

The Truth of Fiction.

Some Stories of the Lebanese Civil Wars

He was fighting—that was all there was to it.

For what? To preserve. To preserve what? His group's power.

What was he going to do with this power and this group?

Rebuild the country. What country? Here, everything became vague.

*He lost his footing. Because in this country there were too many factions,
too many currents of ideas, too many individual cases for one theory to contain.*

(...) His head spun.

Etel Adnan¹

The civil wars in Lebanon (1975-1990) frustrate traditional narrative structures such as chronological markings, chains of causality, or the more ideologically charged depiction of cycles of suffering and redemption. The use of the plural, that many commentators tend to prefer, gives a clear idea of the fragmented composition of the conflict, split into a countless number of warring factions representing contending communal identities and ideologies, splinter groups within these larger blocs, and foreign governments pursuing their own interests. Following recurrent shifts of alliances, the balance of forces was reconstructed at many junctures; while at several times, ceasefires and protracted periods of lull gave the illusory impression that the wars were subsiding. Difficulties and disagreements arise even in the seemingly plain matter of establishing beginnings and endings.² Unlike many countries recently overwhelmed by internal ethnic, racial, and cultural violence, Lebanon has never had an official truth and reconciliation commission. The postwar government has rather opted for a policy of censorship and amnesia, sealed by the approval of an amnesty law (1991) pardoning most war crimes and allowing prominent figures in the civil wars to become part of the country's new government. Some historians have used the term “state-sponsored

amnesia” to describe the politically instrumental and economically calculated policy that has discouraged public and collective re-elaboration of the past traumatic experiences in the name of “a fresh start” or “tabula rasa.”³ To this day, no common, shared narrative exists on the period of the civil wars. Memory is highly politicized, parcelized, and ideologically instrumental: each of the different confessional and political groups has its own idiosyncratic and divisive version of the events.

Amidst enforced collective amnesia, public censorship and the maddening proliferation of competing versions, the problem of historical narrative becomes all the most urgent as it is contentious. How does one tell the (hi)stories of the civil wars without either falling in the trap of essentialist and identitarian accounts nor losing referential grip on its intricate realities? Grappling with this dilemma, a group of Lebanese artists emerging in the 1990s has produced a challenging body of works, in the mediums of photography, video, installation and performance.⁴ These works are vehicles for alternative forms of narrativization of the wars, that complicate our understanding of supposedly factual accounts through a systematic combination of actual documents and fictional tales, indexical reference and narrative fabulation. If the deliberate blurring of the planes of fact and fiction undermines positivistic criteria of credibility, this is not meant to lead into an epistemological, ethical and historical relativism. These “documentary fictions” serve rather as defence and acknowledgement of an expanded notion of documentary reference through the inclusion of materials that are generally left out of the historical record such as: rumours, anecdotes, psychic disturbances, “hysterical symptoms,” “fantasies erected from the material of collective memories.”⁵

This chapter considers practices of *fictionalization*—intended as both the fictional transposition of reality and the realistic transposition of fiction—as they are used in a selected number of artworks. Walid Raad's long-term project *The Atlas Group* consists of an imaginary foundation committed to the research and documentation of the contemporary history of Lebanon. Raad mimics the public and technocratic modes of address and presentation of an institutional

archive, including an accessible website, to investigate the processes through which historical knowledge is produced. In apparent contrast, Akram Zaatari's video-essay *Letter to a Refusing Pilot* (2013), reports a documented fact as if it was a fable, while using the private mode of address of the letter to appeal the public audience of gallery visitors. In both works, fictionalization offers a way out to the conundrums of an exhausted identity politics. The invention of fictional characters or the transposition of real ones into imaginary and nameless personas allows to bypass the dilemma of who is allowed to speak in behalf of whom, within a highly fractured country. If on one hand the fictional or nameless character complicates notions of collective belonging by showing the fictitious nature of group filiations, on the other hand, it also creates a transcendental position that encourages transversal identifications. The artists recede to the role of spokespersons or silent addressers, limiting themselves to report a story. Doing so, they enact a modern, updated recuperation of the seemingly obsolete art of storytelling opening new channels for the dissemination of narratives. It will be argued that it is precisely the “story” —as the minimum unit of a communicable experience—that functions here as mean for a re-collectivization of the wars historical legacy.

