the sphere of the "insiders" and "outsiders" of the topic of enforced disappearance; the insiders being the ones personally affected as well as civil society actors supporting the cause. Additionally, the closely connected notion of local versus global will arise in this subchapter.

"The only comfort she found was in the company of wives and mothers of the others that disappeared" (ACT, *do not let* 20). This is one of many examples describing the closeness of

[24] The establishment of Law 105 in 2018 and the National Commission can be seen as a great success of these relentless efforts. However, this does not change the fact that the discourse itself is still not a national one.

the Committee of Families' community through their common experiences and suffering. In Wadad Halwani's documentary, this can also be observed. When she describes the death of Odette's husband, which would be mirrored years later by the disappearance of Wadad's husband, she says: "We did not know each other then. However, it seems like we started to feel each other apart and in abstention!!" ("The last picture" 03:26-03:37). The feeling conveyed is that nobody can understand the women's struggles as well as they do – except for other mothers and wives of kidnapped persons around the globe who are entrapped in the same state of waiting. This suggests a closer bond with families affected by the crime in other countries than with their fellow Lebanese citizens who are not in the same situation. A bitterness towards the local community is voiced when W. Halwani explains why the tent was set up in front of the UN building: "Perhaps the world would care. Their country didn't, neither for them nor for the 17.000 missing of its citizens" (ibid 05:50-05:59). Their turn towards the international society, however, is also portrayed as a failure when she mockingly mentions Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General at the time, who "never cared" (ibid 10:26-10:28).

In ACT's *Do not let*, an effort to frame the cause as a national issue can be seen: In the introduction "the disappeared" appeal to the local community, not begging for sympathy but arguing a common responsibility and cause:

> "Let us recognize that, after thirty six years of struggle, the least of their [the families'] rights is to expect an active stand by the Lebanese people, showing that it adopts a solution to our issue. Not for our sake, and not for the sake of the families' committee, but because this would close the final chapter of that past war, re-iterating the common saying in Lebanon: 'Let it be remembered so that it would never happen again'." (5)

With the narrative that the closure of the cause of the disappeared is a "guarantee that Lebanon will be spared, once and for all, from the foul taste of war" (ibid), ACT opposes the argument of those who claim that bringing up issues of the war would lead to another conflict.[25]

In *Erased*, there is no separation of insiders and outsiders of the issue. The perspective is one of a person experiencing their own city and how the topic of war and enforced disappearances have been affecting it. It focuses on the local and public aspect and never mentions the inner circle of the families or local NGOs. This is amplified visually with the cinematic portrayal of geographic places or bird perspectives of maps. At one point, the film notes: "When you're

[25] The Committee of the Families have received threats for their advocacy on several occasions. "Government officials would argue their cause would ignite civil strife." (Huijgen and Touma).

going from Hamra to Mar Mekhayel, you will traverse two or three mass graves, depending on the road you choose to take" (00:41:50-00:42:00).

4.5.2. Summary and Contextualisation of the Analysis

Through the analysis of the eight materials, several interdependent frameworks as well as one main narrative about enforced disappearance in Lebanon can be identified. Even though it gets challenged by an alternate approach taken in the film *Erased* by Ghassan Halwani, it clearly dominates the discourse:

The direct victims are described as being in a state of weakness, robbed of their power to be there for their families through the violent act of their disappearance. Although not present, the disappeared are made visible by descriptions of them or representations such as photographs and personal belongings. They are described exclusively through their roles within the private realm – as husbands, brothers, sons, daughters or loyal friends, disconnected from political or religious affiliations and circumstances.

The indirect victims are portrayed in an endless and agonising state of waiting, hoping and passivity. Their lives are shown as revolving around their disappeared, either doing everything they can to get to know the truth or as having been defeated in their struggle. They embody both weakness and strength, however, stories of their relentless activism are overshadowed by the portrayal of personal suffering. This is intensified through visual representations such as the iconic pictures of mourning women surrounded by memorabilia. The relatives are framed within the private sphere, sometimes even while they are in fact acting in public and political roles. Notions of womanhood and motherly qualities are emphasised, which further emotionalises and depoliticises the cause.

The issue of the disappeared as a whole is presented in a very emotional way and almost exclusively through the lens of personal tragedies. The voices heard are those of insiders of the issue, who are either directly affected or represent a supportive regional or international body. The perpetrators are either completely left out of the discourse or described in neutral terms. Except for the occasional accusation that political or religious leaders are hindering the Committee's work or vague hints that some perpetrators are now holding political power, no fingers are pointed. When political matters are brought up, they are usually framed or combined

with the private sphere, demanding sympathy for the families or appealing to a sense of responsibility for the country's future.

The four interviews that were conducted to complement the analysis will now help to explain why, how and under which regional circumstances this narrative as well as the alternative approach came into being. First, the interviewees are briefly introduced:

Carmen Abou Jaoudé is a political scientist, researcher and university lecturer in political science and transitional justice. She is a local insider and renowned expert of the topic who combines several perspectives on the issue: Having served as head of office at ICTJ and board member of ACT, Abou Jaoudé is a member of the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared in Lebanon since June 2020.

Monika Borgmann is a former journalist, film director and the co-founder and director of UMAM Documentation and Research, which seeks to inform the future by dealing with the past through archival collections ("About Us"). Borgmann has been contributing to shape the discourse with several projects such as the *Missing* initiative in 2007, resulting in a campaign, workshops, exhibitions and the creation of a database with information on the direct victims. Her focus is on the broader perspective, seeing the disappeared as only one chapter of the Civil War – even if it is "one of the most painful ones" (Borgmann, *interview*).

Justine di Mayo has been working for 10 years on transitional justice initiatives in Lebanon, Syria and more broadly in MENA. As the founder and director of ACT for the Disappeared (founded in 2010), she worked on generating political and societal support for the right to know through events, publications, and memorialisation projects. She currently is program manager at the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a global network of historic sites, museums and memory initiatives (ICSC, "About Us").

