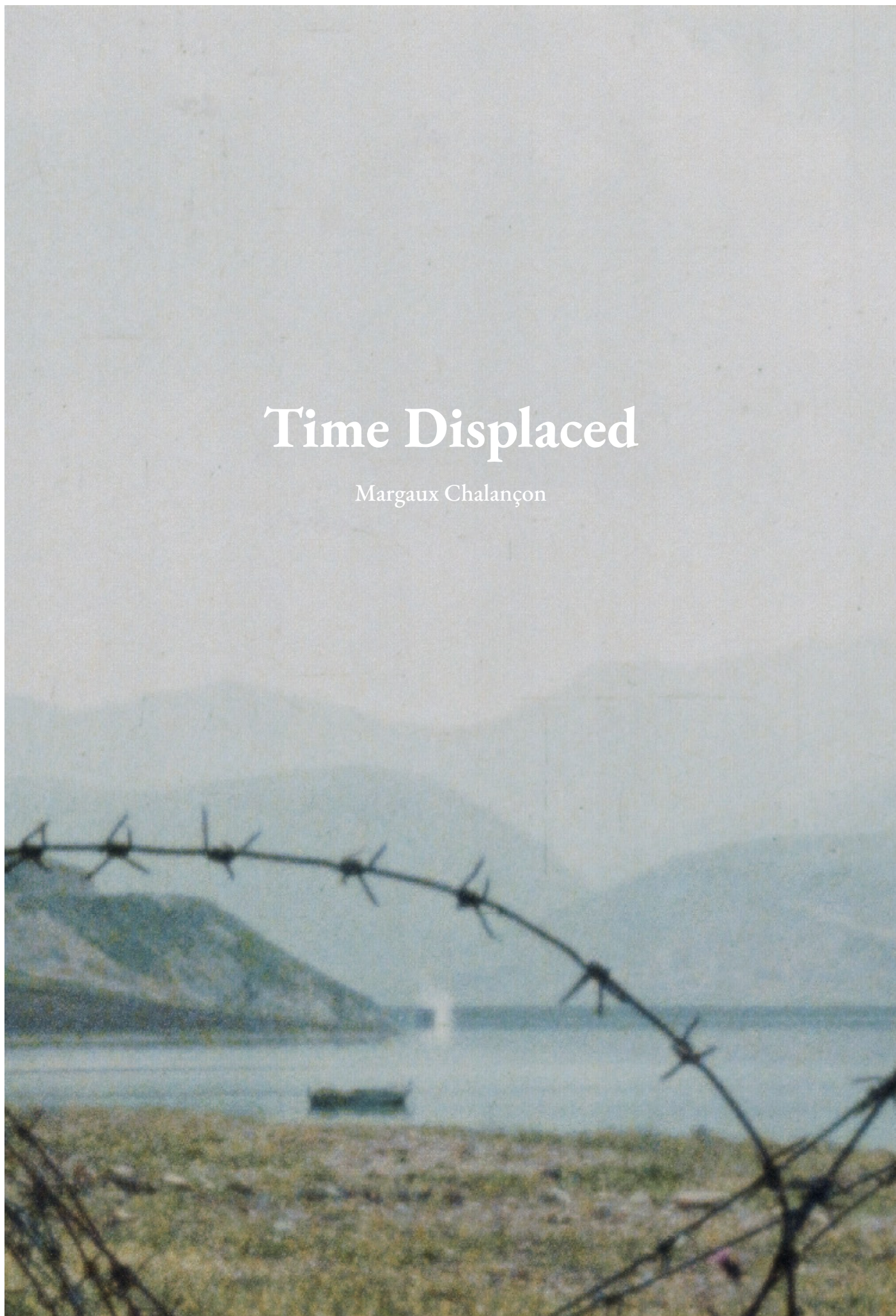


# Time Displaced

Margaux Chalançon





Time Displaced: an attempt at restoring  
*Waheb al Horriyah* (Kais al-Zubaidi, 1989)

Margaux Chalançon

Tutor: Carolina Cappa



Film Preservation Studies - 2021-2022





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# Preface

I didn't expect that working on *Wahab al Horriyah/The Freedom Giver* (Kais al-Zubaidi, 1989), a feature documentary commissioned by the Lebanese Communist Party, would make so many emotions re-surface. It has always been hard for me not to be affected by the images I'm watching, even if in an academic context. This year - studying Film Preservation at EQZE, hasn't been any different. Did this effect prevent me from seeing the images correctly? Is there space for *feeling* when dealing with archives in a professional way? For my masters' project - an attempt at restoring the film, instead of trying to separate my work from my emotions (if it is even humanly possible), I decided to follow them.

[Emotion] is first and foremost a shock, an "unexpectedness," and one of the foundation walls of the faculty of understanding. There is no intelligence without emotion, no emotion without intelligence. In fact, the felt emotion fractures the usual devices of the research. It opens between oneself and the visited object a real interrogation, and gives the desire to explain an unusual dimension [...] Indeed, it is not a question of making fusion between the document and oneself, which would prevent one to think, but of constituting reciprocity with the object, where distance introduces meaning. There is here an operative, not passive, attitude that captures the written words in a double movement: to make the analysis of what was and to accompany it with a reflection on what can cause a "disturbance."<sup>1</sup>

1. Farge, Arlette. "La Part De L'Emotion." *Socio-Anthropologie*, vol. 27, 2013, pp. 99-101. (my translation)

The following text not only presents the journey of my restoration work, it also describes and analyzes the main emotion I felt this year, a sort of temporal disorientation caused by the many images I've seen. Some of them provoked intense emotional reactions, which first came as a surprise. I had seen Lebanese films from that time period before (during the 6 years I've lived and worked in Beirut) but it was the first time that they induced such reactions. This shift in my response was easy to explain: I realized it was the first time I was seeing past images of destroyed Beirut since the port explosion on August 4 2020. And that changed everything. Suddenly, these images echo something similar I have seen with my own eyes, without a camera in between us. Many times, I wondered if by watching

such images on repeat for this project, I was voluntarily inflicting pain on myself, trying to be in the images, trying to go back to that date again. I'm putting any sense of privacy and shame aside by saying this, it is the truth. It has constantly been present in the work I've been doing, there is no reason to hide it.

Back in April 2022, before taking a break for the Easter holidays, my friend Hikaru (who studies filmmaking at EQZE) suggested that I write a diary to document my work on Kais' film. I liked the idea, and thought it would be the most adequate form to shape what I wanted to share. In this diary, different themes cross each other's paths: audiovisual archives in Lebanon, film restoration in general, the development of my restoration work on the film and the time displacement caused by it.

What the diary says, whether filmed or written, is that the desire to remember forces one to choose what one remembers, and thus creates oblivion. And even, creates oblivion twice as much: there is what has not been preserved in the diary and will be forgotten; and there is what has been fixed and will, subtly, change its nature, to become memory, that is to say reified memory, that is to say oblivion.<sup>2</sup>

2. Aumont, Jacques. *L'attrait de l'Oubli*. Editions Yellow Now, 2017. (my translation)

Trying to reconstitute a film, itself trying to reconstitute a series of historical events so that they (both the events and the film) are not forgotten. In this process, how many details have been erased? How many stories will be forgotten, probably forever? My work this year has challenged me to reconsider the linearity of time. Looking back, I find it amusing that all of this happened while studying at EQZE, which describes itself as the school of the three tenses of cinema, aiming to "identify and define a single view of cinema that links the past, present and future."

November 2022, Munich.







Thursday, January 6, 2022

## *Wahab al Horriyah*

I had a meeting with Naja Al Achkar from *Nadi Lekol Nas*, in their office at Mansion in Zarif, a Beirut neighborhood. *Nadi Lekol Nas* is an organization aiming to preserve and transmit (mainly cinematographic) cultural heritage from the Levantine region. 2 weeks ago, Liana Kassir, my contact there, gave me a tour of their office and showed me the type of film material they have, as well as where and how they store it. The films are in old, mostly unlabelled, metal cans, stacked on top of each other in what seems to be never-ending towers of film cans, in a corridor. We then visited the new space they got in Hamra, where they will relocate soon, along with their film collection. The space is bigger, safer, and can offer better storage conditions, so I was told. Beirut is a coastal city, hot most of the year, running on private electricity generators (when there are no fuel shortages). I immediately wonder: will there be 24/7 electricity to maintain a stable temperature and humidity level in the storage room, as per the “international recommendations?” Not anytime soon, I suppose. In any case, they’re doing the best they can. I feel bad that my school doesn’t expose us to how we can preserve films when there is no 24/7 electricity, for example. That’s the case in many cities. What does that mean about film preservation and the way it is taught? Will most of what I learn this year become useless in Beirut? *Nadi* seems excited to collaborate with me, in any way possible, I feel more overwhelmed than anything else, to be honest. Anyways, I had asked Liana if they needed help to digitize a film, offering to use the school’s equipment to scan one, that way I will be able to practice film digitization, and it could benefit a small structure like *Nadi*, which doesn’t have access to a scanner easily.



Figure 1



So today I went to pick up the 16mm copy they would like me to digitize: a film by Kais al-Zubaidi, called *Wahab al Hurriyah/The Freedom Giver*, I've never heard either names before. They just got the 16mm print back from Germany, where the director has been living for many years. It is somewhere else in the office, so we go get it. It was set apart from other films, in a black carton box, on top of a small printer, sitting below a desk covered with piles of papers. I ask if it is a positive or a negative copy. They don't know. I am told the film is 1h30 long and was done in the 80s. I open the box and check, it is a positive copy, without sound. There are 2 reels in the box. There is another box, containing the incomplete sound on a 16mm magnetic support. But it took us time to reach this conclusion. There are some writings on the box, we are not sure whether it is in Dutch or German, we try to translate what's written using Google translate. The label confirms it is reel #1 out of 2 for the sound, I decide that I will not take the magnetic sound with me, since I am not sure that the school has the equipment to digitize it. They also mention a DVD and a VHS, I ask if the DVD has been made from the VHS, and they confirm it has. They suggest I use the sound from the DVD/VHS if needed. The conversation is a bit confusing because I'm speaking in English. My friend Jenn is there with me and translates to Arabic for Naja, Nesreen - the person in charge of administration, speaks in English with us, and it seems that the specialized vocabulary is getting lost in translation. In a one-hour-long conversation, I try to ask as many questions as possible to understand what this film is, where it is coming from, how and why it is in this room with us today. I felt like my questions were not regarded as important. I try not to let this demotivate me, I ask if it is possible to get in touch with the director and I am told that yes, but warned that he is 80 years old, sick, with a back injury and a failing memory, yet still aware. I ask what has been agreed with the director in terms of what will be done with the film: it needs to be digitized, subtitled in English and a digital version is to be created so that the film can be preserved. We sign an agreement saying that I take the 16mm with me. I commit to digitizing the film and I am asked if I can do more, such as color correction, etc. I don't want to promise anything I won't have time to do, since I am not sure what my final masters' project will entail. Before we leave, they mention that September 16th is the anniversary of the Lebanese Communist Party, the organization that commissioned the film to Kais al-Zubaidi and gave them the distribution rights. They would like to screen the restored film on that occasion, especially since Karim Mroué, the film producer, is 93 years old. It would be nice for him and Kais to see the film again before it's too late. I take the box and leave. I don't know where all of this will take me.



Figure 2

While writing this entry, I wanted to check if Mansion was considered to be located in Hamra or Zarif, so I opened Wikipedia and found out that it was previously referred to as the Ziade palace, which dates back to 1860 and was bought by the Ziade brothers in 1930. The same Ziade as May Ziade, the feminist poet, writer, and essayist. I remember seeing a documentary about her a few years ago in Beirut, she fascinated me back then. I'm quite surprised to cross her path again, unexpectedly. One of her brothers convinced May to come back from Cairo to Beirut, and a few days after she arrived at the palace in 1939, she was committed to an asylum in Hazmieh against her own will and her brothers tried to gain control of her estate because she was "unable to manage her properties."<sup>1</sup> Later on, during the civil war (1975-1990), the palace was pillaged and occupied by militias and was left, just like so many other 19th-century palaces in Beirut, with a bullet-peppered facade and in poor condition. Maybe, just like the Ziade palace, this copy of *Waheb al Horriyah* will have a lot of stories to tell.

Today, on Mansion's website, we can read: "Mansion is, first and foremost, an experiment in shared dwelling within a gated city of private car parks, abandoned and fenced spaces, and deteriorating or derelict buildings. In a word, it is a *slow* building, one that has avoided the dominant impulses of Beirut's postwar reconstruction, which typically demolished existing structures for speculation, or refurbished them into exclusive and lavish "heritage" spaces. In this way, Mansion is an attempt at *creative reuse*, the reclaiming of divested or "failed" spaces for new practices of habitation, public access, encounter, and production. Where the logic of fast profit ruthlessly damaged neighborhood relations at incalculable cost to Beirutis, Mansion yearns to be a venue of community structure and connection, simultaneously supporting individual and collective practices."<sup>2</sup> I wonder if a film restoration can be compared to a building restoration. I remember reading about how film restoration is different from other arts' restorations, due to the medium's specificities. But this is a whole other topic. In any case, similarly to Mansion's intentions, I hope that my work with the film won't romanticize the past. Maybe I will restore the film fully, maybe not. But regardless, I'm happy this journey started at the Ziade palace.



Figure 3

1. "Ziade Palace." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation.

2. "مَنْشُون." Mansion.