A Story of Gambling Historians: Walid Raad as a Post-Structuralist Storyteller

“It is little known fact that the major historians of the Lebanese wars were avid gamblers. It is said they met every Sunday at the race track.” The group, including Marxist, Islamist, Maronite nationalist and socialist historians, did not bet on the winning horse, but on the amount of distance between the horse’s nose and the finish line as captured in the photo-finish image published in the next day’s newspaper. It is with this implausible anecdote that Walid Raad introduces *Notebook Volume 72: Missing Lebanese Wars (1989/1998)*,⁶ one of the several pieces composing the complex cosmology of The Atlas Group archive. The piece consists of 20 plates reproducing enlarged pages taken from the notebooks of Dr. Fadl Fakhouri, who, as we are told, was one of the “foremost historians of the Lebanese wars.” Taped on the notebook pages are newspaper clippings of the

winning horses accompanied by Fakhouri's accurate notes describing the race's distance and duration, the time of the winning horse, calculations of averages, the historians' initials with their respective bets, and a short description of the winning historian along with the time discrepancy predicted by him.

This openly absurd and whimsical story has been mostly interpreted as a metaphor of history-writing, reduced to a mere matter of gambling. The never-in-time photographs stand in for unreliable sources that always fail to capture the event as it occurs, so that the historians can do little more than estimate the discrepancy between the event and its documentation. The adjective 'missing' in the title bleakly refers to this missed encounter with history, dismantling the allure of auratic immediacy that spreads from certain documents and testimonies. *Missing Lebanese Wars*, in this sense, functions as a sort of methodological introduction to the meta-historical approach underpinning the Atlas Group archive. Raad's intention is not to write an unwritten history, to fill a gap, but rather he is interested in the writing of history itself, in the ways in which the past does or does not get written down. Speaking as an intermediary of the association, he has said:

We do not consider “The Lebanese Civil War” to be a settled chronology of events, dates, personalities, massacres, invasions, but rather we also want to consider it as an abstraction constituted by various discourses, and, more importantly, by various modes of assimilating the data of the world.⁷

As Alan Gilbert points out, this statement closely echoes Michel Foucault's genealogical approach to history. Foucault defines the archive as a discursive system or a set of rules determining the historical conditions of possibility for knowledge formation and models of subjectivity.⁸ Raad's focus on abstract and aprioristic discursive systems allows him to escape the partisan and instrumental logic of the historical reconstructions put forward by different identitarian groups. In so doing, he foregrounds a more complex vision of truth—as something constructed rather than merely apprehended. However, this is not meant to discredit the notion of truth as such, as the documentary content of the works makes ostensibly clear.

Albeit fictional, the Atlas Group archive contains important elements of actual documentation. Each file/artwork results from the formal manipulations of real, mainly photographic, documents taken from Raad's private collection and other public archives. The “produced documents” are then copied, re-dated and attributed to a motley cast of fictional characters who in turn are said to have donated these works directly or by proxy to The Atlas Group. Alongside Fakhouri, among the authored files, we find the Arab hostage Souheil Bachar, who is said to have spent a brief period with American hostages, and Raad himself, presented as a donor of the organization. Other files are anonymously authored, such as those accredited to the mysterious secret agent Operator #17; others still, we are said, were commissioned by the Atlas Group to external producers and advisors. To complicate even further the already intricate set of relations between the real and the fictional is the fact that two of these characters, Youssef Bitar, Lebanese state's chief investigator of car bombs detonations, and Georges Semerdjia, photojournalist and videographer, are both real historical figures, although the research into a single car bomb explosion that is attributed to them, is obviously made up.⁹ Art historian Carry Beatty Lambert has introduced the notion of “parafiction” to define the category of fiction in recent art, as related but distinct from the more long-established tradition of fiction in literary and dramatic art. Rather than performing in “the hygienic clinics of literature,” parafiction has “one foot in the field of the real”. In other words, “in parafiction, real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived.”¹⁰ Rather than nurturing disbelief, these repeated short-circuits permit to ground fictions more deeply into reality, reinforcing their critical stands.