Ghassan Halwani is an artist and filmmaker in Beirut. His life is involuntarily tied to the issue of the disappeared by being the son of Adnan Halwani, who was kidnapped from the family home in 1982, and Wadad Halwani, who founded the Committee of the Families after her husband's disappearance. After growing up within the sphere of the relatives, G. Halwani "started to have a critical reaction towards the representations that were employed around the disappeared" (*interview*), as well as towards the interest that was shown by local and international NGOs. He therefore represents a critical voice presenting an alternative to the

dominant discourse, which he implemented using an artistic, materialist and reflexive approach in his film *Erased___Ascent of the Invisible*.

Regarding the argument that notions like womanhood, emotion and the private sphere are deliberately used to achieve depoliticisation, the interviews confirm that this has been a strategical choice. Justine di Mayo notes that "[o]f course one of the main challenges is to avoid politicisation of the issue, because this is always a problem in Lebanon" (*interview*). She highlights the danger of power imbalances within the fragile sectarian system and of members of communities getting defensive if they feel that their groups or leaders are threatened. Di Mayo explains that due to the weakness of the Lebanese state, the community leader becomes the protector: "It's your political leader who provides protection and healthcare for you" (ibid). She puts this in contrast with the Latin American cases, where dictatorships could be blamed whereas in Lebanon, there is no simple matter of "one side against the other" (ibid). Di Mayo argues that strategically, advocacy is therefore more difficult in Lebanon: If one community is accused, others can take advantage of this fact. It is mainly due to this fragile local power play that the affiliations of religious or political communities have been left out when lobbying for the victims of enforced disappearances (ibid).

One example of this strategy being applied could be observed at a Conference in May 2022. During a witness testimony, a member of the Committee of the Families declared: "It goes beyond my confessional identity. The pain of a Christian mother is the same of a Druze or Muslim mother. The suffering is enormous, and it has to end" ("Clarifying the fate"). During the same event, spokesperson Wadad Halwani warned the participating representatives of the political parties not to influence the issue with their personal interests, reiterating how the Committee had managed to steer away from political or religious instrumentalisation for the past decades (ibid).

The aspect of invisibility has also been playing a major role in creating strategies and campaigns. Di Mayo emphasises how the purpose of disappearances is making the individuals and the crime invisible. The aim of the activists was therefore to "make the person visible and [to] claim their identity" (ibid). This was done by collecting hundreds of photographs of disappeared individuals and exhibiting them in places all over the country (Borgmann, *interview*) or collecting stories through oral history projects (di Mayo, *interview*). Over the years, these turned into many projects and advocacy tools, such as *Fushat Amal* ("space for

hope"), a digital memorial for the missing[26], or by placing silhouettes of disappeared persons at locations where they were last seen. With the cooperation of the Committee of the Families, ACT has tried to spread their stories as widely as possible with publishing them in Lebanon's major newspapers once a week in three languages, or with the book *Do not let my story end here*. In all of these projects and more, the objective has been to highlight the personal stories, which again plays into the strategy of depoliticisation. The portrayals allow for individual identification beyond the strongly divided communities: "It [is] not about who did what, it [is] about: This happened to me, I have a personal story. I was like you and your loved ones and your children" (di Mayo, *interview*).

Another aspect of the strategy is the framing of the subject as a humanitarian one. The involved activists are aware that under the current circumstances, justice in terms of prosecution is not possible since there has been no regime change after the Civil War and an Amnesty Law was put in place.[27] "I mean, even if any political party [were to] come up with information [about enforced disappearances], nobody goes to prison" (Borgmann, *interview*). The consequent choice of the Committee of the Families has been to solely focus on the right to know the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared. Di Mayo explains that "we put aside everything related to accountability and to prosecution. The most important thing for the families was to get answers" (*interview*). As Wadad Halwani explained at a conference: "Our discourse is clear: We want to know where the missing people or their remains are, and if they are dead, we want to grief" ("Clarifying the fate"). In the presence of political representators, she emphasises that the Committee of the Families will not hold others accountable for past events. As enshrined in the Amnesty Law, there would be "no accusing or sanctioning the parties engaged" (ibid).

The decision for this strategy has been affecting the advocacy efforts, especially when considering the diversity within the victim-group. Every community and even every family member may have a different opinion on what justice means to them individually, and on how to proceed. At the same time, "it is important in all the strategies to talk with a unified voice [to ensure] that the message gets through" (di Mayo, *interview*). In order to achieve this, other voices and demands might be shushed, which can lead to tensions within the internal sphere of

[26] At the interactive digital space www.fushatamal.org, users can browse through or add individual profiles, photographs and stories of disappeared persons.

[27] Interestingly, article 37 of Law 105 does concern accountability, stating that "any instigator, perpetrator, accomplice, or accessory in an enforced disappearance shall be punished by imprisonment with hard labor for five to fifteen years and fined between fifteen million Lebanese Pounds and twenty million Lebanese Pounds" (UMAM, Law 105). The civil society actors however still do not prioritise accountability. On the contrary, some claim that this article was included to derail the entire legal process (Huijgen and Touma), which highlights the fact that the activists and experts do not believe there is any realistic chance of accountability.

relatives or supporters of the cause. According to di Mayo, even within the Committee of the Families and ACT – which has been formed to support the relatives – there has been a "kind of divergence" and that "strategically, we were not 100 percent in agreement" (*interview*). One example for this is that ACT has been pushing civil society to start their own documentation efforts, whereas the Committee of the Families argued that this was the role of the state:

> "[They said that] if we start documenting and talking about investigation and locations of grave sites, this is going to trigger resistance among politicians, and it will … damage our advocacy efforts and the negotiation we have been building over the years with them to make sure they will create a commission."[28] (ibid)

This need to collaborate and negotiate is a challenge itself considering the lack of trust between the sphere of human rights activism and the political leaders. This could be observed during discussions within the Human Rights Laboratory university class. When the students were tasked with organising a round table with all political parties at the end of the semester, a certain reluctance was apparent. Some argued that religious extremist or militant parties stand in the way of justice and human rights due to their values, and that the students were not comfortable to send invitations and sit at a table with them.