Figure 4





Figure 5

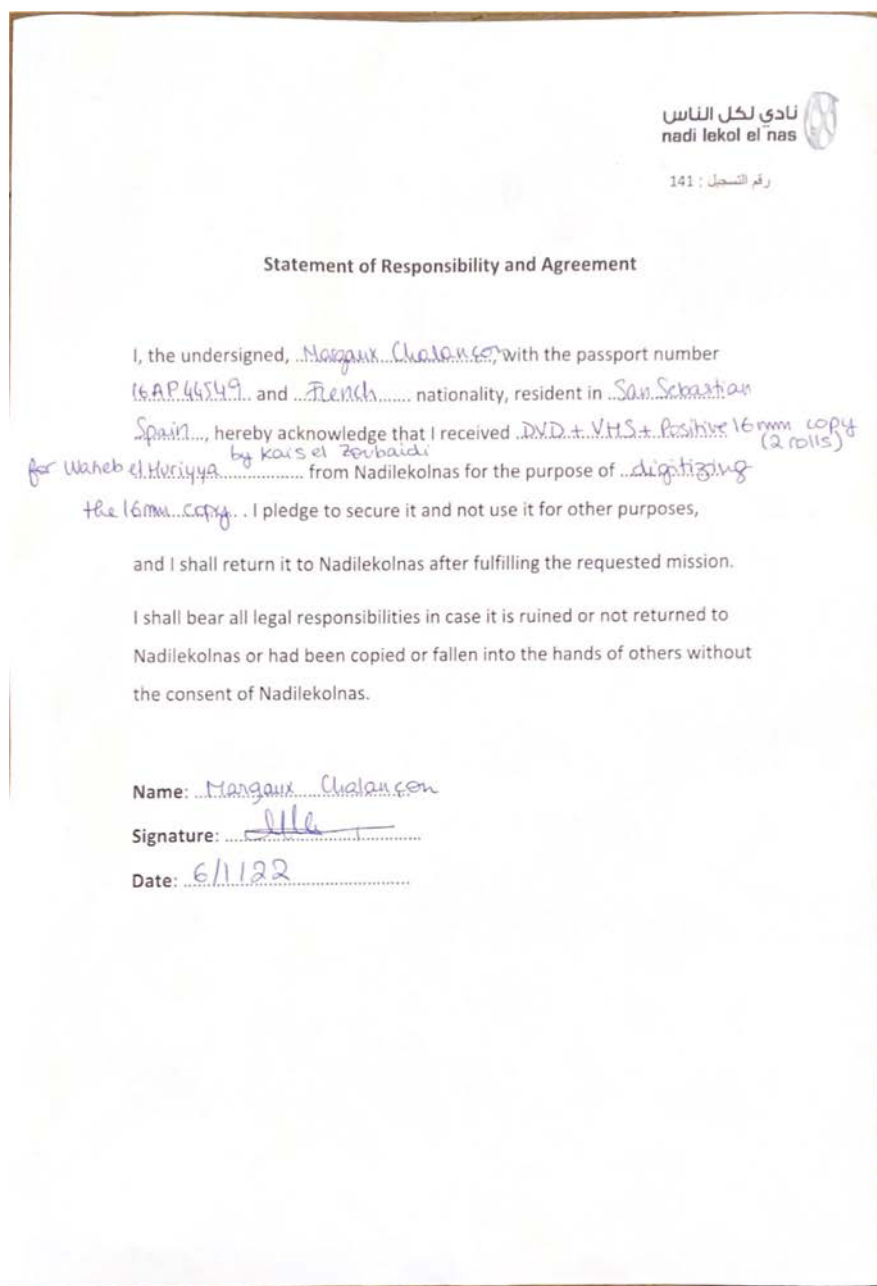


Figure 6

Friday, January 14

## What we *can* do

*We can't apply first world solutions to third world problems.*<sup>3</sup>

— Carolina Cappa

3. Cappa, Carolina. "It's Almost Too Late." Eye International Conference 2022, May 2022, Amsterdam, Eye Filmmuseum.

I'm back in San Sebastian, attending classes. I read a beautiful text today for Carolina Cappa's class (preservation of film materials) titled "The Gray Zone" by Ross Lipman. He places subjectiveness and choices at the heart of the restoration and preservation practices. In order to restore a film, one has to fully embrace the subjectivity of their position as a restorer and be prepared to abandon standards of any kind (even though one uses and respects them), to be in accordance with the project's own specificities and needs.<sup>4</sup> Since the beginning of the year, I've been reading about international standards and recommendations. They are definitely not "international," considering they are written by and for the West. Lebanon, for example, struggles with many obstacles preventing it from applying these recommendations. The ongoing economic crisis makes it extremely expensive to obtain 24/7 electricity, meaning the ideal storage conditions needed for photochemical film material can't easily be attained. There is also no possibility to scan film for "preservation purposes" in the country, due to the lack of equipment and technical know-how. To make it short: access to resources, especially financial ones, is extremely limited. There is no public funding for film preservation. Even though a national film archive exists, no one really knows what they do, the extent of their collection nor their mission. It feels like a ghostly institution, its existence resembles that of an urban legend: it is hard to meet people who actually could talk to the person in charge, even more so to find people who entered the building. Nour Ouayda did. I used to work with her from time to time when I was post-producing in Beirut, so I met up with her last month. She is in charge of the *Cinematheque Beirut* project, by the Metropolis Association, which aims to assemble and preserve Lebanese and Arab cinema, similarly to *Nadi Lekol Nas*. While the later is closer to distribution, *Cinematheque Beirut* is more about organizing and sharing knowledge. Nour and I managed to sit together at a bar, in the middle of that one week during the Christmas holidays when everyone in Beirut was a Covid contact case. We talked about how cultural associations could be better suited than the state to preserve Lebanese cinema, considering the government's capacity to erase what does not fit the dominant political discourse at any given time. Which reminds me: in Lebanon, every film that is to be

4. Lipman, Ross. "The Gray Zone: A Restorationist's Travel Guide." *The Moving Image*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2010, pp. 1–29.

projected publicly needs to pass by the Lebanese General Security, who can decide to censor some scenes or refuse to grant the needed screening permit for an entire film.\* We also talked about the importance of trying to find solutions based on the Lebanese context and its films.

Due to the lack of public funding, co-productions are very common in Lebanon. This naturally affects the circulation of films and the localization of the film material [...] Filmmakers have strong relationships with foreign countries because they migrate there. There is a continuous back and forth between Lebanon and the hosting countries as Lebanese filmmakers leave home to study and live abroad and come back to work and shoot their films in Lebanon. This creates very particular patterns and maps of circulation between Lebanon and other countries. It would be great to start thinking how we could set up an infrastructure capable of receiving and storing films in stable conditions with a view to repatriation [...] How can we stop comparing ourselves to an “ideal” film archive, and - rather than always be thinking, “what should we do?” - ask “what can we do?” What can we do with our own means, our own specificities, and our strong relationships to the materials we want to preserve? It is not always easy to make that leap of imagination.<sup>5</sup>

5. Nour Ouayda in Morin, Lea, et al. “Non-Aligned Film Archives.” *Journal of Film Preservation*, no. 106, Apr. 2022. pp. 33-34.

Asking this question, in my opinion, appears to be the only way out of paralyzing comparisons and impossible compliance with unattainable “international” standards and recommendations. It echoes Lipman’s article which, although it does not discuss anything related to archives with limited resources, defends a theoretical approach to film preservation and restoration that could be useful for such organizations. According to him, film preservation is, in and of itself, resting on paradoxes, and the strength of a restoration lies in its process. “[His] basic principle is to allow the subject to help determine its own method of preservation.”<sup>6</sup> Reading this was quite refreshing. Not to dismiss recommendations all together, but this is what I find much more adequate for archives such as *Nadi Lekol Nas*: placing specific needs and available resources at the forefront of the work, and letting them determine the adequate methodology rather than focusing on what a preservation or restoration should or shouldn’t be.

6. Lipman. p 18.

\* Some previous motives for censorship: same-sex kiss, same-sex relationship, filming in Israel, including Israeli actors, produced by an Israeli company.

Tuesday, March 15

## 1982/2022

This past month has been quite loaded with classes, leaving me without enough time to focus on *Wahab al Horriyah*. To get back into it, I had a phone call with Liana Kassir earlier today. We talked about the film and I asked some general questions, but it wasn't as conclusive as I would've hoped. However, I did manage to get some new info:

- *Nadi* paid a fee to the director in order to work on the film, as a way to support him financially given his precarious situation. They now own the distribution rights of the film, as agreed with the producer Karim Mroue (an important figure of the Lebanese Communist Party, at the time director of cultural affairs for the Party)
- Kais provided *Nadi* with both the DVD and the 16mm print, but the VHS provenance is not clear.
- It is not known if other copies of the film exist in Lebanon or abroad, and it is assumed that the one I have with me is the only surviving one.

Before we hung up, we agreed that I would be put in touch with Kais, for me to better understand his work and the context of both the film and this 16mm copy. After that, I was excited to start working on the film so I went to the school to extract the file from the DVD and digitize the VHS (either way, I needed to digitize a magnetic tape for a class so I used this one for the exercise... quite convenient). The VHS has a sticky label “المقاومة الوطنية اللبنانية” *Lebanese National Resistance Front*. I noticed it is also written on the top of the tape.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

I have never heard that name before, and I had understood the film to be commissioned by the Lebanese Communist Party, so i'm a bit confused. After a quick search, I find a newspaper article from 2012, written for the 30 years anniversary of the Lebanese National Resistance Front. I can't believe 10 years have passed already. The title catches my attention: "Monuments That Do Not Remind Us of September in Beirut." It's difficult not to be reminded of the war in Beirut, many of the buildings in the city still carry its scars, literally.

On a sidewalk no one uses, there is a small plaque, barely noticed by passersby and residents of Beirut's bustling Zarif neighborhood. The "Ayyoub Station Plaque," named after the nearby petrol station, commemorates a successful military operation by the Lebanese National Resistance Front (better known by its Arabic acronym, Jammoul) against the Israeli Army on the sixth day of the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982. Here, the memory of that fateful day is fading. When *Al-Akhbar* asked some local residents, many had heard a version of the story: someone, apparently a communist, was killed here in September 1982 outside the station. "Something must have happened here," says Ali, who has spent half his life in the area. Some words then jog a half-buried memory: "operation," "unknown resistance fighters," "resistance front," "1982." Slowly he is able to piece together a story he recognizes. Others have no idea what the sign is for. [...T]hose who remember are but a few. They are considered nostalgic for wanting to protect the memory of such symbolic places. They know about the series of operations carried out by the Communist Party at Bustros Pharmacy, Ayyoub Station, the Palestinian Liberation Organization building, and others. They know how the party inspired Beirut to resist when most of the city had given up hope. On 16 September 1982, the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) made its famous call calling on "everyone" to join the Lebanese National



Resistance Front against the Israeli enemy that had just invaded the city. [...]he LCP decided it would begin carrying out “resistance operations.” [...] And the enemy withdrew from Beirut after less than ten days. But the young men and women did not end their struggle against the Israelis and many followed them to South Lebanon. [...] Jammoul’s military operations would end in the 1990s, yielding way to the growing resistance of Hezbollah, which picked up right where Jammoul left. In May 2000, less than 18 years after Jammoul’s call to military resistance against occupation, Israeli troops would withdraw from the majority of the land they had occupied in Lebanon.<sup>7</sup>

I understand now the importance of the film for the Lebanese Communist Party and why *Nadi* wanted to work on it this year. If by 2012, Zarif residents had already forgotten about the 1982 first act, then what is left today of the Lebanese National Resistance Front in people’s memories?



Figure 10



Figure 11

7. Hamieh, Rajana. “Monuments That Do Not Remind Us of September in Beirut.” *Al-Akbbar*, 16 Sept. 2012.

Wednesday, March 22

# Money

The financial aspect of the restoration of Lebanese films has been on my mind for a while now. Due to the lack of resources, a few films are being restored, though always in Europe, through collaborations that sustain Lebanon's dependency on rich foreign institutions to take care of its film heritage. *Nadi Lekol Nas*, for example, has previously collaborated with the Cinemathèque Française, Arsenal (a Berlin-based film and video institute) and Cinemathèque Royale Belge. Most of the time, the films remain physically there once the work is finished.

Who is making money out of this restoration? These factors determine which films will be restored and which will not and influence the way restoration is undertaken. For example, films that "sell" might be prioritized and restored in ways that answer the market's demands but disregard any ethical questions that arise.<sup>8</sup>

8. Morin, 2022, pp. 33-34.

Nour Ouayda's mention of market and demand makes me think about the different artists and structures I approached in Lebanon to try to find material I could work on. All of them suggested movies made during and about the civil war. This can't be a coincidence. Is it because the pre-civil war films have been lost and this is the only film heritage left? Or because this is where the demand lies? But who is demanding exactly? I'm reminded of Karen Gracy's description of the hard to dislodge dominant paradigm:

In our current worldview, society relies largely upon cultural heritage institutions to select which material is most worthy of expanding limited resources on its care [...] In many ways, cultural institutions are articulations of particular worldviews of certain segments of society. Communities, particularly those in the developed world, rely upon trusted cultural institutions to perform the task of cultural heritage valuation for us. These institutions are often the cultural entities with which we are familiar, for example, libraries, archives, and museums. They also may be other types of forces such as the market, which determines economic value of cultural objects, or religious institutions, which designate certain objects with sacred value.<sup>9</sup>

9. Gracy, Karen F. "Moving Image Preservation and Cultural Capital." *Library Trends*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2007, pp. 187-189.

Tuesday, March 29

## What year is it?

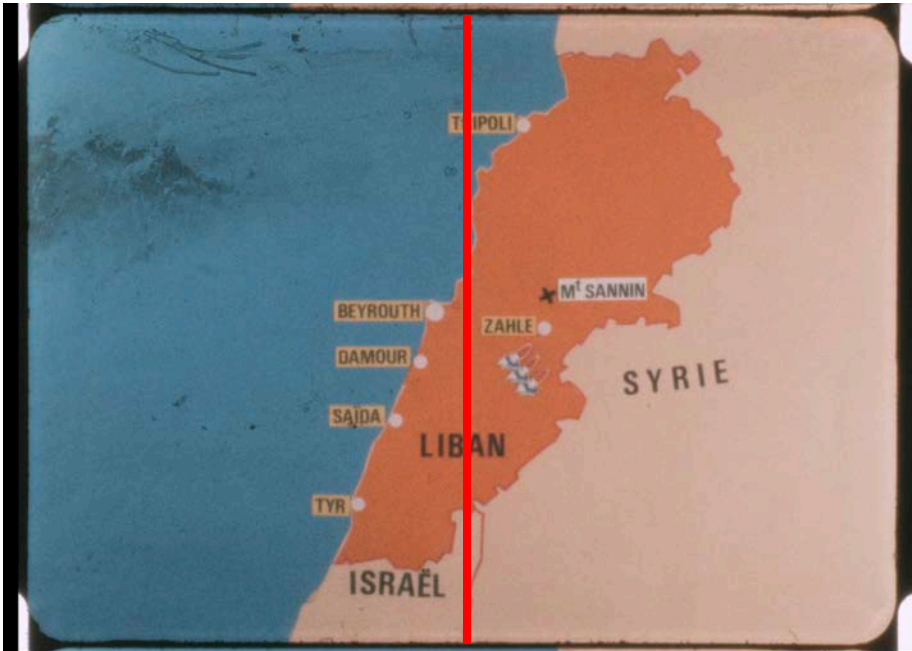
Mathilde Rouxel called me and asked me to help her team. She's an independent researcher taking care of the late Lebanese filmmaker Jocelyne Saab's early films restoration.<sup>10</sup> Having worked with her before in Beirut and having been involved in the initial stages of this collaborative and experimental restoration project, I accepted. Mathilde's idea for this project is to train Lebanese people interested in digital restoration so that they can work on Jocelyne's films from Lebanon. Some of them went to Marseille, where they were trained by European experts and then returned to Beirut to train other people in their turn. The team started working on the digital cleaning with an expensive restoration software called HS-Art Diamant, for which she managed to get some licenses, but not enough to finish on time before the Saab's retrospective in 2 months in Montreal.

Digital cleaning is something I would like to learn and we happen to have a license at the school. I'm writing this entry and a week has already passed since I started working on *Bilan de la Guerre* (Jocelyne Saab, 1982).

10. See Rouxel, Mathilde. "Itinéraire en pointillés d'un processus de restauration collectif." *Hors Champ*, 2022.



Digital Cleaning - *Bilan de la Guerre* (Jocelyne Saab, 1982)



Digital Cleaning - *Bilan de la Guerre* (Jocelyne Saab, 1982)

I did some trials with the software to learn how to use it (the Diamant class is set up for later this year) and started on the 7 minutes film. I still have 1 week to go if I want to meet the deadline.