Whether real or fictional, the individual subjects populating the Atlas Group, in line with Foucault's notion of the author-function, are treated not as “originators” of discourse but as its “variable and complex functions.”¹¹ Raad shifts between different modes of address and authorship, via specific typologies of characters—the historian, the photojournalist, the onlooker, the witness—investigating the registers and paradigms through which historical evidences are constructed and presented. Through the construction of fictionalized forms of enunciation, the artist stages the

complex ecology that surrounds “fact making.” To use his words, facts are not approached in their “crude facticity,” but “through the complicated mediations by which they acquire their immediacy.”¹² Such a post-structuralist critique of authoriality extends to the artist himself who apparently renounces personal style by mimicking the administrative aesthetic of the archive and using the impersonal language of documents, with associated patterns of seriality and repetition.¹³ Raad's subjectivity, shaded behind the collectivity and anonymity of the group form, emerges as a composite and distributive formation manifested in a multitude of testimonial voices, a process that philosopher Peter Osborne has defined as the “fictionalization of the artist function.” In his analysis of the Atlas Group, Osborne describes fictionalization as the process by which documentary materials are transfigured into art, without losing their referentiality. History, in Raad's work, appears as a complex “transaction between ‘documentation’ (as both indexical mark and institutional process of certification) and fiction, where fiction is the guiding hand.”¹⁴ Fiction, however, is not a deceptive but rather a constructivist tool. Raad stages the process by which history is constructed, that is “pieced together out of elements that have been severed from the subjectivity of individual subjects.”¹⁵

The extended narrative captions that surround each document, with their poetical framings and the attribution to fully developed fictional characters, betray however an intention that goes beyond the deconstruction of discursive mediations. The Atlas Group fictional characters, rather than simply being pseudonyms of the artist, are better defined by the term heteronyms, a literary concept introduced by Portuguese writer and poet Fernando Pessoa.¹⁶ Whereas pseudonyms denote false names, heteronyms are fully developed characters having their own physical aspect, biographies and writing or communicative styles. The figure of Fakhouri, for instance, is developed and visualised in *Civilizationally, we do not dig holes to bury ourselves* (1958–1959/2003), a collection of twenty-four black-and-white self-portrait photographs that depict the historian during a visit to Paris and Rome in 1958 and 1959.¹⁷ Rather than, in a Foucauldian fashion, isolating analytically the structures of the various discourses that make up the archive, Raad, acting as

storyteller, translates the archive back into individual life stories.¹⁸ Drawn from the photographic and textual experiences of real people, his fictional subjects spin themselves out of the residues of subjectivity, doubly stunted by the violence of the wars and the depersonalization of the archive. Unexpectedly stories emerge in the bureaucratic space of the archive; or as French philosopher Jacques Rancière would say, Raad constructs a “narrative in the system of discourses.”¹⁹

It is important to note that Raad rarely allows materials from The Atlas Group to be exhibited without some form of public presentation, a talk, lecture, and more recently guided visits conducted by the artist himself—all forms that rely heavily on orality and presence.²⁰ If the expansive cast of characters of the Atlas Group alongside with its vertiginous complexity, labyrinthine structure and multi-layered system of cross-references, can be said to reflect mimetically the precarious epistemic conditions of the Lebanese civil wars, this layering of voices has also another outcome. The game of telling and retelling reanimates the antiquated and nearly obsolete oral tradition of storytelling. It is now time to consider how these fictional characters can potentially mobilize a post-identitarian notion of collectivity.