Carmen Abou Jaoudé, who was the lecturer of the seminar, advocates for a pragmatic approach, saying she understands personal positions for accountability and systematic change. However, "at the same time we know that in the short term we need to have a different discourse that is more humanitarian rather than political" (Abou Jaoudé, *interview*). In her opinion, the way to go forward is to engage with different actors and to keep working on a dialogue process with the political parties:

> "They have legitimacy, they are present and are not going to disappear soon. [There are also] young people who are students and engaged in these political parties, and I think we need to talk. … This is being realistic, pragmatic, saying that we do not have the luxury of time. The families are dying, gravesites have been destroyed – we really need to move on with this very quickly." (ibid)

For Abou Jaoudé, engaging the youth who have ties to political parties is key, so they can think critically and serve as a "bridge between civil society advocating for justice and the right to know, and their political parties who are really resisting" (ibid). She argues that this would also

[28] Di Mayo is referring to the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons in Lebanon, which has since been appointed due to the combined advocacy efforts, but is having difficulties to start their work (see chapter 4.4)

facilitate the National Commission's mandate to raise awareness and educate the public on disappearances, which aims at prevention and non-recurrence.

Regarding the problem that the broader Lebanese society has not been participating in the discourse, the conversations with the interviewees brought up three possible explanations or facets that could be weighing in. The first is the policy of imposed amnesia after the Civil War still affecting the society. Di Mayo explains that the message of the "former warlords" has been: "If we look at [this issue], if we look at mass graves, if we look at the past, this won't be good for us as a community and for Lebanon, because there will be tension again." She argues that the society adopted this belief, which has been causing challenges: "It was difficult for transitional justice organisations, because most of the population was convinced that we should not talk about what happened" (ibid). Di Mayo also remarks that in the past, this fact has caused auto censorship within the civil society organisations. "We didn't dare talking about this or doing that because there was this idea of 'if we do that, people will think that it is going to escalate into violence'." (ibid)

The second possible explanation is the matter of priority:

> "Lebanon has been living through cycles of violence since the end of the war, people are struggling and even more today are struggling with electricity, with providing with food, with education … so it's also a question of priority." (ibid)

Carmen Abou Jaoudé thinks that the Lebanese are sensitive to the issue in general, but also notes that "people are overwhelmed and there is a fatigue … some people will say 'let's care for the living'" (*interview*). She stresses the fact that the issue of the disappeared is linked to the accumulating problems and crises: "We live the consequences of not dealing with the past" (ibid). She says that therefore today "in a way, they don't care about the [disappeared], they don't care about the victims of the August 4 explosion, even about the victims of poverty and sexual violence" (ibid). In her opinion, bodies such as the National Commission will require a good communication strategy within the framework of something broader such as dealing with the past, accountability, and non-repetition.

A third aspect regarding the non-existent national discourse is the Committee of the Families' strong hold on the issue: "Maybe, sometimes the Committee was too protective – which I understand, because they were the first concerned" (Borgmann, *interview*). Abou Jaoudé also sees this challenge. She explains that on the one hand, the aim is to get society involved and to get people to feel and act, but on the other hand, the families "have ownership in a way" and

are not comfortable when activities are not passed by them. Like Borgmann, Abou Jaoudé sees this as an understandable and "human" reaction: "It is their cause, their issue. They are the ones suffering the most" (*interview*).

It is beneficial to examine Ghassan Halwani's approach on the matter, since it relates to the issue of disconnection between the internal and external community. As can be observed in the film *Erased*, G. Halwani refuses to show the issue through the lens of the families. The reason for his approach is explained by him with his own experiences growing up as the son of the founder of the Committee of the Families. "Becoming part of this body directly creates the difference between you and the other citizens in this country" (*lecture*). He expresses this circumstance both as a stigma and as obstructive to a broader appropriation of the discourse.

One critical point according to G. Halwani was the internationalisation of the issue in the beginning of the 2000s (see chapter 4.3), described by him as "arrival of the experts" (*interview*). He argues that the insertion of those with expertise in dealing with the issue of the disappeared serves as a way for the society to subtract itself from the problem. "For me, this relationship … was very problematic" (ibid). He began to differentiate between a "discourse of struggle" created by the families and a "discourse of experts" which came with the NGOs, whose human rights language depoliticised the issue. "And between them, something very important is missing: the discourse of the society, which should be a political discourse" (ibid).

G. Halwani describes a key moment of realisation while he was standing on a street overlooking the place where the tent of the Committee of the Families had been set up:

> "I was observing this, and it felt like this discourse of struggle somehow isolated them from the rest of the society … Because they became the experts of this issue, and their discourse of struggle means that anyone who doesn't have a relative who disappeared will not know how to approach this body. The only thing that others know to do is sympathy … So when I had this observation, I felt like the whole society looks at the issue of the disappeared through the perspective of the committee. Something was bothering me [about this]." (ibid)

Furthermore, as a young family member he felt the pressure of inheriting the issue, which was "more than scaring" (ibid). For this reason, he began searching for common ground between "me" and "you" – the internal group who are personally affected and the other citizens, especially the younger generations. In his opinion, it is not enough to "present for the young generations a film about the families sitting, standing, crying or demanding, or even presenting the law itself…" (*interview*). With his film, he therefore aimed at "erasing these constant images that are related to the discourse by not making them appear" and presenting a completely

different discourse. For this reason, he chose to focus on the common legacy of land, addressing the younger generations as inheritors: "They are those who will inherit the land, the city, the villages, the other cities, in which there are a lot of mass graves" (ibid). This is also why, when the film describes walking through the city above mass graves, for the purpose of identification it mentions the areas of Hamra and Mar Mekhayel – both frequented by many young Beirutis.

Through his approach, G. Halwani hopes to encourage debates and conversations:

> "Why is there this need of putting yourself in the position of the mothers and reproducing the discourse of the mothers, while you are a citizen living here who could generate another discourse?" (*lecture*)

Following up on his statement, a student in the Human Rights Laboratory class raises the challenge of having the legitimacy to participate in certain discourses by speaking of her own experiences: "In Syria, when I do not have a missing person myself, I will not be necessarily considered to be someone who has the right to speak in that cause." This again reiterates the problem that it requires the families' will for truly allowing and encouraging the issue to become a societal one.