The short film was shot in the 1982 summer, during the Beirut siege of the Israeli invasion. It exists in the same time and space as *Wahab al Horriyah*. I couldn't watch the film fully before starting the work. The images are too graphic for me. On the phone, Mathilde had warned me. "I hope you won't be too triggered by the images, they are quite hard to watch." I replied jokingly that I will be mainly focused on the pixels composing the image. "I will send you the file without sound anyways, it's easier that way." She was right to warn me, and I'm relieved I don't have the sound. Sometimes I don't even know what I'm supposed to be looking at. Did I just see a burnt baby corpse? Today I reached a particularly difficult-to-watch shot. It is a room, probably a basement, filled with small-sized corpses. It seems that this image is coming from a TV monitor, and that Jocelyne filmed the screen: we can see the horizontal lines of the cathodic tubes, making it a bit hard to distinguish details. I need to clean a big stain, but I don't know which body part is supposed to be behind the stain, because of how much the bodies are damaged. Is it a leg or an arm? I cried several times already. Not just because of the atrocity of the images in and of themselves, but also because I'm seeing the same destroyed streets I've seen after the Beirut port explosion last year. If I didn't know the film was from 1982, I could have sworn it was Beirut post-blast 2020.









Thursday, March 31

## Detective Work

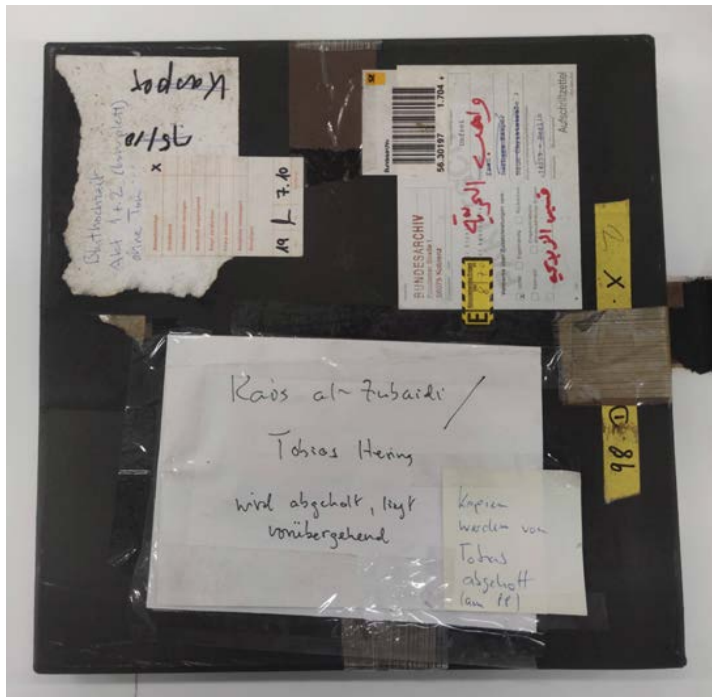


Figure 12

I didn't want to leave for the holidays without having checked the box and the reels of the film I will work on. So I started by closely examining the box. I felt like a private detective trying to make sense of the clues in front of me. 2 allies: Google translate on my laptop (most of the writings are in German) and my phone camera.

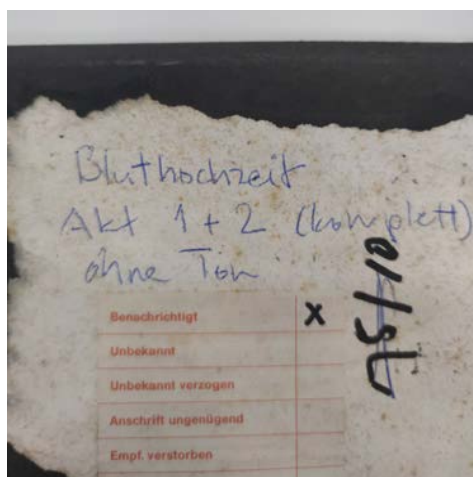


Figure 13

There is what seems to be a German title on the box “*Bluthochzeit*” which translates to “Blood Wedding.” Is that the German title of *Wahab al Horriyah*? Why would it have a German title? Under it: Akt 1+2 (komplett) ohne ton = part 1+2 (complete) without sound. This confirms what I’ve seen in Beirut: the box contains 2 reels, and there is no sound on the reels.

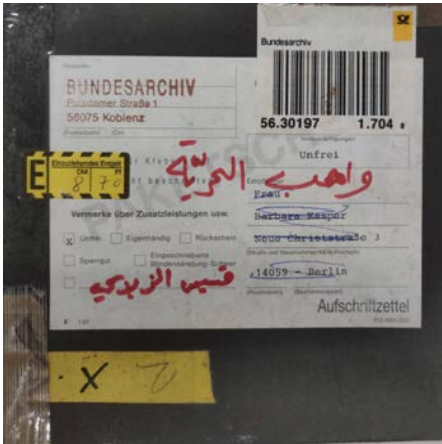


Figure 14

The box has a label from Bundesarchiv (the German state archives). Was the film stored there? Or is this a repurposed box? In red marker, in Arabic, “*Wahab al-Hurriyah, Kais al-Zubaidi.*”

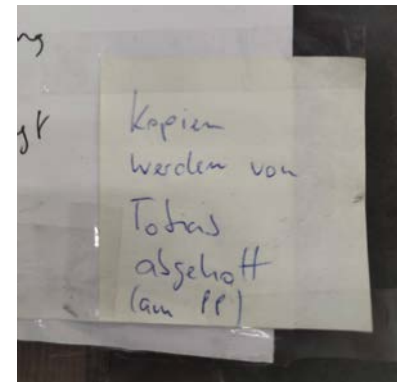
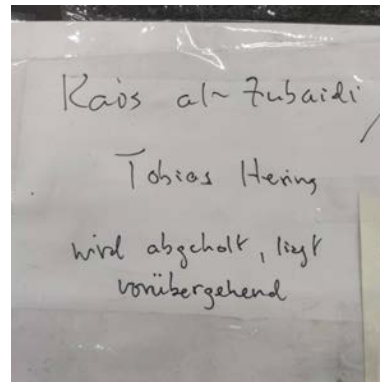


Figure 15

The 2 notes state that the box is there temporarily and that it will be picked up by Tobias Hering. Liana had mentioned that the film stayed at Arsenal temporarily, the note is probably coming from there then, and Tobias was the Arsenal point of contact? I found out that Tobias curated a retrospective on some of Kais’ films so it would make sense.

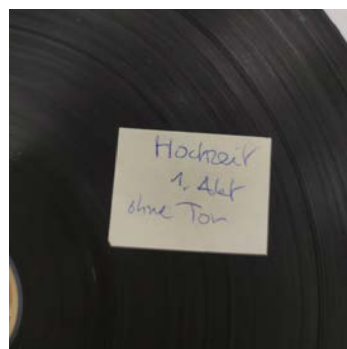


Figure 16

The 2 reels were contained in a transparent plastic bag, which I removed, since I was told it wasn’t necessarily a better storage method. On each reel, a post-it with part of the German title and the number of the reels.



After this fun little investigation, I decided to have a look at the reels for the first time. I am so mad at myself for not having checked them before because this is when things got tricky... I set up the inspection table, to be able to unwind the reels and look at the film more closely. To my surprise, the element I have between my hands has a lot of splices and different film stocks. Almost each shot has a different film stock and there is a tape splice in between each shot. It is pretty clear it is a work print, like an edit print, like the skeleton of the film. This is not the final print. It will take a very long time to inspect it, check the state of all the splices (I started counting them at first but there are so many that it is pointless) and look at the different film stocks used, to try to understand this material. I should have checked the reels before. To which stage of the post-production process does this copy correspond to? Is it even the final edit? I need to scan it to know. But I need to prepare it before I can run it through a scanner. Can I even use the school scanner considering all the splices the copy has? Is the Filmfabriek scanner at the school stable enough for this copy? I'm frustrated and all these new questions drained me... I will leave it for now and worry about all of this when I come back from holidays. I still have the work on *Bilan de la Guerre* to finish.

Wednesday, April 6

## Definitions

Today I had to present the advances on my project to the school, what its focus will be, which steps I've taken etc. I've been so focused on the digital cleaning of *Bilan de la Guerre* lately that I haven't had time to work on this presentation. I spent the last 2 weeks in front of a computer, on my own, so explaining things required more effort than usual. I presented in English and the 2 tutors answered in Spanish, I replied back switching between Spanish and English. The exchange was frustrating and tiring. The communication wasn't fluid, I felt like we were using the same words but that they meant different things for each of us. Most of the conversation turned around the use of the term "restoration," and whether it adequately fits the work I'm doing this year. I felt it was a waste of time, a sort of inception in which I was stuck in the pages of some of the books I've been reading, like *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace*. In the first chapter, the various authors struggle and disagree on the use of a word instead of another to define their work, for pages on end.<sup>11</sup> They argue that using the wrong terminology affects how the importance of preservation is understood. They're right of course, but all I could think about was how ridiculous this debate would seem to someone who doesn't belong to this academic circle. The authors claim that their mission is to ensure people understand what cinema is. This is the question that is still being discussed, how many years after Andre Bazin?<sup>12</sup> And so today I was stuck in one of those debates. I didn't really understand why, at this stage of the project, semantics were the main point of focus.

11. Cherchi Usai, Paolo, et al. *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace*. SYNEMA Gesellschaft für Film Und Medien, 2020.

12. Bazin, André. *Qu'est-Ce Que Le Cinema?* Les Editions Du Cerf, 1969.

Thursday, April 7

## “He needs to see”

*Compassion and suffering are incommensurable. Before the ruins of a bombed-out building, there is an immense gulf between those who lament what they're seeing, and those who lament what they no longer see.*<sup>13</sup>

— Roger Assaf

13. Text by Roger Assaf in *Beyrouth ma ville* (Jocelyne Saab, 1982).

Touda Bouanani, whom I had met at the Punto de Vista Festival, came to the school to present her work on her dad's archives. Ahmed Bouanani was a Moroccan filmmaker who wrote a book on the history of cinema in Morocco, though it wasn't publishing when he was alive. Touda and some other researchers edited the surviving manuscripts and published the book.<sup>14</sup> Since she doesn't speak Spanish, I offered to translate her presentation from French to Spanish to the other students. I loved doing it. Afterward, we went for lunch together with Pablo La Parra, and got to know each other a bit more. She mentioned she had a trip planned to Beirut in June, maybe I will be there on the same dates as her...? I had to finish working on *Bilan de la Guerre*, she politely asked if she could sit with me while I reviewed my work and launched the final exports. I felt like I couldn't say no even though I knew this was going to slow me down. I'm happy I didn't refuse. We talked about so many things while I was working: her childhood in Morocco, my life in Lebanon, how we both feel about these images of destroyed Beirut, our interests for moving-image archives, my Algerian grandfather who emigrated to France and never went back to his country, all the questions we couldn't ask our respective grandfathers. What do we do when archives don't exist? When there seems to be nothing to look back to?

14. Bouanani, Ahmed. *Une Histoire du cinéma au Maroc de 1907 à 1986*. Kulte, 2020.

I could see that she was quite distraught by the violence of the images. I mentioned an anecdote my friend Hashem had once shared with me as he was explaining how the West sanitizes images of war, refusing to show graphic content. One day, when he was 6 years old, he visited his Iraqi grandmother Amal in Mosul. The TV was set on a channel broadcasting footage of Palestinian children corpses. Hashem's mom asked the grandmother to change the channel, judging the images were not suited for a little boy. No, said Amal, let him watch, he needs to see, he needs to know.

Sunday, April 17

# Forgetting

*Really, the things we remember are those we forget.*<sup>15</sup>

— G. K. Chesterton

15. Chesterton, Gilbert Keith. *Autobiography*. House of Stratus, 2001.

Right before I left San Sebastian for the Easter holidays (Semana Santa, as they call it here), I went to the Medilab library to see if anything attracted me, and I found this little book called *L'Attrait de l'Oubli* by Jacques Aumont. I recognized it because I've read another book from the same collection, which was called *L'Attrait de la ruine* by Andre Habib. Hoping it would be similar, in its analysis of a trope of cinematic representations through specific examples, I decided to take it with me to Porto. Aumont proposes a relation between cinema and memory which I found quite relevant when applied to movies documenting traumatic events, such as *Wakeb al Horriyah*. He argues that cinema does not create memory but rather forgetfulness, that the enemy of memory is the making of memories, because it turns them into narrations and fictions.

If I film an event, I freeze it, it stops being there to be replaced by its image. We can say that it is a trace of it, a sign or even a monument; it is still replacing it, forever, just like we know it is the case for “important” events, about which memories are indissociable from *mythical aspects*.

History isn't written in advance: making history is not about finding a hidden or a lost story, it is about advancing a proposition, itself based on the trust placed in the thinking capacity of the very form of the discourse.<sup>16</sup>

16. Aumont.



Both of these excerpts made me think about Lea Morin's "cine-conferencia" I attended last month at the Punto de Vista Festival in Pamplona. She is a researcher and curator who explores (non-aligned) archives, history and film heritage from North Africa. That day, she shared with us:

I think it is important when we lead a research/archive/restoration project about these cinematographic narratives, to apprehend archive spaces through their complexities. To stay away from trying to find a frozen meaning into things. So why are we here, fighting to archive the absent? Because there is, and there always has been, a refusal of counter narratives, a refusal to let society and history be written by other voices than the dominant's, a refusal to see and accept the most radical writings in the world. Those writings actually proposed by those filmmakers, engaged in aesthetical, intellectual and political struggles. And we do need an archive of these prevented radicalities. We do need to fight for this counter-history to continue emerging and to find the right counter methods to do so.<sup>17</sup>

I then recall her warning, in a conversation with Annabelle Aventurin about Non-Aligned Archives:

Far from being just technical work to recuperate damaged images, restoration involves investigation, restitution, and re-release. For this last, it is essential that no communication about the restored film is allowed to smooth out or erase its history. It must not remove (as happens with restorations that effectively remove the film grain) any complexity, or mythify the film, reduce its past merely to censorship history. Nor should it talk about the film as though it were a lost treasure, found only by chance: its previous invisibility has been caused by systematic policies of downplaying non-dominant culture, but it will be described as "rare," "unique," "censored," "disappeared," "lost," and "rediscovered" without additional explanation. This kind of vocabulary helps erase the complexity of the film's history [...] in fact, its disappearance and its reappearance both exist in the context of the dominant political discourse and thus what is deemed appropriate in the histories.<sup>18</sup>

17. Morin, Lea. "Por Un Ensayo De Ficción." Lan. Punto de Vista - Festival Internacional de Cine Documental de Navarra, 17 Mar. 2022, Pamplona. (my translation)

18. Morin, Lea, and Annabelle Aventurin. "Non Aligned Film Archives." *The Living Journal*, vol. 3, no. Non Fiction Issue, 2021.

Just like historical events can belong to the dominating narrative, films also correspond to a dominating political discourse, or they don't. Depending on which side of the fence they fall under, they can be more or less doomed to be forgotten. Events turn into memory, turn into history, turn into myths, turn into films. In this endless chain of transformations, I wonder where *Wabe al Horriyah* stands.

All editing, by definition, is an instrument of oblivion, since editing means creating intervals and differences, and this can only be done by abandoning as many and more possibilities than one has exploited.<sup>19</sup>

19. Aumont.

I think about Kais, who was also an editor, and edited the film himself. Did editing this film make him forget more than remember what he had witnessed and lived? What does he remember about making the film? Will I ever have the chance to speak with him?