Imaginary Witnesses and the Fiction of the Collective

The invention of fictional characters enables Raad to foreground the problem of whose testimonies are admitted in the archive, or in other words, the problem of who has the right to participate in the production of knowledge.²¹ One of the works in the Atlas Group more evidently concerned with this issue is *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (#17 and #31)_English version* (2000/1999). Veering away from the experience and reconstruction of the wars from within, this work looks instead at the ways in which they were perceived and framed from outside, focusing especially on international mass media coverage. The video-work stems from Raad's scholarly research on the “Western hostage crisis,” in which he considered the different treatment of Western and Arab hostages in international media.²² The Bachar Tapes are attributed to the fictional figure of Souheil Bachar, a Kuwaiti

embassy employee who, as we learn, had been kidnapped in Beirut in 1983 and imprisoned for ten years in solitary confinement—except for twenty-seven weeks in 1985 when he was held in a cell with five American hostages, Terry Anderson, Thomas Sutherland, Benjamin Weir, Martin Jenco, and David Jacobson. Each of the five men published a depoliticized book-length account of the experience of captivity, reporting the story in personal rather than political terms. Stripping any reference to the socio-political context, the American hostages shaped an autobiographical narrative in the form of a tale of individual transformation.

Hostage opens with an informational inter-title that credits 53 video tapes to Souheil Bachar, who has donated them to the Atlas Group and allowed only tape #17 and #31 to be screened in North America and Western Europe. The amateurish looking footage mimics the format of captives' videotaped statements, including a taped up flag or piece of cloth on the back wall. At the start Bachar provides very precise instructions on how the tapes should be screened, dubbed and subtitled. He asks to be dubbed into English with a neutral-toned female voice, while his speech is constantly interrupted by editing and glitches due to the rudimentary technology. His testimony focuses especially on the time he spent together with the American hostages, culminating in a rather Orientalist account of the Americans' anxiety over the guards' sexuality, and the way they were both attracted to and repulsed by his body. The relationship with the Other is mostly lived through the filter of fear and the perceived threat of homoerotic desire.

The invention of the character of an Arab hostage permits to insert a subaltern voice into the historical narrative of the hostage crisis. As such, this fictional witness-character acts as a corrective to the official narrative, allowing in turn to deconstruct the ways in which subaltern identities are represented in the media, as the scrupulous attention for the details of Bachar's visual (self-) presentation makes clear. Although not dismissing this widely shared assumption,²³ art historian Vered Maimon has emphasized the way in which the fictional character of the testimony allows to undo “clear identifications and divisions,” moving beyond conventional clashes of civilization.²⁴ There is no attempt to make this fiction believable. Bachar is played by the well-known Lebanese

actor Fabi Abi Samra, making his fictional status immediately apparent at least to a Lebanese audience. Rather than personifying the emblematical representative of an ethnically defined group and giving voice to a politically and historically marginalized subject, as Maimon notes, Bachar is a split character: difference is not projected only outwards, but is also mapped onto himself in the rift “between voice and body, speech and noise, actor and role, fictional figure and real event”.²⁵ These evident rifts open fissures and gaps in his portrayal and self-presentation, constantly frustrating identification and producing a sense of estrangement in the viewer. In Maimon's words, the fact that Bachar is an imaginary character serves to “expose the fictional character of *any* collective form of belonging.”²⁶ If the internally split figure of Bachar challenges the logic of partisan, identitarian identification, its testimony is however incorporated within the equally imaginary collectivity of the Atlas Group. At a speculative level, as Osborne has suggested, the fictional collectivity of the Atlas Group “is a stand in for a missing political collectivity.”²⁷ Through the group-form and the global connotations implied by its name (Atlas), Raad portrays a speculative, albeit non-existent collectivity, offering the model for a post-national and post-identitarian collective subject.