Finally, a look into the future by the interviewees shows how difficult it is to predict anything in the current political and social environment of Lebanon. Two of the experts represent a pessimistic view on the matter. Justine di Mayo acknowledges that much has been achieved and that the Committee of the Families and their supporters have managed to keep the issues on the political agenda for decades, however there is still no concrete result until now:

> "[To become a national issue], it needs money, it needs political stability, it needs … for sure a new political class … Society support is not enough, just look at the garbage crisis. Everybody is concerned by the garbage crisis or by the electricity [shortages]. Everybody wants that and it doesn't mean it's happening. There are so many layers of difficulties … more than 50 percent of the population is living in poverty, so how can we ask people to make the issue of the missing a priority, if they cannot even have enough to feed their children or to pay for their schools?" (di Mayo, *interview*)

Additionally, di Mayo says that many families of the disappeared demobilised and do not believe that anything will happen anymore, knowing that those who did the kidnappings are still in power. "[I think] they thought we failed, because nothing concrete happened in all these years" (*ibid*).

Regarding the general political circumstances, Monika Borgmann says that people are getting tired of the struggle:

> "There is the question of why the revolution is not continuing [considering] the economic situation. I mean, people are waiting for what to go to the street? They are tired, they are getting desperate, not everybody has the strength to fight forever … I am pessimistic. But that does not mean that I'm not doing anything. I will do what I [can] on a local level, but I don't have a lot of hope." (*interview*)

The major issue for her is Lebanon's general "culture of impunity" which is not only affecting the issue of the disappeared: "It's a general culture and everybody is suffering in one way or another. I really believe that it's this culture that has to change" (ibid). Hence, Borgmann advocates for a national call for justice, combining all the injustices – whether it is regarding political assassinations, systematic sexual violations during the Civil War, the investigation of the port explosion, or the disappeared. She feels that if there was a positive development in any of these issues, it could generate a "kind of push" (ibid) for the others. While this thesis is concluded, Borgmann works towards establishing an annual commemoration on July 17, the official Day of International Criminal Justice[29]. Her aim is to invite groups who are calling for justice in one way or another, emphasising on the point that every participant can decide what justice means for them – whether it is to know the truth, exhumations of mass graves, or criminal investigation into political assassinations or other issues (ibid).

Carmen Abou Jaoudé agrees that a national strategy that includes all these issues is important but emphasises on being pragmatic at the same time: "Some issues need to be dealt with in a more urgent way. Until we have the political change we are dreaming of. [It is important] not to postpone the issue of the missing anymore." (*interview*). She says that if there is any dialogue happening with the political parties – which she is advancing through her university seminar and her activities with the National Commission – it is already a big step:

> "It is going to take time, we need to build trust with them, which is not easy … I don't know [if] this is idealistic in a way … it comes from a very positive, optimistic view of 'let's start together to work on the relationship and on building trust'. It is not easy, but for me what is easi*er*, is to work with the youth. The youth have a different discourse. It is easier to talk with them and have them engage. I don't know [if it] is going to be successful. At least we will have tried." (ibid)

Regarding the discourse, Abou Jaoudé understands both the approach of the Committee of the Families and the critique about it. She encourages alternative approaches and thinks "it's really necessary to be creative, so we can advance and have progress" (ibid).

[29] see https://www.umam-dr.org/event_detail/116/116/

When asked about how to proceed with the discourse, Ghassan Halwani places his hopes within the youth as well:

> "I didn't want to generate a discourse myself, but … tangible elements that can be taken. It's not me who [should] write the discourse, but political programs that can be done by younger generations." (*interview*)

Since G. Halwani has started to show his film at university lectures and other events, he experiences reactions from the young audiences that are encouraging for him. "Some say they came to see this film from one city, but now [they] cannot go back to the same city they came from. The discussion changed their relation to the city" (ibid).

Regarding the role of the families of the disappeared, he references the Argentinian case as a role model, where the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have created a university. "What I tend to think is that the most important thing for the Committee of the Families could do is to become a source of knowledge [instead of] a keeper of the discourse" (ibid, *lecture*).

5. Conclusion

> "They [the disappeared] became … like 'ghosts' haunting Lebanese identity, condemning the country to be stuck in seemingly permanent liminality, erasing the past and future while torturing the present." (Ayoub 77)

The estimated 17.000 disappeared of Lebanon are often described as *neither here nor there* – neither dead nor alive, never visible but always present. It is not only their families who are trapped in their agonising and victimising state of not-knowing. Apart from causing unfathomable personal tragedies, the issue of the disappeared is a national one, connected to understanding the past, acknowledging injustices, and actually moving forward. Hindered by the collective looking-away of the Lebanese society – which is encouraged by sectarian political leadership – the issue has been lingering for more than four decades, sometimes emerging to the surface but never visible enough to be dealt with sufficiently. The matter itself is full of contradictions, and *neither here nor there* just like the disappeared themselves.

The purpose of this thesis was to analyse and reflect on the discourse around Lebanon's disappeared and discuss it along the lines of dichotomies that determine the matter, such as visible/invisible, weak/strong, or private/political. The main research question asked in which ways the portrayal of enforced disappearance by advocacy actors such as the families of the disappeared, local NGOs, and international organisations and media influence the narrative. To answer this question, a combination of qualitative content analysis of eight sources and interviews with four actors involved in shaping the discourse was used.

The thesis has illustrated that the relatives of the disappeared in Lebanon have a strong hold on how the issue is communicated. Over the decades, they have successfully managed to rally advocacy support from local civil society as well as international organisations. It can be argued that the communication strategy is a pragmatic approach resulting out of several regional political specifics in Lebanon: First, the 1991 Amnesty Law regarding the crimes of the Civil War prevents the persecution of enforced disappearances during that time on the local sphere. Second, there has never been a regime change since the Civil War, which means that politicians currently still at large are presumably responsible for these crimes themselves and are unlikely to investigate them. Third, Lebanon is characterised by a fragile sectarian system encompassing many different religion-based political communities. The Committee of the Families and other

activists fear that accusing individual members, leaders or sects might hinder solving the issue, which should be an overarching effort since every sect has their own disappeared and perpetrators. Fourth, bringing up crimes of the past – especially from the Civil War era – is a particularly sensitive issue in Lebanon: The political argument that dealing with the past creates tension and possibly another war is appropriated by many Lebanese.