Time does not make memories fade,  
it strengthens them.

*Under the Rumbles* (Mai Masri, 1982)



Qu'est-ce qu'il est au fond de vous,  
vous n'en parlez pas.



Il faut être l'oubliez-vous  
après quelques temps.

"What is deep inside of you, if you don't talk about it, maybe after sometime you'll forget it."  
*Beyrouth, "la rencontre"* (Borhane Alaouié, 1981)

Friday, April 22

## Less is more?

Since I have more time now that I am on holiday, I'm trying to find literature on completed restoration projects, to have some examples of the types of work being done, and to get familiar with the ways restorers share their experiences. I'm more interested in reading about projects that don't have a big budget or lack access to fancy equipment, projects that challenge the recommended methodologies, often only applicable in rich countries. The most interesting report I have read so far is "Behind an Experimental Film Heritage: Preservation and Restoration Protocols and Issues."<sup>20</sup> It describes the work of the Slovenian Cinematheque on the early films of Karpo Godina (a Yugoslavian experimental director from the 60s/70s). The authors share their reasoning on concrete decisions such as whether to keep or remove certain damages or defects on the scanned film during the digital cleaning process. For example, they decided to keep the small scratches (damage), probably due to the analog projection of the films. They consider them to be an integral part of the film structure since its first screening, bearing aesthetic and historical values in the way they reflect the modalities of viewing and experiencing the films. Indeed, their restorations weren't aiming towards the preservation of the films as unlikely "model images" that actually never existed. Instead, they were more interested in restoring these films as some type of testimony of particular film practices. This idea of keeping what some people can consider to be "damage" or "defaults" (such as scratches, instability or even dirt) has also been brought up as an ethical decision by Paolo Cherchi Usai in several writings.

20. Della Rovere, Lorenzo, et al. "Behind an Experimental Film Heritage: Preservation and Restoration Protocols and Issues." *Journal of Film Preservation*, no. 89, Nov. 2013, pp. 115-123.

Is image enhancement a form of restoration? Do we have the right to make an image look better than it was originally? One example should stand for all [...] Cameras and projectors were often producing and showing jittering images, and the matter was serious enough to become a discriminating factor in the film industry. [...] In restoring an early film with this kind of defect we are faced with another unanswerable question: should we reproduce image instability just as it was (because that's how people saw the film), or should we make it look stable, as if the problem never existed? One may argue that of course producers of the time would

have loved to get rid of this flaw in the apparatus [...] So we take care of the problem, as we now know how to do it, but in doing so we open ourselves to a whole range of objections. Early film producers would not only have preferred to see their images stable, but they would probably also, had they been able, have made them sharper, better contrasted [...] How far are we willing to go in this exercise of wishful thinking? A limit must be set to our right to imagine their intentions, yet the boundaries of that limit are far from being well defined.<sup>21</sup>

21. Cherchi Usai, Paolo, et al. "Chapter 3: The Ethics of Film Preservation." *Silent Cinema: An Introduction*, BFI, London, 2010. p 60.

12 years after the writing of this text, the questions are still relevant. Especially since my restoration work is based on a very dirty and damaged work copy, rather than on a final projection print. Maybe this minimal intervention approach, this idea of interacting as little as possible with the image to avoid "improving" the way it has always looked, is more suited for this project? I now remember a book I read earlier this year in which the authors eventually discuss the need to "educate the audience" when it comes to restored works and how they are presented. "You are going to see an archival copy, and every scratch here you see is part of its history. You're looking at a print that was struck 50 years ago."<sup>22</sup> I wonder: what is it that I am trying to preserve, or make accessible again with *Wabe al Horriyah*? The work print I have, of course. I don't want to hide the fact that it is an editing print and I want to present it as such.<sup>23</sup> The issue is that the sound will come from the VHS or DVD, so I am already affecting the integrity of this particular print, using it to (re)create a new element (with sound), that was never shown to the public (since it is based on a work print). My main goal is for the film to be seen again. But the notion of contextualization the authors brought up is very important: I will need to include a title at the beginning of my restored version to explain where the image came from, where the sound came from, and what I did to combine both.

22. Cherchi Usai, 2020.

23. See Foosati, Giovanna. *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*. Amsterdam University Press, 2019.

Wednesday, April 27

## A chronology of movement

Back from holidays, back to work. I started the inspection of the work copy on the first reel. A lot of things don't make sense to me. I'm writing down hypotheses in my notebook, only to scratch them off completely a few minutes later. The reel is made of different film stocks: Orwo, Agfa, Fuji, some Kodak too. Each has a different color fading, depending on the brand and type. A carnival of sorts. I can sometimes see on the edges of the film different manufacture dates. How come there are so many different dates? They go from 1982 until 1989, which I assume is the release year of the film. *Nadi* had told me the film had been released some time in the 80's. At this stage I'm just trying to understand what this element is and what it corresponds to. I have so many questions... I take pictures to accompany them. I decided to redo all the splices since most of them are only done on one side. I am scared they won't be solid enough to be run through a scanner. I'm also cleaning what I notice is dirty. I have to go through the film very slowly on the winding table not to miss anything. It is very repetitive work. I need to remove the existing tape splice: I use a scalpel to take off a small corner of the tape, but only on the edge of the film, otherwise, I may damage the image, then I use some pliers (they actually look like big tweezers) to hold onto that corner and pull on it to remove the rest of the tape. Then I clean the film where the splice was and proceed with the new splicing.

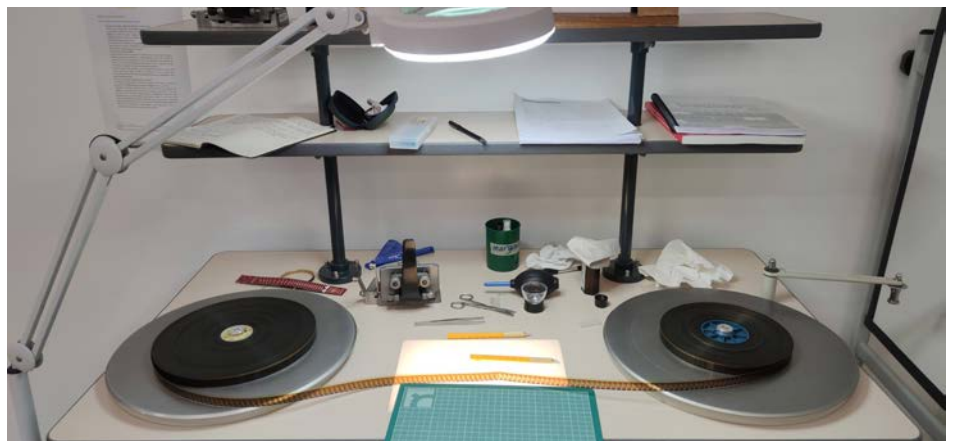


Figure 17



After a while, it feels like choreography in 8 beats:

1. place the two parts of film on each side of the splicer
2. unroll the tape
3. place the tape carefully over the film so that the left and right edges of the tape go over the top and bottom part of the frame - making the splice less visible
4. run my finger on top of the tape to make sure it is well taped without air bubbles
5. close the splicer to cut the tape (chop-chop)
6. turn the splicer the other way around
7. flip the film
8. repeat the previous steps to tape the other side of the film.

I resume unwinding the film until the next splice, sometimes just a few frames after. The repetition makes it physically draining. My eyes, arms, and back hurt at the end of the day.

It's funny. The body learns so fast. I was listening to a podcast the other day on France Culture about the body at work, interviewing carpenters for example, and how their body becomes their best tool. I've always wanted to try a type of work with very repetitive, physical, mechanical tasks, to see how my body would react and where my mind would go. Apparently, I can't handle working in silence so I listen to more podcasts, music or I call some friends. I think about my grandmother arching her back over her sewing machine, I think about Kais too. Did he make the same gestures as I did? Where was he? Which tools did he use? Why did he cut on this frame and not the next one? I've only seen a photo of him and I've never heard his voice, I need to watch his earlier films that Liana sent me. The tools get worn out pretty fast and now the scalpel doesn't cut as sharply as before. Even when I cut the tape with the splicer, most times I need to check if the perforation in the tape is well defined. A clear cut is hard to obtain. The tiredness takes over the chain of thoughts. Do clear cuts even exist? Is there always a decisive moment that helps us define a before and an after? I look at my wrist. Before the explosion: no scar. After the explosion: scar. I'm thinking about how splices look like scars too. Skin and film. I recall how Renan titled his EQZE project last year: P(i)elícula\*.

I measured how much film I had already unwinded. 180 meters on my right, 360 meters on my left, meaning I've only inspected one-third. I had set aside 5 days to work on the first reel, today is day 2, I'm still on time.

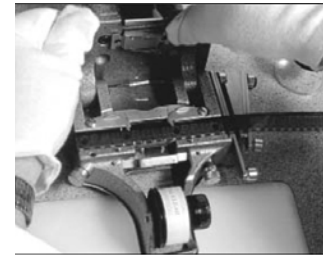
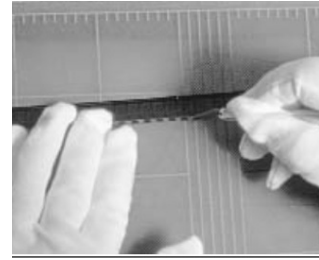
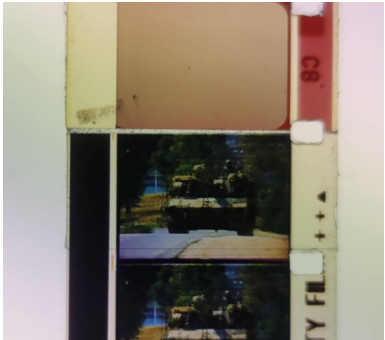
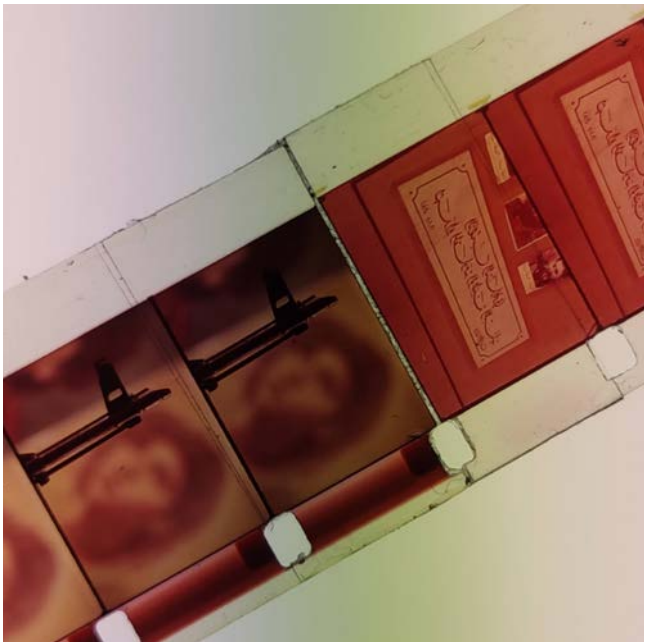
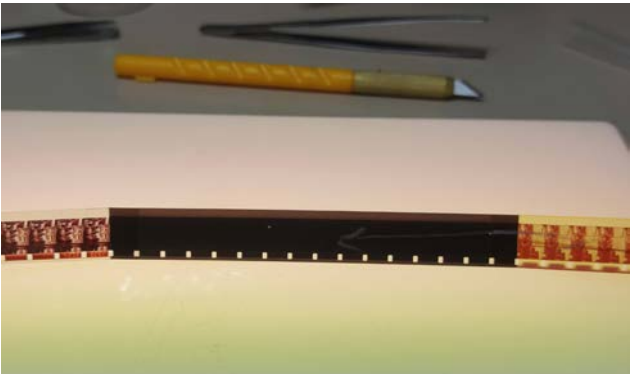
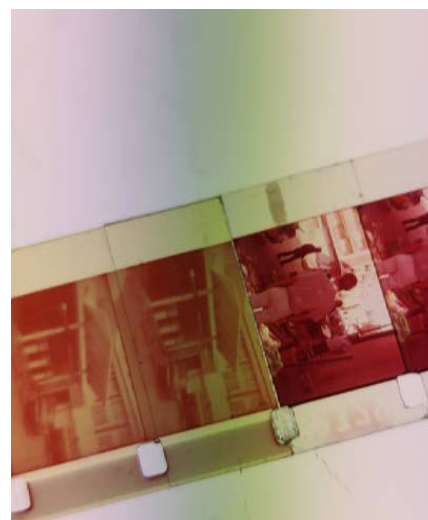


Figure 18

\*In Spanish, "piel" is "skin," "película" is "film," Renan created this neologism "p(i)elícula" that evokes skin as film and vice versa.



16 mm work print - *Wabeb al Horriyah*



16 mm work print - *Wahab al Horriyah*

Saturday, April 30

## Restitution

Earlier today I watched *Topologie d'une Absence* (Rami el Sabbagh, 2021). The images used were filmed by Pathe and Gaumont unknown operators during the 1920s, when Lebanon was under French mandate. Sabbagh insists on the materiality of the photochemical film (mostly exacerbated digitally): interruptions from splices and end of reels are so abrupt that I can't help but see them as materialized violence. I then read a transcription of a post-screening discussion in Beirut, in which Sabbagh expressed his views on colonial images, their reappropriation and restitution.

Remi el Sabbagh: I think these images can be freed from their historical context. I don't like the word "reappropriation." I prefer to think in terms of liberation: freeing these images from the violent colonial appropriation that has been inflicted upon them.

L. K. (a participant): Yet, you appropriate them. I mean, to simply try to free them from their colonial history is to appropriate them and claim them. It's saying, "these images are ours."

R. S.: I don't think of these images as goods that I take back or give away.\*

L. K.: No, not as goods...

R. S.: My view of appropriation and reappropriation is very literal, and I don't like to use those terms because they tend to imply that images, culture and art are goods that have been stolen from us. Whereas it was the violence of the colonizers that made them goods that they could take and give away. I want to free the archive from the idea that it is a good. That's why I don't think of it as a reappropriation of "you stole my land, and now I'm taking it back," no.<sup>24</sup>

24. Ouayda, Nour, et al. "Cartographier l'Absence." *Hors Champ*, 2022. (my translation)

\*Which reminds me of Mosireen's "Revolution Tryptich" statement: "The images are not ours, the images are the revolution's." in Dickinson, Kay. *Arab Film and Video Manifestos: Forty-Five Years of the Moving Image amid Revolution*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.



His challenging of the words used to refer to colonial images as material goods, instead of them being defined by the gaze we place on them, reminds me of a Annabelle Aventurin's words: "In the case of our work on Med Hondo's films, the idea of "restitution," rather than restoration, makes sense to me: recovery of a film and its contents through digitization, making it available after decades of invisibility."<sup>25</sup> Here, the word "restitution" has a different connotation than the one evoked by Sabbagh, even though it plays with this idea of something being returned. "Restitution" emphasizes the film's newly gained visibility. I wonder if this term could be relevant for my work on *Wahab al Horriyah*. Maybe instead of "restoration," we could use another word to describe alternative approaches that focus on making films that have been inaccessible for a while, visible again.