Rumours as History: Akram Zaatari and the Open Letter

Far away from the administrative and quasi-scientific veneer of the Atlas Group archive, Zaatari's elegiac and enigmatic video-essay, *Letter to a Refusing Pilot* (2013), one part of a three-pieces installation,²⁸ projects us straight away in the atmosphere of a fairy tale. One minute into the film, after aerial shots taken with a flying drone and close-ups of black-and-white archival photographs showing buildings in aerial perspective, we see the cover of a vintage edition of *The Little Prince*, the famous 1943 novella by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who as the unnamed and mysterious hero to which the letter-film is addressed, happened to be himself a pioneer aviator who disappeared in 1944 during a reconnaissance mission over the Mediterranean. While hands flip

through the illustrated pages of the book, this seemingly unrelated insertion performs the important function of casting the story into a literary dimension, and more precisely into the frame of a fable. The reference to literature is reinforced by the very title of the film with the nod to the epistolary genre on one hand, and its explicit allusion to Albert Camus' four part essay *Letters to a German Friend*, on the other.

The film is based on a rumour that started circulating short after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, in Saida, Zaatari's hometown located in the South of the country. It was said that as Israeli forces advanced, one pilot refused to strike his assigned target, a secondary school for boys not far from the Ain El Helweh refugee camp. He veered off course and dropped the bombs into the Mediterranean Sea. Many more stories were passed on regarding the reasons behind the refusal. Some said that the pilot's family had originally been from the old Jewish community of Saida, and he felt too emotionally attached to the place and its inhabitants. Others said that, having studied as an architect, he had recognized that the building, for its institutional squared profile, was either a school or a hospital—a version that will prove to be correct. Though the school, as well as most of the surrounding city, were eventually bombed, the story turned into a sort of legend, embroidered and embellished with new details in each telling. Zaatari has an intimate relation with this story, not just because Saida is his hometown, but mostly because the boys's school that was spared by the pilot, had been run for two decades by the artist's father. Zaatari never knew for certain whether the story was true, until when, in 2010, the tale was brought up during a public conversation between Zaatari and the Israeli filmmaker Avi Mograbi. Thanks to the circulation of the transcript of that talk in book form,²⁹ Zaatari learned that the pilot at the centre of the rumour was not only real, but still alive and living in Haifa. He arranged to meet the man, whose name is Hagai Tamir, in Rome—the mutual non-recognition of Israel and Lebanon prevented them from meeting in either of their home countries. No part of this encounter is featured in the thirty-five minutes film, whose non-linear narrative unfolds rather enigmatically until when, towards the end, two informational inter-titles succinctly summarize the (non-)event. During the meeting, however,

the two exchanged old photographs, drawings, letters and other vernacular documents belonging to the respective families. Some of the pictures of Zaatari's childhood are included both in the video and in the accompanying newsprint publication, whereas Tamir's photographs are absent, reduced to textual descriptions written in the third person in the publication.³⁰

The video-essay is completely bereft of any form of oral commentary, whether transcendental voice-over or diegetic dialogue. Meanings are built solely through the montage of different visual fragments. Juxtaposed to the aerial shots, we see hands slowly drawing the facade of a school, before sketching a paper airplane. Then the same hands, now wearing white gloves, according to the aseptic aesthetics of archival institution, are seen handling sepia-tinged family photographs of a younger Zaatari and his family on the grounds of the school, then leaf through letters and run over the artist's meticulous journal entries from the time of the Israeli occupation. These personal notes, uncannily resembling the flash news of TV reporting, contain descriptions of some of the worst days of fighting in 1982, interrupted by more ordinary occurrences such as the titles of films, references to the weather, reports of school closures. To emerge is a rather subjective, personal and idiosyncratic account of war, far from the objectivistic presumptions of institutional archives. In a particularly striking sequence, photographs of the school taken from a nearby hill, are shown alongside an iPad playing an excerpt from an Israeli army documentary of the 1982 invasion, featuring images of bombings and destruction. The recording technologies, from obsolete reel-to-reel players, to old photo-cameras and modern I-pads, take centre stage, assuming almost a subject-like character as utterers of testimonies. The theatrical presentation of archival material is interspersed by present-day shots of kids moving through the hallways of the school today, young boys throwing paper planes from rooftops and an eerie panoramic shot of a modernist sculpture in the schoolyard. Periodically, the sound of a drone and, sometimes, that of an airplane, crop up between snatches of French pop songs and Egyptian cinema, recalling a persistent threat or a lingering memory. The constant contraposition of points of view, alternating between aerial shots and the stagings of a personal archive serves to establish at a purely visual level a dialogic exchange