Therefore, the crucial part of the advocacy strategy has been depoliticising the topic and framing it as a humanitarian one: The demands that are voiced focus on the right to know the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared, as opposed to a judicial investigation and persecution of the perpetrators. The present research suggests that this depoliticisation effort is sustained by presenting the issue through the perspective of personal tragedies of those left behind, predominantly the wives and mothers of disappeared. The major themes shaping the portrayals are waiting, hoping, suffering or fighting to find the truth. Through female-dominated notions such as emotion, passivity, weakness, motherhood and the private sphere, the matter becomes a personal one. Adding to this, the direct victims are solely presented through their relationships and roles within the private sphere: in their representation, they are loving fathers, children or friends, not soldiers or activists. Their presumed kidnappers are either left out of the conversation or described in neutral terms.

Furthermore, the thesis has addressed the problem of the Lebanese society not participating in the discourse: With thousands and thousands of direct victims, four decades of communication efforts and ground-breaking recent achievements on the political sphere such as the implementation of Law 105, how is it still not a national topic discussed by everyone? Where does the message get lost? Some possible explanations this thesis provides relate to the policy of imposed amnesia after the Civil War, the fact that it might not be a priority considering other current crises, or the Committee of the Families dominating the issue so much that it hinders others to weigh in on the discourse beyond expressing sympathy.

Going forward, a closer look on this distance between the insiders of the issue – the families and their supporters – and the rest of Lebanese society would be beneficial. Within this thesis, this was merely touched upon by presenting the perspectives of the interviewees, one of which strongly argues for encouraging the creation of more political discourses not tied to the families of disappeared, especially within the younger generations. To gain more data and insights however, it would be necessary to assess the receiving rather than the sending end of the ascertained frameworks and narratives. A broad survey within the Lebanese society on their

knowledge regarding enforced disappearances in Lebanon, the demands of the families, and their own opinions on how to deal with the issue could be a valuable contribution to the topic.

To conclude, the way *we* talk about forcibly disappeared persons and their families is a very personal, emotional and apolitical one. A certain disconnect between the circle of "insiders" and the rest of the society is apparent. While sympathy is guaranteed, there is still no real desire of the local community to claim the issue as a national one. This however is critical to the success of the cause, since the current Lebanese political sphere cannot be relied upon dealing with the issue without a loud and clear demand from its residents.

