

**Friend or Foe: Militia Intelligence and Ethnic Violence in the Lebanese Civil War.** By Nils Hägerdal. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. 240p. \$145.00 cloth, \$35.00 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592722003620

— Reinoud Leenders , *King's College London*  
reinoud.leenders@kcl.ac.uk

In his theoretically driven and empirically rich monograph on the Lebanese civil war, Nils Hägerdal invites the reader to consider the “strategic calculus” (pp. 12, 153) of ethnic militia commanders when faced with hostile militants residing in various areas. They can opt for selective violence to eliminate such militants or, alternatively, for indiscriminate violence or ethnic cleansing, targeting the entire non-coethnic population. Contrary to common assumptions about the inherently blind nature of ethnic violence, Hägerdal observes that in Lebanon militias arrived at radically diverse approaches. Thus, Christian-Maronite militias embarked on indiscriminate ethnic cleansing in some areas, such as in January 1976 in the Karantina neighborhood in Beirut, while these same groups forced out only select Muslim individuals in other places, such as in the neighbouring Baydoun area. The book sets out to unpack this strategic calculus in an effort to explain why militias on both sides of the initial Christian-Muslim fold line of Lebanon’s civil war made seemingly inconsistent choices between various forms of selective and indiscriminate violence to accomplish their goals. The key explanatory variable, Hägerdal suggests, centres around contestants’ ability to gather reliable intelligence on their opponents. Where the quality of that intelligence was high, selective violence followed. Where the fog of war was too thick to identify hostile militants, combatants turned to ethnicity as a crude informational cue signalling an individual’s likely loyalties and hostility. When these conditions applied, combatants resorted to indiscriminate ethnic violence.

Under these varying conditions, the form of ethnic violence thus becomes a function of the quality of intelligence combatants are able to gather. Hägerdal argues that militias’ ability to discriminate among neutral and hostile non-coethnics is accordingly enhanced in ethnically mixed areas, as local co-ethnics can provide vital information on non-coethnic militants and sympathizers backing opponents. Conversely, in homogenous areas inhabited by non-coethnics such informants are mostly lacking, which hampers intelligence capabilities and prompts combatants to rely on ethnicity as a crude proxy for political loyalties.

Hägerdal’s key argument is concise, internally largely consistent, and appealing for its parsimony. As such the book is intentionally positioned to contribute to a growing comparative literature on the nature and causes of—and motivations behind—(ethnic) violence in civil wars. The book provides a useful overview of the complex Lebanese civil war (Chapter 2) where the risk of a convoluted or

overly descriptive narrative looms large. As the book relies on mixed methods to generalize its key argument, Hägerdal built his own cross-sectional data set covering the first war years of 1975–1976, allowing him to draw on minute data at village and neighbourhood levels in a rare attempt to analyse the Lebanese civil war quantitatively. The independent variable, militias’ intelligence gathering, is researched qualitatively, by way of interviewing key militia members active between 1975–1976.

Notwithstanding these merits, the book ultimately fails to convince, for several reasons. Much of the analysis hinges on choices made regarding the unit of analysis. Whether measured areas are considered ethnically homogenous or mixed depends on their size, and this in turn determines any suggested correlations with the forms of ethnic violence these areas were subjected to. Even more problematic is that the author uses electoral registry data from 2009 to determine the sectarian demographic composition of relevant areas some thirty-five years earlier. Hägerdal (pp. 68–9) correctly points out in this context that most Lebanese voters, even when they moved elsewhere, continued to be registered in the ancestral village of their families and that, therefore, these data reflect demographic realities from decades past. Yet there is no reason to assume that the data reflect demographic realities exactly in 1975–1976, the period under study. More likely, and based on the same reasoning, they may reflect historical realities somewhat when voter registration originally occurred before the 1950s. Even so, the 2009 electoral register will more than likely fail to reflect demographic-sectarian realities in 1975–1976 altogether due to diverging fertility rates, external migration rates, and mortality rates; the latter two factors are, among other things, affected by ethnic violence.

Some readers may be willing to overlook these methodological issues as Lebanon poses some formidable challenges in terms of data gathering. But there also are conceptual and analytical problems that remain unresolved. Crucially, the Lebanese civil war is viewed as a “non-separatist war” (pp. 23, 64, 123), to allow for militias to view ethnic cleansing as one of their options in their strategic calculus, and not their primary political goal. It is true that none of the participants in the Lebanese civil war had separatist ambitions and, as such, they retained an interest in moderating their behaviour toward non-coethnic fellow Lebanese where possible as some sort of accommodation with the latter would at some point be inevitable (p. 64). For Hägerdal, this informs the militias’ dilemma in the first place, as indiscriminate violence has high costs combatants would want to avoid, and is therefore used only as last resort. Yet vis-à-vis the Palestinians in the country the Christian-Maronite Kata’ib militia had far more ambitious goals, as they considered them as unwanted aliens and inherently destabilizing for the country’s fragile political settlement based on sectarian