between the unnamed pilot and Zaatari, continually reversing the perspectives from ground to sky and from sky to ground.

The installation comprises also *Saida June 6, 1982*, a shorter piece shot in 16 mm film and screened on a smaller monitor, that shows the Saida hillside silently being destroyed by bombs. The video consists of a tracking shot of a composite image, combining photographs of multiple bombings into a single image, like years of war compressed into a single day. Between the two projections stands a single velvety red cinema chair, that materializes both the singular address of the letter form, and the formatted plural singularity of the one-to-many dissemination of TV news. The seat, destined to Hagai Tamir, is designed to remain empty, so to make tangible the absent subject of the pilot, the purported only recipient of the work. Although he is existent and alive, the pilot is conjured as a sort of abstract figure, known only by his profession and the action he refused to take. As Quinn Latimer pointed out, Zaatari's reticence in naming the pilot turns him into a kind of “fable-like character,” surrounded with the “moral tenor that such fiction often carries.”³¹ The abstraction of the main character into a literary cipher, endows the narrative with a character of transcendentalism, while the use of indexical documentary material allows it to maintain its stringent referentiality. Whereas Zaatari's personal archive is constantly juxtaposed to the detached, violent account of the news, the form of a public video-letter opens a sphere for the shared reception of the narrative.

The Return of Storytelling: Narratives Out of the Rubble of Experience

Raad and Zaatari, in different ways, both come to occupy the position of storytellers of the Lebanese civil wars. Both depart from the archives, whether personal or institutional, as a space of reified experience and translate it back into stories, that are then transmitted and disseminated in the various material and immaterial iterations of their works. Walter Benjamin famously declared that

the tradition of storytelling had been irrevocably damaged by the shock of modern life, mechanized industrial labour and, mainly, the technological warfare whose initial testing ground was the first World War. Men who fought in the trenches, he recalls in his famous 1936 essay, had returned mute from the battlefield, “not richer, but poorer in communicable experience.”³² Already during Benjamin’s lifetime, storytelling and the novel had been replaced by information as a new mode of communication. Unlike the riddles, paradoxes and unresolved narratives of stories, information comes “always shot through with explanation,” does not need interpretation and is, therefore, bereft of that wisdom that Benjamin calls the “epic side of truth.”³³ Information also entails a change in the figure of the witness that from subject of experience is reduced to guarantor of the fact's value. As Josephine Berry Slater points out “informational communication explodes the subject of experience as the bearer of wisdom into a multiplicity of partial witnesses, none of whom can be trusted to give a coherent account of any event. (...) the storyteller (...) is demoted from the position of knower to the unreliable object of doubt.”³⁴