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Appendix

		Weakness / Power	Rationality / Emotion	Male / Female	Active / Passive	Waiting / Moving	Private / Political	Local / Global	Silence / Noise	Amnesty / Justice	Visibility / Invisibility	Dead / Alive (Widowed / Married)	Comments
local NGO	**Act for the Disappeared: Enough Waiting**	Family members are shown in a state of weakness, suffering	Very emotional, somber background music. The family members show pain, dispair, sadness. The rationality / facts appear in the slogans	The disappeared are male but a range of family members is represented to ensure identification: Mother, Father, Son and Wife.	see waiting/moving	Family members: very slow, almost static (dinner), not moving a lot, in a state of in-between. The length of	The magician (symbolising politics, perpetrators…) is the only spot outside of the private realm. The other four spots take place			Focus: Right to know; humanitarian aspect	Magician makes the woman invisible. Other disappeared are gone, but extremely visible through their belongings and family members.		
local NGO	**Act for the Disappeared: Do not let my story end here**	Victims are in a state of weakness. "Terrified on passenger seat". Not here to give strength to family. Families: both	Very emotional. "We, the disappeared, paid dearly, with our lives and our dreams" Suffering of family, aching heart.	Fatherhood / Motherhood in focus (yearning for children) 28 male, 4 female disappeared	Only publications where the Disappeared are (presented as being) active in the discourse (speaking). "They" portray	families in "killing state of waiting" Mother at home loodks after my room: "The worst pain one can inflict on a mother, is	depoliticisation: glimpse into the lives. Before the kidnapping. "We shall neither describe our conditions after being kidnapped, nor the monumental injustice we were subjected to…" focus on personal life, fatherhood, "yearning to meet their children": "Oh our children! How many of you grew up without us? (…) What are your names? What are the colours of your eyes?") When describing public/political matters, it is framed or combined with the private sphere ("We wish for the return of	Targeted to local community, to create a Lebanese common responsibility and cause. Internal bond ("The only Tant vs. UN = Local vs. Global Tent is explained: Paths were blocked locally, that's why they set it up in front of UN building Focuses on local, but not on the "inner circle" (families and supporters) but at Lebanese society, about the city of Beirut, the	demarcation line: "Today this line is no more than a big intersection, always busy, where the public drive through without	Committee never opposed the amnesty law, never demanded its repeal, goal is not to hold the past accountable.	Perspective of the usually invisible (fabricated but in discourse)	All the families want is to uncover our fate: "Are we dead? Are we still alive?" "The uncertainty of my	Wants readers to identify; focus on unifying: "We, the disappeared, belong to all communities, sects, and regions of Odette almost portrayed as a martyr, together with other women in other countries who have died in the process of searching for truth Only source that focuses on the direct victims and almost not on family members. It's not about their personal lives, but on a meta Usually focus on kidnapping and suffering. Public unaware of day-to-day struggle. But report aimed at public?)
Founder Committee, wife	**Wadad Halwani: The last picture... while crossing**	Suffering, crying, pleading women vs. women demanding truth, engaging in activism, strongly united in common goals	very emotional. Personal letter from one to another woman, a friend who died. Personal life story highlighted in great	the documentary shows it as a women's (mother / wife) issue. "Motherly" qualities: When children disappeared, preparing	see waiting/moving	Active waiting? Waiting and moving happen at the same time. Their lives are in a state of waiting since decades, but they are trying to set	Tent (in public): "It became your home." (her real home is described as a "ghost house", ice-cold, emptiness). Instead, the		Silence: Anger, almost shouting vs. Sad, quiet voices Odette's real home: deafening, hollowing silence (vs. tent which is	"Let the kidnappers return our relatives. We want them back, whatever side they're on."	victims: the video and the tent both make them (their photographic version of them) very visible. The families make	disappeared are symbolically kept alive through objects. "I live with their objects, their clothes, their pictures." (Odette) Odette has	
Artist, son	**Ghassan Halwani: Erased, ___ Ascent of the Invisible**	Weakness of kidnapped man ("He is frightened to the point of collapse. He can't even stand on his own two feet. He is on his knees, and they	a lot is left to the viewer, there are emotional /personal parts (Odettes kids story) but in a more discreet/plain way; no background music.			slowness of the film / scenes, making the viewer wait, reflect, experience it more consciously	filmmaker makes his private issue a public one; the film does not focus about his own experience as a son. Who was authorized to		The noise of the waves crashing onto the new port at the end vs. The silenced crime	Perpetrators are included in the film (by symbolically erasing them) Photographer refuses that anyone should see	Play with visibility through the photograph: "I am searching for the official narrative of the war. And in my opinion, the story that's	"The Second Disappearance of the Disappeared": The face of his father surrounded by hundreds of individuals -	Only source that focuses on the direct victims and almost not on family members. It's not about their personal lives, but on a meta
TJ organisation	**ICTJ: Living with the Shadows of the Past. The Impact...**	"Through their stories, we perceive these women not as victims but as survivors"; "hardship, strength they found"	A lot of emotion, suffering, but also rationality, facts, demanding truth, blaming politics. screaming on the street	"children speak of mother's strength, courage, and dedication in the face of a great deal of struggle and sorrow" Without him, sons had	knocked on every door, / asked, I ran inshallah he will return, but 30 years have passed. Searching through swollen corpses	"trapped in the moment when their husband went missing", exist in a state of social and legal limbo I knocked on many	"In a context of tremendous loss, what they ask for is a basic remedy" (almost humble) "Without serious		memory of mother barefoot, screaming on the street	strong desire to know the truth "why should I forgive them?" "Justice? In our country, we don't have justice"	living with the shadows of the past	are not widows and not considered married either" Why won't they tell us whether dead or alive?	kidnapping and suffering. Public unaware of day-to-day struggle. But report aimed at public?)
Int. Humanitarian Organisation	**ICRC: The Families of people missing in connection...**	mother suffered a stroke, coma 20 days lost breadwinner, siblings left school sister had to work Power: Demanding	ICRC: Rationality, Families: Emotion "whenever she cooked for us, we ate her tears with the food, because she never stopped	3/10 male quotes. One talks about mother, one demands facts, one feels incomplete for not having a father. "I became a mother and	"we stay lost and uncertain" forced to be active for administrative issues (register death, settle inheritance,…)	"impossible to move on" (ICRC) "I will remain lost until I see the body" can't settle inheritance issue, refuse death	The ICRC makes political statements ("encourages / prompts the authorities to…"), the quotes of families stay in private sphere.			"Justice means giving us back my husband - dead or alive"	symbolic cover picture: Person invisible, shadow visible.	did everything to register him dead, "but until this day, my husband is somehow still considered to be alive. The sharia court has	
Int. Media	**Al Jazeera: The families of people missing still looking for answers**	wife: agony, pain, nervous breakdown, tearful eyes, brittle voice, looking down, never in camera. "I started banging my head against	Rationality: Journalist, ICRC representative Emotion: Wife (tearful eyes, words like "agony and pain", wedding ring)	womanhood exemplified in emotion, private sphere, clinging to family member	see waiting/moving	wife with her ritual symbolises state of waiting (same each day since 28y: writing, hoping, surrounded by photographs)	Political/Public: ICRC demanding legal measures, Journalist going out to report, talking about what government says		Wife: "We could hear bombs going off…" but then they "heard nothing" from him (silence of disappeared vs. noise of war --> this		scenes at the tent: no family activists, only issue (and their defeat?) is visible by the empty and abandoned tent disappeared: husband	Focus on her still wearing the wedding ring, framed wedding photos	
Int. Media	**Deutsche Welle: Families of Lebanon's missing seek closure**	mother: weakness (sitting, hoping, waiting, crying, suffering) Photograph capture "the pain and longing of aging, ailing mothers"	Emotion: the mothers (talk about: sons, waiting, suffering) Rationality: the organisations (talk about: draft law,	motherhood (caring for son, setting table, holding on to belongings, emotional)	Chores keep her busy during the day, at night in a state of waiting Passivity of the government ("has done	The pictures of both mothers represent waiting - sitting motionless beneath portraits or at a table resembling a shrine, still	families: private (home, portraits) Activists fear law will not be passed if fingers are pointed at suspected perpetrators		Silence of the home. Voice of son calling out in her head.	Doesn't think her sons are alive but demands to know their fate Goal: find remains, not judicial proves or seek justice (strategy	Figure at the table. Photographs - the sons are very visible in their daily lives, always there but not here		

Local / Global	Silence / Noise	Amnesty / Justice	Visibility / Invisibility	Dead / Alive	Comments
		Focus: Right to know; humanitarian aspect	Magician makes the woman invisible. Other disappeared are gone, but extremely visible through their belongings and family members.		
Targeted to local community, to create a Lebanese common responsibility and cause. Internal bond ("The only comfort she found was in the company of wives and mothers of the others that disappeared.")	demarcation line: "Today this line is no more than a big intersection, always busy, where the public drive through without acknowledging the significance of its past." "But she wouldn't give in, she would keep fighting against the world, screaming that her husband could not have simply vanished, screaming for help."	opposed the amnesty law, never demanded its repeal, goal is not to hold the past accountable. Right to know is basic human right. "our families are agents of peace, not fans of riots." We only want the truth, not avenge, not compensation. The word justice is never mentioned once in the whole publication; while phrases like "need to know", "right to know", "know the truth" come up 11 times.	Perspective of the usually invisible (fabricated but in discourse)	All the families want is to uncover our fate: "Are we dead? Are we still alive?" "The uncertainty of my fate remains till this day. Today I am neither dead nor alive. This ambiguity can be read on our children's wedding invitations: Farouk, Nisrine, Mohammad, Fadi and Ferdos had wanted to have m name appear next to that of their mother, without the reference of "deceased". Disappeared are kept alive, e.g. wedding invitation without the status of "deceased"	identify; focus on unifying: "We, the disappeared, belong to all communities, sects, and regions of Lebanon…" "Not for our sake, and not for the sake of the families' committee, but because this would close the final chapter of that past war" Framing closure of the cause of the disappeared as a guarantee that Lebanon will be spared of war. Depoliticisation can be "felt" very strongly done in this report, due to its complete lack of mentioning political