25. Morin, 2022. pp. 33-44.



*Topologie d'une Absence* (Rami el Sabbagh, 2021)





*Topologie d'une Absence* (Rami el Sabbagh, 2021)

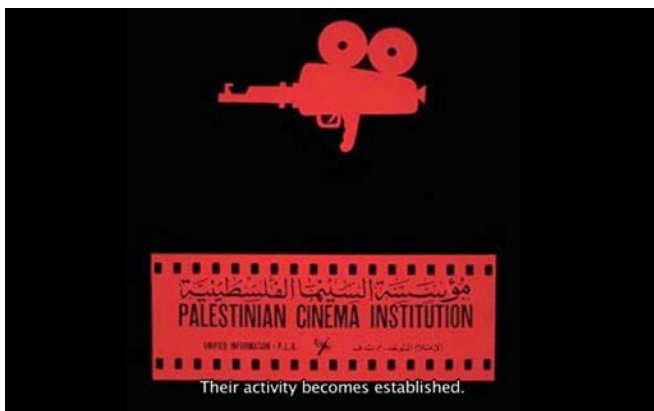
Thursday, May 5

## Editing as a weapon

I finally found the time to watch the Kais' films that Liana had sent me: *Far from the Homeland* (1969) and *Testimony of Palestinian Children in Wartime* (1972). Both of them address the Palestinian forced exile and belong to the alternative Arab cinema of the late 60's, Kais being a key figure of this movement.

Alternative [Arab] cinema developed in the early 1970s from a confluence of a number of cultural and political developments [...] For a number of reasons, Palestine was a pivotal subject of this filmmaking in its early years, and these works complement the films made under the auspices of the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organisation] in important ways. A number of Arab filmmakers, including al-Zubaidi, worked in both arenas, at times creating films about Palestine (or other subjects) within public sector and occasionally commercial cinema and at times working on films for one of the Palestinian organizations. Moreover, Palestine and the Palestinian revolution were not just a Palestinian issue to be addressed by or on behalf of Palestinians living under occupation or in exile. Rather, the revolution was widely understood as a key component of the project of decolonization in the Arab world; creating Palestinian films was one way to act on one's ideological commitment to that project.<sup>26</sup>

26. Yaqub, Nadia. *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution*. U. Of Texas P., 2018. p 86.



*Looted and Hidden* (Rona Sela, 2018)

With *Far From the Homeland* (Silver Dove at the 1966 Leipzig Festival), al-Zubaidi adopted a third cinema perspective as he addressed material constraints as a formal challenge: a lack of camera equipment with sync sound forced him to think strategically and creatively about the soundtrack, requiring the viewers to stay engaged and create meaning from the interplay of sound with images.<sup>27</sup> He also reverts to the third cinema's shared metaphorical language of the camera as a weapon: "The camera is the inexhaustible expropriator of image-weapon; the projector, a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second."<sup>28</sup> More precisely, the use of editing as a weapon, since Kais is not only a director but an editor too. For example, a sequence of still images echoes rounds of submachine gun shots; each image cut associated with the sound of a shot, at a very dynamic pace. In *Testimony of Palestinian Children in Wartime*, embracing Espinosa's *Imperfect cinema*, Kais takes advantage of limited modes of productions and refuses to impose interpretations based on pre-conceived judgements, in order to strengthen the dialectical relationship between the film and the viewer, which is in itself a means to create a new revolutionary consciousness.<sup>29</sup>

27. *Ibid.* p 90.

28. Solanas and Getino in MacKenzie, Scott. *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*. University of California Press, 2014. p 244.

29. Espinosa in MacKenzie, Scott. *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*. University of California Press, 2014. p 230.



*Far from the Homeland* (Kais al-Zubaidi, 1969)

- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- *I want to be a teacher.*
- Why?
- *It's easy.*
- Easy?
- *Yes, it's easier than bearing the homeland on your shoulders.*



They leave carrying their  
homeland on their shoulders,

*Under the Rumbles* (Mai Masri, 1982)

In 1972, the PLO relocated its headquarters from Jordan to Beirut. 10 years later, it is forced to leave Beirut after Israel's invasion and siege of the city and relocate to Tunis.

Saturday, May 7

## Germany

I'm still fixing the splices, it is quite tedious work. The splices I'm making aren't always as precise as they were originally, so I'll be sure to fix any potential instability from my (limited) splicing experience in post-production, on the digital copy. When I run out of albums to listen to, I switch to podcasts and vice versa. I've finished fixing them on the first reel so I cleaned it a couple of times with alcohol. The vapors were so strong that I had to leave the school because I felt unwell. I called my brother when I got home and told him I was hungover without having drunk at all. As I laid down on my bed, I noticed all the small pieces of tape on my sweater. I took both the old and new splices home with me. I can't help but wonder where the film was edited. The 16mm copy was kept in Germany, but was it brought there after the film was done or did Kais work on the film there? Many clues seem to indicate Kais worked on it in Germany. During the inspection, not only did I identify a lot of Orwo and Agfa film stocks (brands respectively from West and East Germany) but the end film leader\* had some German words printed. The material is then coming from Germany. I recall the box I saw in Beirut, containing the incomplete sound, had a label "Cineco Berlin." Surely the image post-production of the film was done in Berlin, the same way the sound was. Kais' connection to Germany is not a random one: he studied in East Germany from 1961 to 1969.<sup>30</sup>

The film school in Babelsberg, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) where Kais al-Zubaidi studied, was particularly assiduous in courting foreign students, and film experts traveled to other countries to run training workshops. Eastern European countries provided equipment and film stock and offered facilities and expertise for processing and printing film. This material support from socialist countries was a significant factor in the rise of filmmaking in the third world. The film festivals of Eastern Europe, and the networking and screening opportunities that they provided, also facilitated the growth of third world cinema. The effects of all these resources and opportunities can be seen in the development of the PLO cinema throughout the 1970s, as personal and institutional ties with Eastern Europe affected how films were made and circulated.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 19

30. Farine, Anaïs. "Avec Kais al-Zubaidi, Retour Sur Un 'Cinéma Alternatif.'" *Écrans*, vol. 12-2, no. Lisières esthétiques et culturelles au cinéma, 2019, p 197.

31. Yaqub. p 126.

\*The end or beginning of the film reel which does not contain images



Sunday, May 8

## Loop

My friend Rita sent me a video she made for the workshop “The Whole Life Academy Berlin,” using archival footage from Studio Baalbeck. It’s called *Diary Entry No.168*. In it, with both her montage and voice-over, she addresses the loop Lebanon seems to be stuck in. In the beginning, footage from a news report from the 50’s is shown, onto which she overlays a series of dates in a yellow font (from then till today), referring to many more governmental crises. I recall *Lettre de Beyrouth* (Jocelyne Saab, 1978), in which Lina shows her friend how the titles of newspaper titles from 1978 are the same as the ones from 1970. Lebanon seems stuck in a loop of endless crises. Today is the day the Lebanese diaspora can vote for parliamentary elections. Watching this video today is funny, depending on your type of humor. All of my friends who left Lebanon are posting pictures of their thumbs being tinted with deep purple ink, proof that they have voted, along with “Vote Them Out” captions. Will things ever change? In the video, Rita talks about what it feels like for her to discover these archive images from her home country while living abroad, and how this impacts her. There is a distance felt in relation to the images and their content - both spatial and temporal, yet an emotional closeness too. She talks about the loop, but she can do so only because she has knowledge of what has happened in the past, she has seen images, she has some reference points. What happens when we don’t have reference points? The voice-over makes me tear up, maybe because she is my friend, or maybe because I relate to what she is saying, or simply because we are far from each other.

It’s hard to live in a loop [...] It’s hard to realize that it’s not the place, but a state of mind, running away from the source is not a solution. How am I living in a similar state to my country, stuck in a loop? How do you break this loop? So many questions, zero answers.<sup>32</sup>

32. *Diary Entry No.168* (Rita Mounzer, 2022).



*Lettres d'un temps d'exil* (Borhane Alaouié, 1988)

Rita's words echo those of Alaouié, who is talking about the incessant noise in his head: "I've changed cities, I changed houses, I changed country, I changed friends, I've even changed myself, but I couldn't stop it."



*Il était une fois Beyrouth: histoire d'une star* (Jocelyne Saab, 1994)



*Diary Entry No.168* (Rita Mounzer, 2022)



*Lettre de Beyrouth* (Jocelyne Saab, 1978)

Monday, May 9

## August

I'm carrying on with the film inspection, trying to understand the use of different film stocks as my tutor Carolina Cappa suggested. Maybe there is a system to it? Why do some images in the film look like they've been copied from their original film material many times, while some others don't? I'm hoping this will allow me to ask more precise questions to Kais when I'm talking to him. Yesterday, after watching Rita's film, I looked for books about Arab cinema on the Medialab website. I came across a film from Akram Zaatari titled, in French: *August: before the explosion*. I'm surprised because I know Akram's work and I'm not aware that he made something about the August 2020 explosion. I check the date, it's 2002. Back to Rita's loop. How many explosions happened in August in Lebanon? Probably a lot more than one can count, how naive of me. Today, while looking closely at the images of reel 1, which I hadn't done during the first cleaning and splice fixing stage, I stumbled on a shot of a Beirut skyline, with an explosion in the background. Buildings are being bombed by Israel during the 1982 Beirut siege. I've seen such images before but this one particularly catches my attention. It has a magenta fading all over it. The sky looks pink, more precisely, the cloud of smoke caused by the explosion is pink. I think of August 4 directly. After the explosion, when we finally got outside the office building, we saw a huge pink cloud in the sky caused by the ammonium nitrate that exploded. It was a pretty cloud though. Pink skies have a different connotation now. Seeing August written somewhere or seeing a pink sky takes me back to that day. Fuck them for ruining my favorite month.



Figure 20



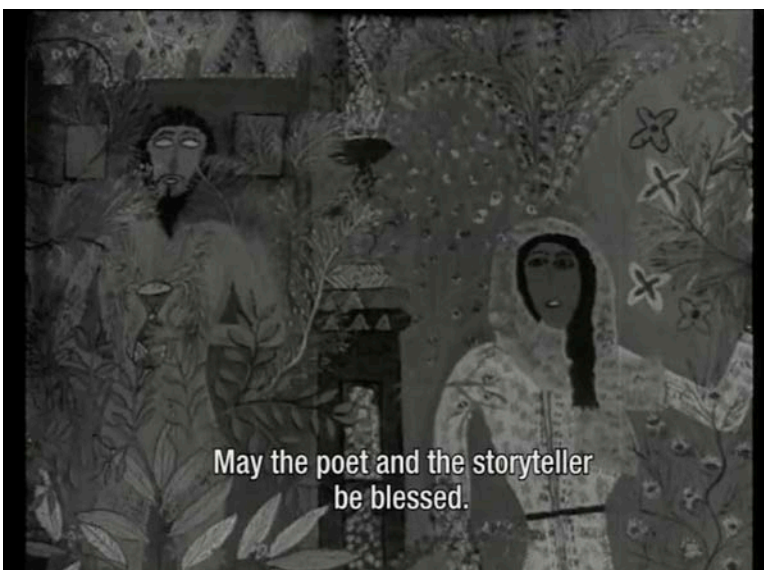
VHS - *Wabeb al Horriyah*



Tuesday, May 10

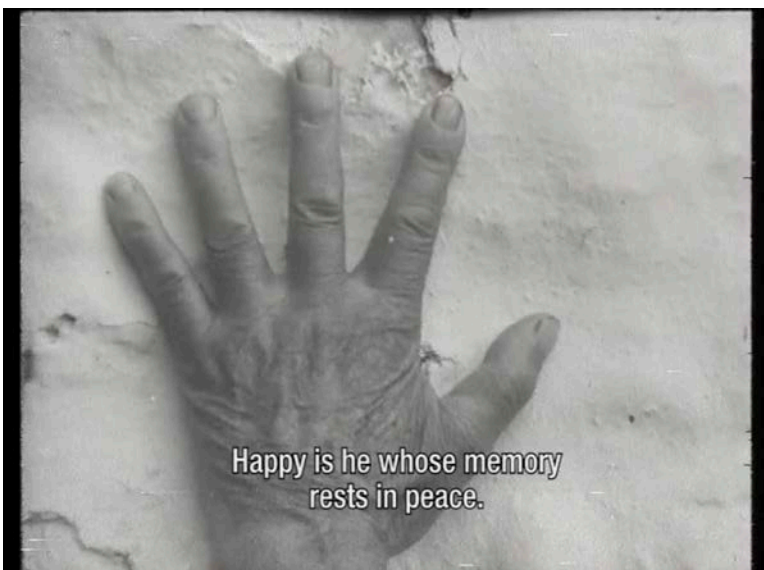
## *Happy is he whose memory rests in peace*

*La Septième Porte* (Ali Essafi, 2017). Uff Uff Uff. Fascinating movie about Ahmed Bouanani and his work. I had heard so much about him that watching the documentary felt like meeting someone I already knew. Bouanani's look sometimes resembles that of my late grandfather... it was a bit confusing: in suspended moments of belief, I thought it was *him* talking to me. But they certainly did not have the same life, nor the same things to say. Ahmed Bouanani was a poet, a storyteller, and a complete artist, all of which Essafi manages to convey really well in this intimate portrait. I had already seen one of Bouanani's films, *Mémoire 14* (1971) and could recognize excerpts in *La Septième Porte*. Working in the Morocco Cinematographic Center (MCC), Bouanani had access to the colonial archives filmed by the French and used them to make a poetic visual essay denouncing how Morroccans were deprived of their own history and memory. In it, he also included some of his drawings and close-ups of Moroccan people's faces and hands he shot, things the French never cared enough to film.