Starting from a similar situation of epistemological suspicion and disbelief, Raad and Zaatari pick up the fragments left behind in the rubble and debris of the civil wars experience: unattributed documents, pictures from their family albums, rumours, anecdotes, implausible but highly emblematic stories, but also pieces of information gleaned from the official media channels (newspapers clippings, TV news flashes). Their attempt at making the experiences of the wars again communicable, does not lead however to the reconstruction of a univocal traditional narrative—an attempt that we find at work instead in sectarian or partisan accounts. The heterogeneous elements, originating from different sources, are montaged together in narratives that move from the personal to the impersonal, from the individual to the collective, in a polivocality of voices that does not privilege any particular standpoint. In Raad's archival project, the “multiple guarantors of facticity” into which the storyteller has turned, are somehow recomposed through their montage and presentation within the fictional collective of the Atlas Group—a speculative, post-identitarian and post-national collectivity. Without providing simple explanations, the narrative captions

surrounding the documents resemble parables, more than factual accounts. Zaatari constructs his narrative out of the material of his personal experience (family photo-albums, diaries), methodically tracing the archaeology of a rumour. He adopts anachronistically obsolete forms, such as the fable and the letter, as an alternative to the instrumental and supposedly objective information disseminated by governmental and mass-media channels.

Although often using personal archival material, both artists, through an array of strategies such as invention of heteronyms, the abstraction of real events and the foregrounding of the document as a bearer of experience, displace their authorial voice to make room for the stories of other people. A good storyteller, according to Benjamin, spends time describing the details of things, while allowing the listener to interpret and make his or her own connections between the various elements conveyed. In the same way, these artists offer us fragments, clues that we are required to patch together in order to obtain a picture of the wars that goes beyond simple information. The new narratives—sembled out of disparate sources and materials—are internally disrupted and disjunctive. It is in their gaps, opacities and fictions that new models of identification and commonality may emerge.

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¹ Etel Adnan, *Sit Marie Rose* (Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press 1982), 75.

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- ² The 1975 attempt to assassinate Maronite Christian and Phalangist leader Pierre Gemayel and the immediate retaliation by his followers against a busload of Palestinians, are generally considered the triggering events at the roots of the successive escalation of violence. More controversy surrounds the ending date oscillating between October 1989, the date of the Taif Accord, and the Spring of 1991, when all militias, with the exclusion of Hezbollah, were disarmed. Yet given that the South of the country remained under Israeli occupation until 2000, and even after that, the ongoing hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel culminated in the 2006 July war, and considering the assassination of ex-Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005, and the scattered sectarian violence of 2008, some would argue that the Lebanese civil wars have never really ended.
- ³ Sune Haugbolle and Sanders Hastrup, "Introduction: Outlines of a New Politics of Memory in the Middle East" in *The Politics of Violence: Truth and Reconciliation in the Middle East* (London: Routledge 2008), xiii.
- ⁴ A list of artists working in the immediate aftermath of the wars should include: Walid Sadek, Bilal Khbeiz, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Tony Chakar, Walid Raad, Akram Zaatari, Jalal Toufic, Rabih Mroué, Lina Saneh, Fadi Abdallah and Marouan Rechmaoui.
- ⁵ Walid Raad, "Let's Be Honest, the Rain Helped: Excerpts from an Interview with The Atlas Group," in *Review of Photographic Memory*, ed. Jalal Toufic (Beirut: Arab Image Foundation, 2004), 44. Raad urges his viewers to approach the photographic documents included in his project, The Atlas Group, as hysterical symptoms.
- ⁶ Here and in the following: The first date is an attributions by The Atlas Group; the second refers to Raad's production of the work.
- ⁷ Raad, "Let's Be Honest, the Rain Helped," 44.
- ⁸ See Foucault's discussions on the "historical apriori" in Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon, 1972). Alan Gilbert makes this observation in "Walid Raad's Spectral Archive, Part I: Historiography as Process," *e-flux Journal* #69, January 2016.
- ⁹ The investigation into a car-bomb detonated in Beirut on 21st January, 1986, was undertaken by Raad in collaboration with writer Bilal Khbeiz and architect and visual artist Tony Chakar. This resulted in the piece *We can make rain but no one came to ask* (2003/2006).
- ¹⁰ Carry Beatty Lambert, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *October* 129 (Summer 2009): 54.
- ¹¹ In his structuralist literary analysis Foucault replaces the subject-author with the author-function. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" (1969) in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 141 – 160, 158.
- ¹² Walid Raad, Interview with Alan Gilbert, *Bomb Magazine* 81 (Fall 2002)
- ¹³ Besides being a feature of "administrative aesthetic," the repetition compulsion or unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind is also part of what Freud has called "traumatic neurosis."