Wadad Halwani: The last picture… while crossing	Suffering, crying, pleading women vs. women demanding truth, engaging in activism, strongly united in common goals Wadad about Odette: "I had always asked myself, how could this woman still walk, talk, sleep, where does she get the strength?" Odette: "How do you manage to live? People often ask me. Ask God, I reply."	Very emotional. Personal letter from one to anoother woman, a friend who died. Personal life story highlighted in great detail, somber music, pictures from photo albums	it as a women's (mother / wife) issue. "Motherly" qualities: When children disappeared, preparing the salad for them. Now: decorating the tent like a home, cooking and gardening for everybody. "You became the lady of the tent and we became your guests. You took care of all of us and inquired about those who didn't show up. So many times I stopped by the tent upon your persistence just to get a kiss or to pick up my share of your cooking." About losing husband: "You had become defenseless,	see waiting/moving	Waiting and moving happen at the same time. Their lives are in a state of waiting since decades, but they are trying to set a process (of truth) in motion with their resistance / with being vocal and as visible as possible. Odette finding purpose in her new role as leader of the tent. "In the tent, I noticed you became diligent. The sun tanned your face. It gave it expression. Even your looks changed. I felt like I am getting to know a new Odette. Odette who grew ten years younger." "Ever since the day of	became your home." (her real home is described as a "ghost house", ice-cold, emptiness). Instead, the tent was furnished and decorated (photographs, tv, table, chairs, blankets, toilet, fridge,…): The public/political space appears private; it unites both spheres. They are activists (strategially placing themselves in front of the UN) but gaining sympathy with very personal, emotional, private matters - they are not militant and no typical activist group, they are mothers and wives missing their loved ones are (as in
Ghassan Halwani: Erased,___ Ascent of the Invisible	Weakness of kidnapped man ("He is frightened to the point of collapse. He can't even stand on his own two feet. He is on his knees, and they are dragging him by his arms."	a lot is left to the viewer, there are emotional /personal parts (Odettes kids story) but in a more discreet/plain way; no background music. More to exemplify administrative manners (landlord problems). Rational question: What do "we" do with the mass graves? No call to action			slowness of the film / scenes, making the viewer wait, reflect, experience it more consciously	Filmmaker makes his private issue a public one; the film does not focus about his own experience as a son. Who was authorized to be found in the mass graves? Palestinian fighters and those of the Leb National Resistance Front due to political reasons (buried by Israeli army), European citizens harder to find because cases implicated prominent figures of the Lebanese authorities.

vs. Global Tent is explained: Paths were blocked locally, that's why they set it up in front of UN building: "Perhaps the world would care. Their country didn't, neither for them nor for the 17.000 missing of its citizens." Mint stem: "It grew to be a garden. It could supply the entire UN staff in the building next to you. For sure, you did not ask for Ban Ki-moon's permission to grow the garden nor consulted with him on that. Why bother, he did not ask about you, to start with. He never cared."	interviews: Anger, almost shouting vs. Sad, quiet voices Odette's real home: deafening, hollowing silence (vs. tent which is inhabitated, louder, communal, alive) Wadad: "The day goes by with nobody to talk to, nobody to listen to. The walls would echo your breaths and, at night, if at last you sleep, you dream of them."	"Let the kidnappers return our relatives. We want them back, whatever side they're on."	victims: the video and the tent both make them (their photographic version of them) very visible. The families make themselves visible to the local and international community symbolically with the tent (but feel ignored)	symbolically kept alive through objects. "I live with their objects, their clothes, their pictures." (Odette) Odette has joined them, she is kept alive by photographs and the documentary ("True, you left the tent but not on your feet nor by your will. Your heart, mind and soul are still here. You are still waving your hand to me every morning, on my way to work." Odettes dreams about her son (crossing street, coming into her room. "I wanted to kiss him, but I couldn't. My lips only brushed his cheek.") Odettes children	Odette almost portrayed as a martyr, together with other women in other countries who have died in the process of searching for truth
Focuses on local, but not on the "inner circle" (families and supporters) but at Lebanese society, about the city of Beirut, the land (owned by everybody). This is accompanied visually: Many scenes and video stills with places of the city, a bird perspective, maps,... Identification with the issue: "When you're going from Hamra to Mar Mekhayel, you will traverse two or three mass graves, depending on the road you choose to take"	The noise of the waves crashing onto the new port at the end vs. The silenced crime	Perpetrators are included in the film (by symbolically erasing them) Photographer refuses that anyone should see the picture of the crime, as it has implications today. "It was shot during the civil war and the war ended."	Play with visibility through the photograph: "I am searching for the official narrative of the war. And in my opinion, the story that's maintained until this day resembles this image. (....) The victim, the person being kidnapped, is missing. And his body is also missing. And the two kidnappers are also missing. We lost them because of the general amnesty law. Therefore, the three components of the crime that we see before us are missing. Therefore, in this context, the whole	"The Disappeared" Disappearance of the Disappeared": The face of his father surrounded by hundreds of individuals - "evanescence of this man", he understood that he was about to lose all what he had managed to preserve of him. Experiment - one person is not recognised, only together. "I realized that these persons have ceased to be the persons we once knew. Instead, they became an arrangement of symbols that do not complete their meaning unless all combined. This arrangement gave	Only source that focuses on the direct victims and almost not on family members. It's not about their personal lives, but on a meta level about how they are portrayed, about their invisibility.