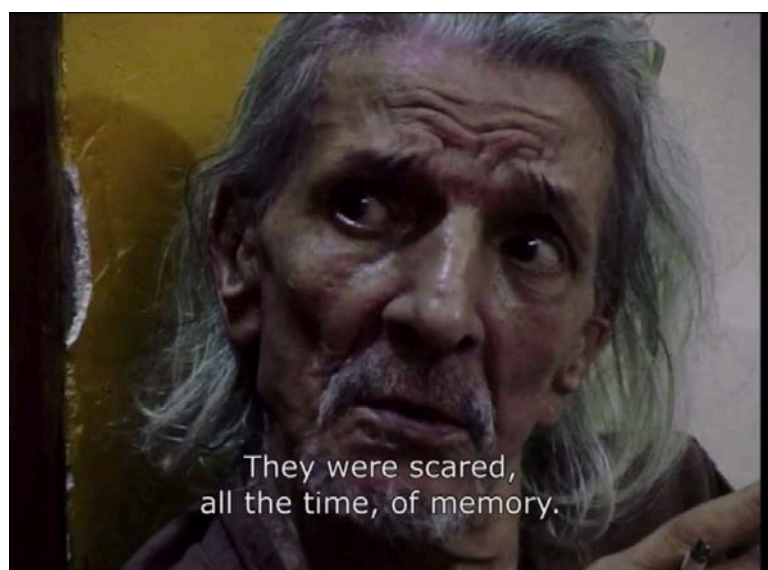
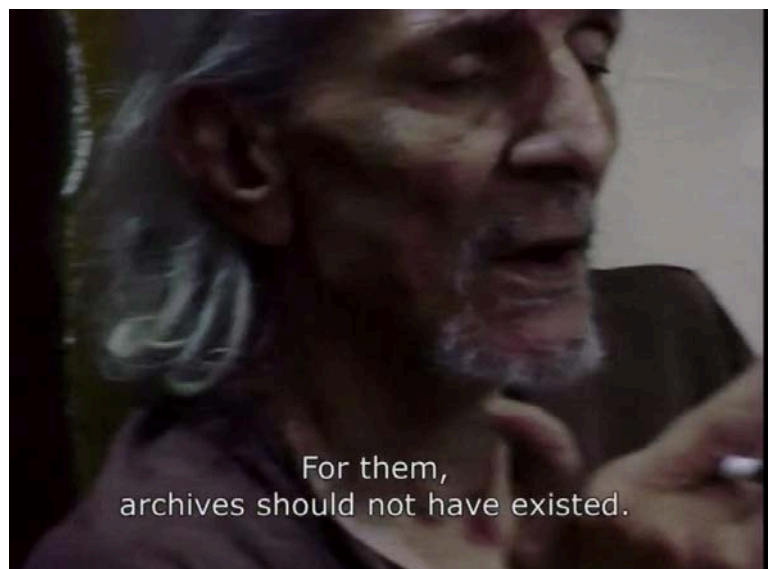
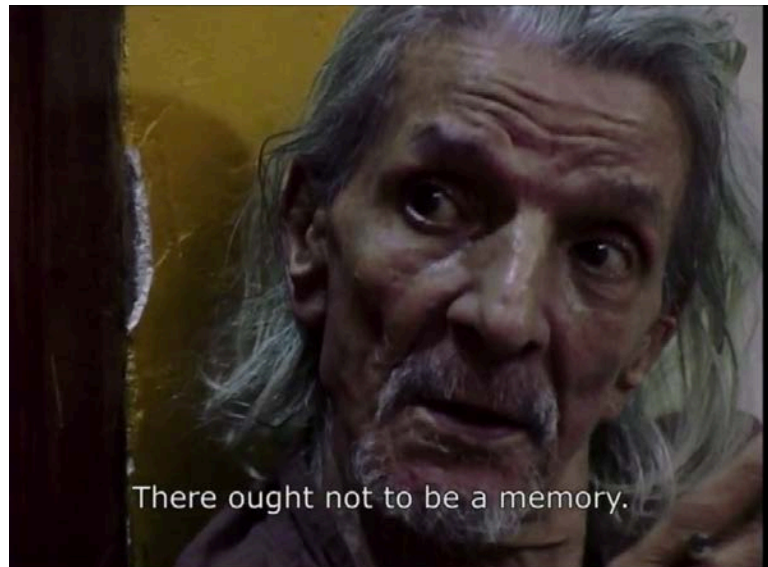
*Mémoire 14* (Ahmed Bouanani, 1971)





*Mémoire 14* (Ahmed Bouanani, 1971)

In *La Septième Porte*, Bouanani refers to the MCC and king Hassan II as being afraid of the people having “memory.” It reminds me of what Rita told me the other day: in school, Lebanese students are taught history up until 1943, which corresponds to the year the country gained independence from France. What comes next is not addressed in history books, there is no official national narrative for the last 80 years. It also reminds me of my friend Abed, who told me the other day he didn’t know films were made during/about the civil war. I was explaining to him what I am doing this year and he was surprised that a film like *Wahab al Horriyah* even existed.



*La Septième Porte* (Ali Essafi, 2017)

Friday, May 13

## Simple Form

Ongoing film inspection. When looking at the content of the frames, I'm noticing a lot of still photographs, which appear to further illustrate what moving images are showing. It also seems to me that Kais is using a lot of shots that other people filmed, as in, that weren't originally shot for this film, as if he is re-using them. These shots aren't very sharp, they look like they've been copied many times and have lines as if they were filmed from a TV monitor playing them back. These "repurposed" images not only have a distinctive visual quality from the ones shot for the film (such as interviews), they also have been edited before being included in the film. I drifted off (as I usually do when doing manual work) and wondered about the differences and similarities between militant cinema and propaganda cinema... This film was commissioned by a militia, does it automatically make it militant? In any case, its editing style seems completely different from the third cinema aesthetics of the earlier films Kais edited, such as the experimental *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* (Christian Ghazi, 1969). According to Ghazi, "it is not possible to express a complex cause in a basic form."<sup>33</sup> This is probably why he had chosen Kais as an editor. Yet, I wouldn't describe the film I'm working on to have a complex form, even though the cause it presents is a very complex one. Why is this film so different from his other films? It is less experimental, more classical in a way. Maybe the sound adds another layer I am not aware of yet?

33. Farine. p 210. (my translation)

Wednesday, May 18

## Time Displacement

Since I finished the inspection of the first reel yesterday, I finally watched the VHS. It's a weird experience to watch a film 25 frames per second (the VHS framerate) after having spent weeks closely looking at all its frames almost one by one, with a magnifying glass. It's like meeting someone you've heard a lot about. Or visiting a place you've only seen in pictures. I'm not skimming through the film like I did right after the digitization of the tape, but rather watching attentively. At some point, I'm hearing the same chants I used to hear during the October 2019 revolution in Lebanon. Although I could never completely understand the lyrics... At the time, I didn't want to bother my friends with translation requests every few seconds. Maybe I will finally understand the lyrics thanks to this film, once *Nadi* sends me the subtitles. Perhaps the lyrics have changed, and the melody remained. As I'm watching, I'm feeling stuck in some weird time continuum, in which tragedies repeat themselves. I see coffins of martyrs with the Palestinian flag draping them, being carried by a crowd, exactly like it happened with Shireen Abu Akhle, who was murdered by the Israeli army while reporting for Al-Jazeera only last week. She was killed while doing her job, wearing a highly visible PRESS vest. When I learned the news on social media, I recalled Jocelyne Saab's words about her film *Beyrouth, ma ville* (in which she films the destruction caused by Israel during the 1982 Beirut siege, and re-uses images from *Bilan de la Guerre*):

At the same time, capturing these images, for me, was like killing or taming death itself. Elaborating a witness image was saving me from my own eventual death. Moreover, I knew that my profession as a war reporter could get me killed. When I was filming and had my eyes hidden by the camera, I thought I was invincible.<sup>34</sup>

34. Rouxel, Mathilde. "Cinéma de patrimoine et de mémoire: Jocelyne Saab, quarante ans d'images de Beyrouth (1975-2016)." *Presses de l'Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik*, 2017. pp. 309-317. (my translation)

40 years ago and today: the same images. There is a very strange sense of familiarity and confusion. I think my brain doesn't know anymore if I'm watching images from today or those from a very long time ago, from my own memory, from a collective imaginary bank of historical images, or from a screen. Are they mental images or physical images? Did I really witness this or am I speculating? There is a sense of disorientation, but with time. After disorientation, re-orientation comes back. I am in a classroom, watching a film I am working on. These images are not my memories. I was not there. I didn't experience war. My friends did, summer 2006. I'm sending them screenshots so they can help me understand some writings I see on the images.



*Figure 21*



*VHS - Wabeb al-Horriyah*





*A Summer Not To Forget* (Carol Mansour, 2007)



**The dates get mixed up nowadays**



**Images oppose each other**





they collide in your waking moments



taking on the shape of a memory



for when appearances have melted away

Thursday, May 19

## Intended Audience

Something is on a loop in my mind since yesterday: the recurrence of photo portraits included in the film. Though I did not understand the voice over nor the interviews without subtitles, there is one word I know that kept coming back: “شهيد” (shahid), “martyr.” The film presents many resistance fighters, sometimes through their interviews, which are often followed by images of people mourning, marking the transformation of the resistance fighter into a martyr. The mourning is either shown through other interviews with living relatives, or through public collective mournings, be it filmed or photographed. Yet in both cases, portraits of the martyrs are always present: in newspapers, on the walls of the living rooms, printed and held up arms high on the streets. The film opens with such portraits. Sometimes, moving images of the martyr (while alive) are paused, turning the moving image into a photograph. It is as if Kais was transforming this person into a literal image. I wonder if becoming an image (framed and mourned) is the ultimate martyr transformation? Martyr, in its primary sense, means “witness,” the one who saw. Are we looking at their portraits or is it the other way around? I find some answers about the relation between photography portraits and collective mourning in Yaqub’s book on Palestinian Cinema, which helps me understand where Kais’ imagery is coming from:

In *Zionist Aggression*, Abu Ali draws a direct connection between individual and collective mourning [...] In *Palestine in the Eye*, Hind Jawhariyah and Abu Ali’s personal grief simultaneously infuses larger, more abstract, and institutionalized revolution with the power and beauty of conjugal love [...] Films document this mourning, preserving it for the future so as to tie that future to the revolutionary present. They also disseminate these forms of mourning throughout the community, binding other Palestinians and their sacrifices to these losses. The films are pedagogical, instructing audiences in what it means to be a Palestinian, and a form of ritual, allowing viewers to participate virtually in these acts of socially constructive grieving. Mourning invites into the community of the aggrieved not “Others,” whom one hopes to convince, but friends, allies, and co-resisters, who, watching the films sympathetically, will be moved such that their commitment is sustained.<sup>35</sup>

35. Yaqub. pp. 82-83.

[Co-founder of the Fatah Film Unit,] Jad Allah’s early photographs are

lost to history, but they would have served as an early intervention into agential Palestinian image-making in connection with this new militant movement. Intended for use in rituals of mourning and celebration of the sacrifices made by fida'iyyin [Palestinian freedom fighter] after their martyrdom, the portraits were surely laden with violence and loss for their viewers, especially for family members and other loved ones. However, in their depiction of the living before their willing sacrifice, the photographs would have also communicated a focus on a political will to act.<sup>36</sup>

36. *Ibid.* p 53.

Even though *Wahab al Horriyah* is more about Lebanese resistance against Israel than exclusively about the Palestinian cause, it seems essential to remember that this is the cause Kais' cinema has always been dedicated to. Since he is coming from this Palestinian cinema lineage and participated in it, I believe Yaqub's words also apply to the mourning processes Kais is making a point to document in the film, giving them as much importance as the military operations carried out by the Resistance Front. As explained by Yaqub, this insistence on mourning displays also gives me a clue about the intended audience of the film: not "Others."





VHS - Wabeb al Horriyah





VHS - *Wabeb al Horriyah*

### III

The night of the non-event. War in the vacant sky. The Phantom's absence.  
Funerals. Coffin not covered with roses. Unarmed population. Long.  
The yellow sun's procession from the mosque to the vacant Place. Mute taxis.  
Plainclothed army. Silent hearse. Silenced music. Palestinians with no Palestine.

The night of the Great Inca did not happen. Engineless planes. Extinguished sun.  
Fishermen with no fleet fish with no sea fleet with no fish sea without fishermen  
Guns with faded flowers Che Guevara reduced to ashes. No shade.  
The wind neither rose nor subsided. The Jews are absent. Flat tires.  
The little lights are not lit. No child has died. No rain  
I did not say that spring was breathing. The dead did not return.

The mosque has launched its unheeded prayer. Lost in the waves.  
The street lost its stones. Brilliant asphalt. Useless roads. Dead Army.  
Snuffed is the street. To shut off the gas. Refugees with no refuge no candle.  
The procession hasn't been scared. Time went by.      Silent Phantom.

XL

the sun is a camera which operates only in black and white  
 white white white is the color of Terror  
 from their eyes nothing remains but egg-white and trees! blackness  
 in the underground blackroom always black is experience

the sun is counting the earth's rotations automobile wheel  
 and on the Palestinian's head rolls a truck  
 a concrete roof collapsed on 500 bodies  
 and the sun took the picture for the C.I.A.'s archives  
 sun camera majestic lens Prince of the gaze  
 white white white is the result of the sun's clicking  
 when teeth become as white as eyes  
 the sun executioner focal point of death goes into action  
 blood has no color in the torture-chambers  
 infrared rays make writings on the calcinated bodies of the Arabs

Friday, May 20

## Change of plan

“Speed,” who had given us the photochemical digitization class (or how scanners work), had casually suggested at the end of the course back in January that I could come to his studio in Madrid to digitize the 16mm print. We had talked a bit about Lebanon and he mentioned how a friend of his made a documentary on the Sabra and Shatila massacres. From then on he said he would be keen on helping with my project by offering a better digitization than that of the scanner at the school. I contacted him this week to see if he was still up for it and if his schedule allowed for it. He generously accepted but is only available next week. After a quick search, I found some cheap bus tickets and I think a friend of mine in Madrid could let me stay at his for a few days. I need to start and finish both the inspection and the splice fixing on the second reel before I leave for Madrid. I’ve always worked better under pressure anyways.



Saturday, May 21

## Is it real?

I woke up with vivid memories of my dream and wondered for a second if it had really happened or not. I dreamt the print was fading while I was inspecting it. I was trying to go fast, unwinding the reel faster and faster, and observing the frames as quickly as I could, but the images faded as soon as I laid my eyes on them. The dream is definitely telling me something, but I need to go back to work.



*Memories for a Private Eye* (Rania Stephan, 2015)  
“Let’s come back to the present.”

Friday, May 27

## Madrid

I arrived in Madrid two nights ago. It was a warm spring night, a relief from San Sebastian's capricious weather. My friend Joseph went back to Beirut for a bit and let me stay in his room in the apartment he shares with his friends in Salamanca. I was walking in the fancy neighborhood with a big blue Ikea bag on my back (the only way I found to carry the 2 film reels) and my carry-on in hand. I didn't think they would be that heavy, I didn't think I would feel out of place either. I spent the day at Ocho y Pico, Speed's studio in between La Latina and Embajadores. Entering the studio felt like entering a sort of magical grotto. We spent some time looking at all the available equipment together. He had some things to finish so I observed his workflow and we eventually discussed what would be the best scanner for the film. I then prepped the 2 reels, added some film leader at their beginning and end, and cleaned them. We launched the scanning of the first reel and finished working late. Although we started scanning yesterday, it is only today that I managed to sit properly in Speed's chair in front of the monitors, and look at the frames being digitized one by one. I didn't expect to be so moved by the fact that I was properly "seeing" the images I've been working with for so long. It's quite a different view (and feel) on these big monitors, compared to the magnifying glass view of the 16mm frames or the bad quality VHS. I confirmed some doubts I had during the inspection, about some shots being in color or black and white, which was quite satisfying. All in all, it was a very smooth process, except for that moment when a piece of tape got stuck in the pin hole and we had to stop the scan and restart it. I'm glad I will have the Sunday off, hopefully I will go to the Rastro flea market.