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- ¹⁴ Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or not at All. Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 33.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* 193
- ¹⁶ Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet* (Penguin Modern Classics: 2002).
- ¹⁷ It is interesting to note that these old photographs are of Raad's father, so that, as Gilbert perfectly puts it, “a significant family document is depersonalized before being snuck in as disguised autobiography”. Gilbert, “Walid Raad’s Spectral Archive.”
- ¹⁸ I take inspiration for this comparison from Andreas Huyssen’s similar considerations on the work of German writer and filmmaker Alexander Kluge. Andreas Huyssen, “An Analytical Storyteller in the Course of Time”, *October* 46 (Autumn, 1988): 116-128, 121. Influenced by the theoretical work of the Frankfurt School, Kluge looks at the crisis of subjectivity under the impact of fascism and modernization. Located in another geopolitical and historical context, Raad reflects on the crisis of the subject as bearer of experience and testimony in the aftermath of the civil wars.
- ¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History. On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 14. In *Problems in General Linguistics*, Emile Benveniste opposes narrative to discourse. In this frame, history for its reliance on narrative strategies close to literature sits somewhat uneasily between science and non-science. Rancière, in his reading of the *Annales* School, a French school of quantitative analytic historiography especially interested in long-term social history, shows how these historians sought to deregulate the opposition between discourse and narrative, by deploying discourse to write non-conventional historical narratives.
- ²⁰ Initially, before developing a body of works for exhibition spaces, Raad performed *The Atlas Group* on the European alternative theatre circuit and at independent film festivals. For his recent solo show at Moma, New York (2015-16), the artist has led daily guided visits of the exhibition. The guided visit should be considered as a performative piece in itself, entitled *Walkthrough* (2016).
- ²¹ The shift from Foucault's interrogation of the ways in which knowledge is produced to who has the right to participate in its production can be detected in Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London; New York: Continuum, 2004).
- ²² Raad's dissertation for the Visual Studies program at Rochester Institute of Technology, entitled “Beirut... a la folie: A Cultural Analysis of the Abduction of Westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s,” compared the autobiographies published by the American hostages with interviews he himself made with Arab former prisoners held in Israeli detention camps.
- ²³ See for instance: Sarah Rogers, “Forging History, Performing Memory: Walid Ra’ad’s *The Atlas Project*,” *Parachute* 108 (October/November/December 2002): 75.
- ²⁴ Vered Maimon, “The Third Citizen: On Models of Criticality in Contemporary Artistic Practices”, *October* 129

(Summer 2009), 102.

²⁵ Ivi

²⁶ Ivi

²⁷ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 35. This missing political collectivity is, according to Osborne, that of the globally transnational. Operating within the global trans-national spaces of contemporary art, the Atlas Group transcends its specifically national focus. Its subject-structure opposes at a speculative level the subject structure of capital—the only “subject” actually functioning at the level of the global.

²⁸ The work was presented at the Lebanese Pavilion during the 2013 Venice Biennale.

²⁹ Akram Zaatari, *A Conversation with an Imaginary Filmmaker Named Avi Mograbi* (Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Kadist Art Foundation, Sternberg Press, 2012).

³⁰ It is interesting to note that the publication is printed in the form of a newspaper, replacing information with personal and vernacular material.

³¹ Quinn Latimer, Akram Zaatari, *Film as a Form of Writing* (Brussels: Wiels, 2014), 15.

³² Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 1935-38, ed. Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 144.

³³ *Ibid.*, 146.

³⁴ Josephine Berry Slater, “Epistemic Panic and the Problem of Life,” *mute magazine*, 13 Feb 2014

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