ICTJ: Living with the Shadows of the Past. The Impact…	we perceive these women not as victims but as survivors"; "hardship, strength they found" I was scared many times; stayed in car middle of nowhere, thinking someone would come kidnap me, slaughter me, rape me. Sold car, paid man, waited all day, got lied to. "We did it ourselves" son worked, lot of pride, not humiliating on street society harsh, but stood on my own two feet. Broke down, but my mother's words gave me strength We are still in the same	A lot of emotion, suffering, but also rationality, facts, demanding truth, blaming politics. screaming on the street telling children about kidnapping	"children speak of mother's strength, courage, and dedication in the face of a great deal of struggle and sorrow" Without him, sons had to work. Without him, wive worked in factory, care for children, housework until nighttime grandfather is needed for legal issues "bravo, you are the sister of men" letting son take over Playing the role of both parents "You bury the feminine side of you deep inside, by force… I lost my life as a woman" wary of a woman who doesn't have a man	knocked on every door, I asked, I ran inshallah he will return, but 30 years have passed. Searching through swollen corpses Prepare file, take it everywhere, whenever someone responsible, grab cab and go see. "We would gather and protest in the rain and in the cold." "I am emotionally drained. I dream of continuing my education. I deram of doing something, earning a degree." If there was a party, wedding, I didn't go.	"trapped in the moment when their husband went missing", exist in a state of social and legal limbo I knocked on many doors. And they used to promise me, promise me, promise me Waiting every day, thinking he might come home today. "The years pass by and you're waiting" would have felt relieved to know if he was dead.	tremendous loss, what they ask for is a basic remedy" (almost humble) "Without serious attention from senior Lebanese officials, this issue will continue to stall, leaving families in limbo and breaching their right to justice and truth" blaming the politicians, demanding to ask them Presidents, state did not address issue, we knocked on their doors "I don't even want to know who did it. I just want to know if my husband is alive" President said he would take care of the issue. They went to
ICRC: The Families of people missing in connection…	mother suffered a stroke, coma 20 days lost breadwinner, siblings left school sister had to work Power: Demanding justice , making powerful statements, "bring them back" ICRC describing their situation: Uncertainty, desperately searching, not knowing, impossible to move on, scars run deep, suffering, anguish, physical illness, problems, hurdles	ICRC: Rationality, Families: Emotion "whenever she cooked for us, we ate her tears with the food, because she never stopped crying"	3/10 male quotes. One talks about mother, one demands facts, one feels incomplete for not having a father. "I became a mother and a father at the same time"	"we stay lost and uncertain" forced to be active for administrative issues (register death, settle inheritance,…)	"Impossible to move on" (ICRC) "I will remain lost until I see the body" can't settle inheritance issue, refuse death certificate "refuse to make him dead" for bank account	The ICRC makes political statements ("encourages / prompts the authorities to…"), the quotes of families stay in private sphere. Male quotes: more political / demanding

	memory of mother barefoot, screaming on the street	strong desire to know the truth "why should I forgive them?" "Justice? In our country, we don't have justice"	living with the shadows of the past	are not widows and not considered married either" Why won't they tell us whether dead or alive? Politicians are alive, ask them. "He's gone and the ones left behind have priority" (death certificate decision due to kids) Being told he is alive by guard, going there every 15 days "if he's dead, tell me, and if he is alive, tell me" You don't even know your status, what are you? never saw his corpse, scares me a lot, barrier to moving on "We will go on knowing that daddy	Usually focus on kidnapping and suffering. Public unaware of day-to-day struggle. (but report aimed at public?) includes external (not only internal struggles - the families). Broader picture, goes beyond inner circle. (Where did the other materials do this?)
		"Justice means giving us back my husband - dead or alive"	symbolic cover picture: Person invisible, shadow visible.	did everything to register him dead, "but until this day, my husband is somehow still considered to be alive. The sharia court has declared him dead, but not the government administration."	

Al Jazeera: The families of people missing still looking for answers	wife: agony, pain, nervous breakdown, tearful eyes, brittle voice, looking down, never in camera. "I started banging my head against the wall. I just didn't know what to do." (helplessness, powerless) (weakness) ICRC et al: lobbying, demanding (power, action) Other members of families (not shown): once active but gave up tent, either dead or too old to continue (weakness, defeated)	Rationality: Journalist, ICRC representative Emotion: Wife (tearful eyes, words like "agony and pain", wedding ring)	womanhood exemplified in emotion, private sphere, clinging to family member	see waiting/moving	wife with her ritual symbolises state of waiting (same each day since 28y: writing, hoping, surrounded by photographs)	Political/Public: ICRC demanding legal measures, Journalist going out to report, talking about what government says Private: woman stays in the private realm in her home, looking at photographs, writing letters to husband
Deutsche Welle: Families of Lebanon's missing seek closure	mother: weakness (sitting, hoping, waiting, crying, suffering) Photograph capture "the pain and longing of aging, ailing mothers"	Emotion: the mothers (talk about: sons, waiting, suffering) Rationality: the organisations (talk about: draft law, collecting data, mass grave sites)	motherhood (caring for son, setting table, holding on to belongings, emotional)	Chores keep her busy during the day, at night in a state of waiting Passivity of the government ("has done little to nothing in finding out what happened to them and where they are") Activists: pushing, putting pressure for draft law ICRC: organising exhibition, collecting testimonies and DNA	The pictures of both mothers represent waiting - sitting motionless beneath portraits or at a table resembling a shrine, still setting a plate for the disappeared son. Staying up, keeping an eye on the door, just in case he returns, even after 36 years One mother kept their clothes, their books, school bag of her then-13-year old	families: private (home, portraits) Activists fear law will not be passed if fingers are pointed at suspected perpetrators

	Wife: "We could hear bombs going off…" but then they "heard nothing" from him (silence of disappeared vs. noise of war --> this is also exemplified when old footage from war is shown: background noise, gunshuts. Other scenes have no background noise)		scenes at the tent: no family activists, only issue (and their defeat?) is visible by the empty and abandoned tent disappeared: husband made visible through many photographs, through the wife telling his story; he is gone but actively made present in her life ("I write to remind him that he's still with us and lives among us.")	Focus on her stilli wearing the wedding ring, framed wedding photos	
	Silence of the home. Voice of son calling out in her head.	Doesn't think her sons are alive but demands to know their fate Goal: find remains, not judicial proess or seek justice (strategy humanitarian issue, not upset fragile political balance)	Figure at the table. Photographs - the sons are very visible in their daily lives, always there but not here Perpetrators invisible (mother doesn't want to talk about who kidnapped her son)		