*Figure 23*

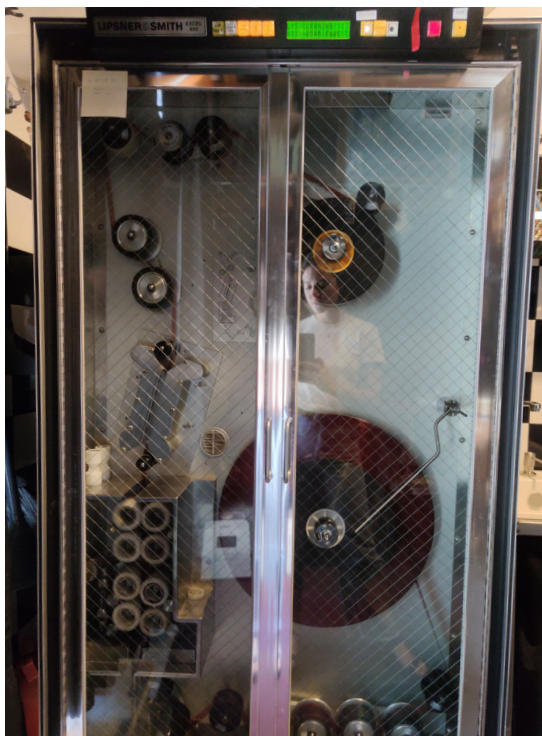
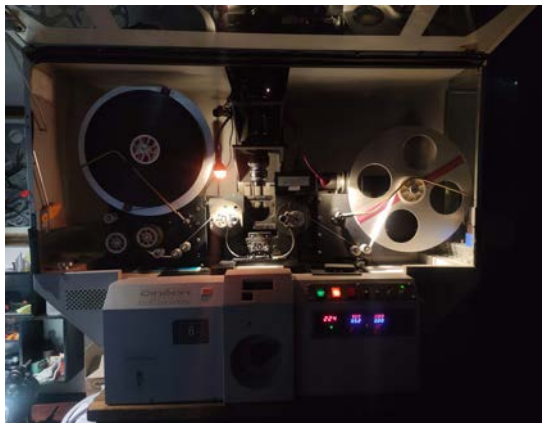


Figure 24

Friday, June 3

# Independence

*In international conferences, I'm not here to ask for help, I'm here to argue.*<sup>37</sup>

— Didi Cheeka

I'm at the Bilbao airport, on my way to Beirut. I'm watching the recordings from the Eye International Conference (EIC), organized by the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam. One of them, titled "Been There, Done That?" by Matej Strnad from the Narodni Film Archive, was a much needed critique of these types of international conferences, where the same questions are being asked over and over again, where the same concepts are being redefined time after time. He argues for a more historically informed approach to these discussions, emphasizing on the need for more accountability and transparency in our evaluations of what's been done to avoid having the same talks on loop. "*In lieu of a solution - a history of efforts, not a standstill.*"<sup>38</sup> After having watched most of the recordings, this appears as essential, especially for academic contexts in which the new generation of restorers is being trained.

In "Audiovisual Archives and the Digital Space: a Global South Perspective," Pedro Felix talked about how the technological divide increases inequalities: the North sells services and brings in the collections and the South is reduced to a condition of a "client." Logically, he argues for the technological independence of the Global South countries.<sup>39</sup> Having entered the film restoration world from Lebanon, this is something I wanted to question this year while studying. I originally wanted to work on a project that would help challenge this dependency. Did I end up doing exactly what I wanted to avoid? Am I perpetuating a dependency Lebanon can have towards other countries when it comes to taking care of its own audiovisual heritage? I'm in San Sebastian, using the resources of the school, of an independent scanning specialist based in Madrid, and many other experts working in the North with expensive tools. This allows me and *Nadi Lekol Nas* to restore the film without any budget. Great. But it is a one-time occurrence. I'm questioning the point of what I am doing here. Once again, I go back to Lea Morin's words which help seeing clearer:

Restoration of a single film is not much in the context of an overall archiving project, but it allows us to experiment with methods. The most important answer to your question is the existence of these small structures to which we belong, these collectives, these small islands of experimentation. It's why we also need to get together. It is time to democratize access to the technical tools of preservation and restoration, to get involved in collaborative practices.<sup>40</sup>

37. Cheeka, Didi. "It's Almost Too Late." Eye International Conference 2022, May 2022, Amsterdam, Eye Filmmuseum.

38. Strnad, Matej. "Been There, Done That?" Eye International Conference 2022, May 2022, Amsterdam, Eye Filmmuseum.

39. Felix, Pedro. "Audiovisual Archives and the Digital Space: a Global South Perspective." Eye International Conference 2022, May 2022, Amsterdam, Eye Filmmuseum.

40. Morin, 2022. pp. 33-44.

بعد الاجتياح الإسرائيلي لبيروت في ١٩٨٢ فقدت معظم  
أفلام سينما الثورة الفلسطينية

After the Israeli invasion to Lebanon in 1982

بعد الاجتياح الإسرائيلي لبيروت في ١٩٨٢ فقدت معظم  
أفلام سينما الثورة الفلسطينية

most of the films made by  
the Palestinian Revolution were lost.



معظم اللقطات في هذا الفلم تعود لنسخ أُرسلت لعروض ومهرجانات  
سينمائية قبل الاجتياح

Most of the images in this film

معظم اللقطات في هذا الفلم تعود لنسخ أُرسلت لعروض ومهرجانات  
سينمائية قبل الاجتياح

come from copies sent to international  
film festivals before the 1982 Israeli invasion.

ما زال العديد من أفلام سينما الثورة الفلسطينية مفقوداً حتى اليوم

The original prints of these films  
remain lost to this day.

Monday, June 6

## Failed Contact

A few weeks ago, I contacted Kais by email. I was so nervous before clicking on “send.” His answers were quite short and unengaging, so I suggested to speak over the phone, in Arabic (with a translator when in Beirut), rather than in English by email. Otherwise, it will be difficult to have an extensive conversation that would lead to some answers to the many questions I have. Until today, my emails proposing to set a precise date and time for the call remained unanswered. I hope he is ok. Maybe a Whatsapp group call will work just as well when I am back in San Sebastian.

Wednesday, June 8

## Archival Drive

I had a call with Liana who gave me some news about Kais. He had a surgery last week and is still recovering slowly. I'm relieved he is ok. I'll wait to get in touch again.

While getting to know his work and his dedication to the PLO, a central theme I kept stumbling upon has been the disappearance of the PLO film archives after the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982. Various Palestinian filmmakers groups (such as the Palestine Cinema Group and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) had recognized the necessity for the creation of a Palestinian film archive, which led to the creation of the Archive and Cinematheque Department by the Palestinian Cinema Institution (PCI) in 1976.<sup>41</sup>

41. Dickinson, Kay. *Arab Film and Video Manifestos: Forty-Five Years of the Moving Image amid Revolution*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

From their earliest days in Amman, Palestinian filmmakers and photographers were aware of the archival importance of their filming. Part of the optimism of the Palestinian revolution inhered in the belief that its current state as a liberation movement in exile was temporary, that the future of the Palestinian people would differ from the present, and that a detailed record of the revolution would be crucial for future generations. Filmmakers working within the PLO also believed in the power of the indexical image (photographs and film) to convey truth and the power of truth to affect politics. Their drive to film the revolution was, by definition, an archival drive, an attempt to capture and store history so that it would be available for others to see and understand at a later time.<sup>42</sup>

42. Yaqub. p 162.

The PLO film archive was not only created to serve an informative and educative role in Palestine's history, but also to function as a sort of image repository to be used by filmmakers, prior to 1982.

The loss of the PLO archives in 1982 was one factor in the rupture separating the new strands of Palestinian filmmaking of the 1980s and 1990s from earlier works. The PLO maintained several archives in Beirut. Films, footage, and related documentation were stored in the PCI archive [...] Whether the PCI archive was destroyed, stolen, or lost (and hence a

treasure that potentially could be recovered) has not yet been definitively determined, but its disappearance has had an impact on Palestinian film. As a resource open to all PLO and solidarity filmmakers, the archive informed the look and content of films throughout the period. Footage was often reused in multiple films [...] PLO materials also exist in German archives, the result of co-production agreements between the PLO and the GDR. When PLO filmmakers left Beirut, many of them took their archives with them. Maurer, Hawal, and al-Zubaidi all have such private archives.<sup>43</sup>

43. *Ibid.* pp. 198-199.

This PLO archival drive was certainly shared by Kais, who not only has a private archive but also has been involved in the search for the lost Palestinian film archive. In the film *Kings and Extras* (Azza El-Hassan, 2004), Kais is visiting a cemetery with the director suggesting that the films that disappeared in 1982 might have been hidden there.<sup>44</sup> Some answers are to be found in the film *Looted and Hidden* (Rona Sela, 2018). Sela has been investigating the visual material taken as booty by Israeli soldiers in Beirut and found, among other materials, Kais' film *Anti-Siege* in the Israeli Defense Forces archives, which access is restricted. In the film, I see images very similar to the ones I have seen in *Wahab al Horriyah* and I wonder: how many images shown in the film also exist in the Israeli military archives? Is a copy of the film even kept there? Now that I think about it, the film also shows images that seem to have been filmed from an Israeli perspective, given the proximity to the Israeli soldiers (sometimes the camera is in the tank with Israeli soldiers). In any case, where did Kais find all of this archival material documenting the Resistance's operations from 1982 until 1989? Sometimes, the images he is re-using seem to come from TV, at some point he is using excerpts from a feature film too, but I don't know where he went to look for all of these various sources.

44. Farine. p 209.

The film follows the act of seizure and the control  
over the looted materials in Israeli archives.  
It reveals the materials in their original  
Palestinian contexts for the first time  
and traces the central figures  
whose work was connected to the archives.

*Looted and Hidden* (Rona Sela, 2018)



*Anti Siege* (Kais al-Zubaidi, 1977) in *Looted and Hidden* (Rona Sela, 2018)



*Looted and Hidden* (Rona Sela, 2018)

16mm work print scan - *Wabeb al Horriyah*



Thursday, June 9

## Condemned

*Only the hand which erases can write.*<sup>45</sup>

— Jean-Luc Godard

45. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, episode 3(a), (Jean-Luc Godard, 1998). (my translation)

In *Looted and Hidden*, Sabri Jiryis (ex-director of the PLO Research Center) explains how in 1983, Israel returned the archive materials to the PLO research center, as part of a prisoner swap. The deal was broken by the French and 120 wooden crates were sent to a Palestine Liberation Army Camp in Algeria, through Air France. In 2001, Israel confiscated PLO archives again, after the research center settled in East Jerusalem. Another loop, another cycle. According to him, the repeated plundering of the archives is part of the Palestinian struggle. It is “another battle, not with bullets, with books. Another battle.”



*Looted and Hidden* (Rona Sela, 2018)

When watching images from the restricted archives Israel is holding, it is inevitable not to think about their political character, in the way they deal with narrative building and memory. “No political power without control of the archive, if not of the memory. Effective democratization is always measured by this essential criterion: participation and access to the archive, to its constitution and interpretation.”<sup>46</sup> In *Archive Fever*, Derrida analyzes the archive, quasi psychoanalytically, and reveals “the violence of the archive itself, as archive, as archival violence.”<sup>47</sup> Further than the violent political power of the archives, what the film reminds me of is the idea that “[d]estruction and preservation are, in the most profound sense, bound up in a cyclical process.”<sup>48</sup> One does not go without the other. There wouldn’t be an archival drive, without the threat of death, aggression and destruction. The archive is made possible because of those impulses. Hence, destruction drive and archival drive co-exist and this is what Derrida refers to as *archive fever*. “There would certainly be no archive drive if it did not involve radical finality, if it did not involve the possibility of forgetting, which is not limited to repression.”<sup>49</sup> He argues that the “archive is always and *a priori* working against itself.”<sup>50</sup> I find this to be even more true when thinking about photochemical film archives. In its photochemical form, film is bound to get damaged and eventually disappear. A print can only be projected a certain number of times before being too degraded to be used. A sort of double condemnation. Perhaps even triple when the films are Palestinian? As Estefan points out, “the constitutive condition of Palestinian archives - recurrently plundered and destroyed by Israel - is dispossession.”<sup>51</sup>

46. Derrida, Jacques. *Mal d'Archive: Une Impression Fraudienne*. Galilée, 2008. p 15. (my translation)

47. *Ibid.* p 19.

48. Lowenthal, David. “Material Preservation and Its Alternatives.” *Perspecta*, vol. 25, 1989, p 73.

49. Derrida. p 38.

50. *Ibid.* p 26.

51. Estefan, Kareem. “Narrating Looted and Living Palestinian Archives.” *Feminist Media Histories*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2022, p 58.

*Making cinema is writing on a paper that burns.*<sup>52</sup>

— Pier Paolo Pasolini



A frame from the 16mm work print of *Wahab Horriyah*  
burnt by a projector

52. Pasolini, Pier Paolo. « Être est-il naturel » (1967), in *L'Expérience hérétique, Langue et cinéma*, Payot, Paris, 1976. p 216. (my translation)

Saturday, June 11

## Towards Imperfect Restoration

I met with Mathilde Rouxel last night. We talked about the Eye International Conference, where she presented the Jocelyne Saab restoration project I had helped with, and she gave me some updates on its status. Apparently, during the Montreal retrospective, people were quite moved to rediscover the films in a much higher visual quality than the way they had always seen them, usually on bad quality tapes. They were happy to be able to recognize Jocelyne's face on some shots, where they had never noticed her before. This reminds me of an important point brought up by Carolina during the EIC: "We are not used to seeing a VHS copy as a preservation copy but sometimes it is, it is the only thing we have. We should get used to seeing degraded archival material. We consider it 'not enough,' and this is an issue."<sup>53</sup>

53. Cappa.

It's always nice to converse with Mathilde, she knows so much about Lebanon's specificities and has her own way of doing things. She mentioned the anti-institution approach she shares with Muhanad Yaqubi (also collaborating on the Jocelyne Saab restoration project), who presented his work on the PLO archives he found in Japan at the EIC. His presentation was titled "Towards Imperfect Archives." Espinosa's *Imperfect Cinema* defended the "communicative and aesthetic power of the imperfections of low-budget filmmaking arising out of contexts of political urgency."<sup>54</sup> Maybe we should think about Imperfect Restorations too? We then talked about the importance of keeping in mind the conditions (material and financial) in which Lebanese civil war films were made, especially when calculating the amount of money (and time) we need to restore them. It was nice to laugh with her about how the restoration might be more expensive and time consuming than the making of the film itself. She also pointed out that often, due to the tendency towards aesthetic perfectionism in the digital restoration world, we may be "fixing" things the directors couldn't care less about back then, given the emergency of their situation and the precarious modes of production, so I think about the concept of minimal intervention again. When working with militant films, remembering not only their modes of production but also the way they circulated seems essential:

54. Yaqub. p 50.

We work very carefully on the political and physical repair of these materials and research the specific contexts in which they were produced. Having completed in detail the whole process of identification, research, and restoration, we are the best placed to ensure their circulation [...] When we come with a proposal to restore a film, invisible for the past 45 years, we continue and prolong the particular (and political) care they gave to it. We are part of a similar impoverished economy and work with a comparable, militant commitment - a desire to emancipate ourselves from the rules of the industry. We also want to establish this intention, and to learn from it.<sup>55</sup>

55. Morin, 2022, pp. 33-44.

Monday, June 13

## Memory Glitch

Back to San Sebastian. I woke up with a voice note from my friend Riwa. When I was in Beirut, she showed me a WIP of the film she is editing. It's a film about Lebanon's history, but it's a bit hard to define. In any case, it only uses archive images, whether from TV, documentaries or fiction films. Mostly from the civil war period. Of course, I asked her if watching these images on repeat, for consecutive days/weeks/months, created a sort of time confusion for her. I was hoping she would have experienced the same thing as I did so that we could talk about it. At the time, she had said no. But in her voice note today, she tells me that she thought about it and yes, sometimes weird things happen. Being in some places triggers fake memories, coming from images she has only seen on screen, on repeat. For example, she was driving by the Ring intersection in Beirut, and had flashbacks of horrible things that happened there, convinced she had been a direct witness to them, only to realize a few seconds later that they were actually images she had seen in a film, happening in the same spot. Although it is not a pleasant experience for her, it makes me feel better. I'm not the only one feeling disoriented by images, feeling time glitching, or rather, failing.