demographics. The author notes that the Kata'ib and other Christian militias more frequently resorted to ethnic cleansing than their enemies, and he puts this down to these militias having inferior access to intelligence in the areas in which such atrocities occurred (pp. 78, 86, 89). Yet one could counter that indiscriminate ethnic violence by the Kata'ib against Palestinians was rather informed by a set of racist and ultra-nationalist goals or ideology, thus in this respect causing the conflict to share some features of "separatist wars" wherein "militants from one ethnic group [perpetrate] intentional forced displacement against members of a different community" (p. 77). Indeed, when the distinction between "separatist" and "non-separatist" wars gets blurred in this way, the possibility arises that ethnic cleansing during the Lebanese civil war and more generally is associated with *superior* intelligence capabilities. This was purportedly witnessed in Palestine in 1948 where Jewish forces relied on minute intelligence from the so-called "village files" to target and expel Palestinians (*The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Ilan Pappé, 2006). This raises questions about Hägerdal's treatment of ethnic violence as synonymous with indiscriminate violence, as there are strong grounds to believe that it has often distinctly selective or discriminative undertones.

Hägerdal's insistence to explain ethnic cleansing by insufficient intelligence capabilities in homogenous ethnic areas appears too unidimensional. As homogenous ethnic or rather sectarian enclaves proliferated during the Lebanese civil war in the 1980s, one would expect by Hägerdal's reasoning that ethnic cleansing would have occurred more frequently. There is no evidence for this. Quite the opposite, fewer instances of ethnic cleansing may have then been associated with the fact that most mixed areas had already become homogenized, removing the need to "cleanse" them.

There are far more possibilities for intelligence gathering than relying on co-ethnics' intelligence in hostile homogenous areas, as Israel has shown in the Palestinian occupied territories since 1967 by creating a large pool of Palestinian collaborators and informants. In a messy civil war such as Lebanon's, resorting to indiscriminate ethnic violence entails a calculus that transcends the availability of reliable intelligence and includes a host of other factors such as intra-sectarian outbidding, creating deterrence, taking revenge, or opportunism. For instance, Palestinian forces and their Muslim allies did not go on a rampage killing civilians in January 1976 in the village of Damour because they lacked intelligence on local enemy fighters. More likely, they took revenge for the massacre in Karantina, wanted to restore a balance of terror in its wake, and acted when they faced little resistance from enemy fighters. Exactly because the factors informing and motivating indiscriminate ethnic violence are multifold, there are no lawlike inevitabilities in their occurrence. Ironically

for an author putting so much emphasis on violent actors' decision-making, Hägerdal takes from his own analysis that under certain conditions protagonists had "little choice" (pp. 36, 37) but to unleash indiscriminate ethnic violence. However, ethnic violence in whatever shape always is down to agents' choices, and for this reason should be viewed and judged in terms of individual responsibility and culpability even if we hope to establish patterns in its occurrence.

**The Origins of Secular Institutions: Ideas, Timing, and Organization.** By H. Zeynep Bulutgil. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 272p. \$99.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

doi:10.1017/S1537592722003875

— Dan Slater , University of Michigan  
dnsitr@umich.edu

Once upon a time, religion and the state were everywhere inseparable. How did that change? Why did religion get removed as the state's justification for its own laws and for its subjects' rights in some places but not others? And in places where the state remains religiously defined and legitimized to the present day—think of Iran, where women have recently erupted in revolutionary protest over the many religiously inspired restrictions the state imposes on them—what are the prospects that citizens might someday win, not freedom *of* religion, but freedom *from* religion?

These are the puzzles of "institutional secularization" that motivate H. Zeynep Bulutgil's tremendous new work of comparative political history. Before detailing her arguments and evidence—which, to foreshadow, prove deeply compelling—it is worth pausing and reflecting on just how substantial the historical puzzle of state secularization truly is. What Bulutgil rightly establishes as the "historical baseline" (pp. 19-20) of institutional fusion between religion and state could simply have lasted everywhere. Religious organizations enjoyed enormous initial advantages over any fledgling secular rivals, and the state was firmly on their side. The answer to how and why institutional secularization has been achieved anywhere at all thus requires an answer to how and why this cavernous secular disadvantage has, at least in some times and places, been overcome.

Bulutgil's argument for how and why unfolds in two stages. First, the rise of print-capitalism and the relaxing of censorship allowed secular ideas to spread and secularizing movements to emerge. This did not happen everywhere; indeed, it has still not happened everywhere. Those secularizing political movements then became pivotal at stage two. Where they could tap into strong civil-society organizations and—most vitally of all—where they preceded and gained a historical head start on their religious party competitors, secularizing movements could win power and remove religion from state institutions for good.