Tuesday, June 14

## Monuments/Documents

While prepping for another presentation of the project at the school, I had a look at the scanned film again to grab stills to include in a powerpoint. What struck me this time, as I was watching the film at double speed, was the recurrence of not only documents, but also monuments: statues, sculptures, destroyed buildings, tombs... I don't recall ever seeing all these physical *mementos* in Lebanon. Where did they go? Maybe I just wasn't paying attention. I know the statue of the martyr's square in downtown Beirut was removed for a while, before being re-installed. I can't help but thinking of these images of texts and monuments as witnesses.

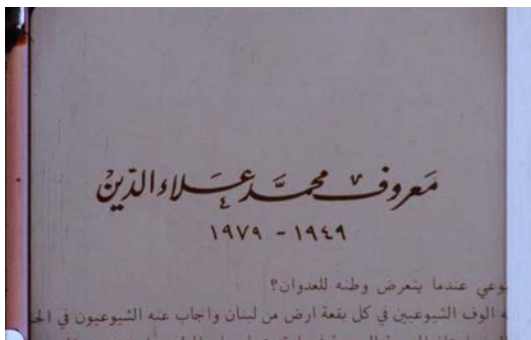
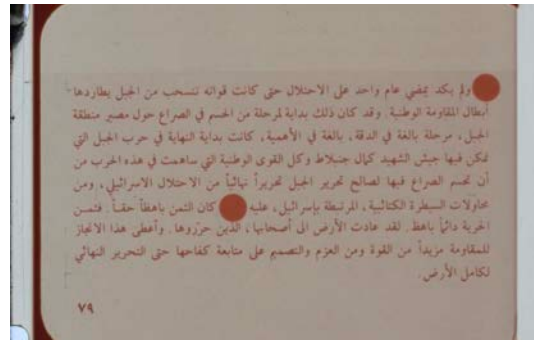


*Beirut... Points of view* (Hady Zaccak, 2000)

Between the monument and the document there is no cut. They are two poles of the same continuous spectrum and one requires the other. The monument is produced to impact the viewer's gaze and guide his imagination and his thoughts towards the invisible, in particular towards the past. [...] Designed to be looked at and directly evoke the past, the monument is linked to collective memory. When the facts that it transmits are no longer and belong to the past, the document serves as an intermediary that allows them to be reconstructed; it is an instrument of history.<sup>56</sup>

I wonder, again, where *Wahab el Horriyah* stands. Is it history, through the use of newspapers, photographs and TV images? Or is it collective memory, through the use of live testimonies and interviews of families remembering the ones they lost? According to Pomian, the monument "makes one remember" while the document "informs." Kais' film does both.

56. Pomian, Krzysztof. "Les Archives. Du Trésor Des Chartes Au Caran." *Les Lieux De Mémoire*, vol. 3, 1992. p 166.



Wednesday, June 15

## Now what?

Earlier tonight I was preparing some videos for tomorrow's presentation. I wanted to include a video comparing the VHS to the scan of the 16mm, so we could see the huge image quality difference. As I was trying to find an excerpt where the 2 sources are matching in terms of edit, I realized they don't have the same montage. They seem similar, but aren't. There are some minor differences, such as shot durations, or an extra shot here and there in the VHS. What does that mean? Where does the VHS come from then? Is this 16mm work print not corresponding to the final edit? And how can I use the sound from the VHS/DVD if they don't have the same edit? I don't understand anything anymore.





16mm work print scan vs VHS - *Wahab al Horriyah*

Saturday, June 18

## Lacuna

I am faced with a dilemma. I don't know if I should continue with the restoration of the work print without including any sound (since the soundtrack doesn't match the edit). Or if I should try to match the sound from the VHS to the print. The incomplete sound corresponding to the first half of the film is still in Beirut, should I find a way to bring it here and digitize it? Or maybe I should try to locate the full sound matching my copy by contacting other institutions who could have it? Although *Nadi* affirmed many times that no other element from the film could be found...

I think showing the film without sound wouldn't make sense, the objective of my work was to make the film circulate once again. Without sound, the film can't be fully "restituted," in Aventurin's sense of the word. All these questions made me remember an article I read this winter. It is a re-reading of the FIAF\* Code of Ethics,<sup>57</sup> questioning its capacity to frame the work of today's restorers, especially since technological tools have developed so much since it was written.<sup>58</sup> The latest edition of the Code dates back to 2008. 14 years is a long time. The Code has of course been shared or referenced in many classes that I've had this year, however, no critical reading of it was proposed. I think it would have been constructive to have this recent article accompany the Code so that we can critically engage with it, rethink and discuss what is considered allowed or recommended when restoring a film. But back to my dilemma about the missing sound: the article proposes it could be useful to try and accept the incomplete character of an element to be restored (say a film copy in which we know some scenes are missing compared to other versions), similarly to how we accept ruins or missing parts in other art forms.

57. Executive Committee of FIAF. "FIAF Code of Ethics." *FLAF*, 1998.

58. Fournier, Caroline, and Jeanne Pommeau. "Pour Une Relecture De L'éthique De La Restauration Et De La Diffusion à L'aune Du Progrès Technique." *Journal of Film Preservation*, no. 104, Apr. 2021, pp. 11–24.

\* International Federation of Film Archives



I read a short essay by David Lowenthal today, tackling the subject of lacuna in a similar manner, by giving arguments as to why preserving fragments instead of whole pieces is an interesting option. It can be done without the same obsessive fidelity to the concept of “original integrity” as when trying to work with an entire piece. It is cheaper, takes less space and still can function as a reminder. It also resembles life, revealing the living process of objects:

Fragments surpass wholes in joining the past dynamically with the present. Mutilated and incomplete, they impart a sense of life “from their evidence of their struggle with Time,” in Malraux’s phrase [...] Engaging the viewer’s imagination, fragments activate myriad connections between what is and what was [...] They not only reveal what is missing, ghost presences of their past, they also refer to their re-discovery. Thus, the fragment implies “the history of both its deposit and its recovery.”<sup>59</sup>

59. Lowenthal, p 72.

Why do lacunas tend to be accepted in architecture or sculpture for example, but not in cinema? I don’t know if the answer exists but I do like the question. Should I accept this lacuna without trying to fill it?

Tuesday, June 21

## Lesson

As I was trying to understand the edit differences between the VHS and the work print I scanned, I discovered that the DVD did not originate from the VHS I digitized. The DVD actually has the same edit as the work print. And it contains the full soundtrack. Since both had the same color bars at the beginning and they had almost the same duration, I had wrongly assumed the DVD corresponded to a digitization of that VHS. I should have known better, but moving forward, I will make it a point to check all elements fully and thoroughly, before assuming their exact content.

Thursday, June 23

## “You can use this version”

I finally heard Kais’ voice. Liana and I called him together so she could translate for us. Kais is really old, so it was hard to get the conversation started and ask specific questions. My main concern was to make sure that the 16mm work print I have corresponds to the final edit, approved by the LCP. I had previously sent him a video with both the VHS and the 16mm work print playing side by side so he could compare both edits. He confirmed that the scanned work print corresponds to the final version, and that the VHS is an earlier edit he then had amended after receiving feedback in Beirut. I ask him how the film circulated and who originally gave him feedback, since I had Yacub’s words about Palestinian cinema in mind.”

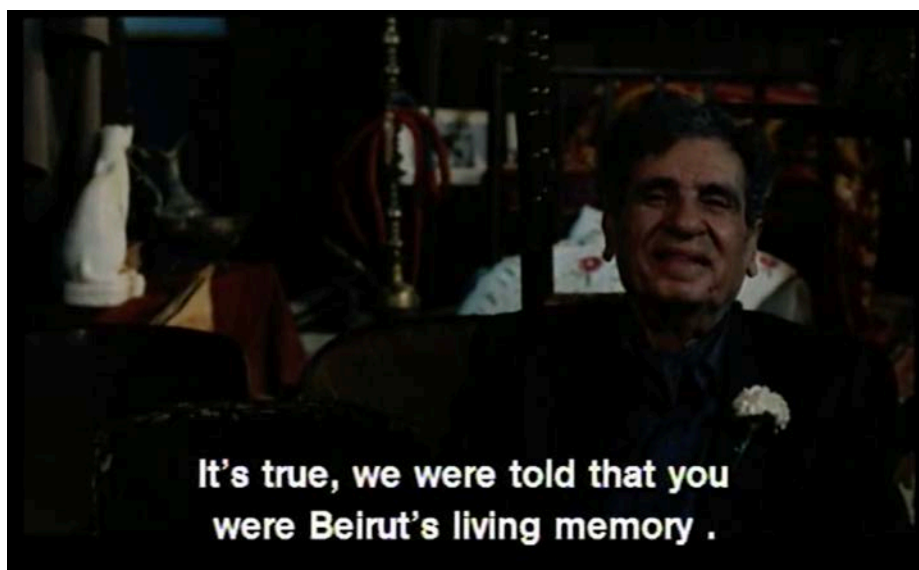
Distribution, too, would not take place through traditional commercial channels, but rather through those channels—e.g., the offices of the revolution, allies, student groups, and popular committees—that would ensure the type of active political engagement with a film that was necessary to its efficacy. The film itself would be an imperfect, emergent, and open text, and a filmmaker’s relationship to it would be ongoing. A filmmaker might alter the film based on audience reactions.<sup>60</sup>

60. Yacub, p 50.

But I didn’t receive any concrete answers. I think he is too old for such a conversation and I feel bad for bothering him with all these questions. The only thing that seems certain and that he repeats many times is “You can use this version,” referring to the print I scanned. That’s my plan. But what I find strange is that Naja from *Nadi Lekol Nas* is not sure about it. He says that it is not the version he remembers seeing in Beirut. It is confusing, but we agree to follow Kais’ directive.

Monday, June 27

## Archives are the people



*Il était une fois Beyrouth: histoire d'une star* (Jocelyne Saab, 1994)

I called Anais Farine, Liana's friend, who researched Kais' earlier Arab alternative cinema. She generously shared a lot of her findings with me, including Kais' CV, and gave me names of other people I should talk to, journals I should consult, films I could watch. She then put me in touch with Irit Neidhardt and Tobias Hering, both of whom are based in Germany and worked with Kais in the past. She thinks Irit could know more about Kais' relationship to Germany, and the post-production of the film. It feels like a treasure hunt, or a quest to figure out how many degrees of separation exist between Kais and I. When I asked her where I could look for newspapers reviewing movies from that time, she mentioned Abboudi Abou Jaoude, a "Lebanese publisher and himself an encyclopedia of cinema, [who] has been collecting film posters since he was 15."<sup>61</sup> I don't know the name but when she explains where his shop is located, I remember having met him already. I had been to his shop to buy prints of old posters to decorate my apartment in Beirut.

61. Shooter, Natalie. "Beirut's Movie Archivist Preserves Lebanon's Celluloid Glory Years." *Middle East Eye*, 12 Feb. 2016.



Collector Aboudi Abou Jaoude with the film poster for Haroun (Haroun sympathy) (MEE/Roland Ragi)



The back room of Al Furas publishing and distribution house, where Aboudi Abou Jaoude's keeps his poster collection (MEE/Roland Ragi)



A selection of lobby cards used to promote films in the cinema (MEE/Roland Ragi)

Figure 24

People are the archives I'm seeking: they are the best archive I can turn towards, especially in Lebanon. I don't know if it is easier or more complicated than going to a sort of institution, or if the question is even worth asking. People as Archive. Archive as People. In the Israeli military archives, the pictures the soldiers looted in Lebanon are labeled as "imprisoned photographs." It couldn't be any clearer.



Looted and Hidden (Rona Sela, 2018)



Wednesday, June 29

## Becoming archive

*The screen is the camera.*<sup>62</sup>

— Jean-Luc Godard

62. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, episode 3(a), (Jean-Luc Godard, 1998). (my translation)

During our phone call last week, Kais referred to the film as an “archive film,” and explained that he had to look for the archival footage in many different places, not only in TV archives in Lebanon but in Syria too. Most of the TV images he uses were filmed from a TV monitor, if we look closely, we can see the edges of the TV monitor appearing on the frame top and bottom corners. Sometimes, it is even possible to know if the images displayed on the TV screen were shot on film or on video tape. Re-filming the images, re-shooting the events: this is something Jocelyne Saab used to do as well. Creating an image from an image on a screen. The camera is filming the image, which has become the event itself.

The archive is not content with simply recording an event, which would remain exterior to it. The event has a generative and creative dimension, so close and inseparable from the image produced that these two terms - image and event - become inseparable, if not reversible.<sup>63</sup>

63. Olcèse, Rodolphe. *Le Surgissement Des Archives*. Publications Universitaires De Saint-Étienne, 2021. p 231. (my translation)

A Lebanese National Resistance Front attack on Israeli soldiers is being filmed, simultaneously recording the event and creating a potential visual archive. The event and its image are now linked forever, the latter almost replaces the former. This is what Derrida refers to as “the archiving archive,” emphasizing that it is the way visual info media operate.<sup>64</sup> To him, only the future can tell if an image will be considered of archival value.<sup>65</sup> But when is this moment? From which point do we start considering an image as an archive? “One is not born, but rather becomes, an archive,” argue Julie Maeck and Matthias Steinle.<sup>66</sup>

64. Derrida. p 34.

65. *Ibid.* p 60.

66. Maeck, Julie, and Matthias Steinle. “On ne naît pas image d’archives, on le devient.” Steinle, Matthias, an Julie Maeck. *L’image d’archives : Une image en devenir*. Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016. pp. 11-18. (my translation)

The archival image does not intrinsically possess a documentary value in and of itself.\* This value is erratic, it evolves over time according to its market value and the questions we ask of the images [...] Each image, whether of documentary or fictional origin, abandoned in an attic or carefully inventoried in an archive, is a potential archival image. It is the Sleeping Beauty in the woods of dormant archives. It becomes a monument/documentary image from the moment we decide to make something out of it. If one accepts this postulate, it is thus necessary to question the becoming archive of the image, namely the processes which

\* For more on this in a context of repression archives, see: Da Silva Catela, Ludmila. “Chapter 7: El Mundo De Los Archivos.” *Los Archivos De La Represión Documentos, Memoria y Verdad*, Siglo XXI De España, Madrid, 2002.

participate in conferring on the image the status of archive [...] All seems thus to be played at another level, that of the “recovery” of the images at a moment posterior to their manufacture, in a discursive device presenting them like a testimony, a trace of a past event, which is understood as such by the reader or the spectator.<sup>67</sup>

67. *Ibid.*

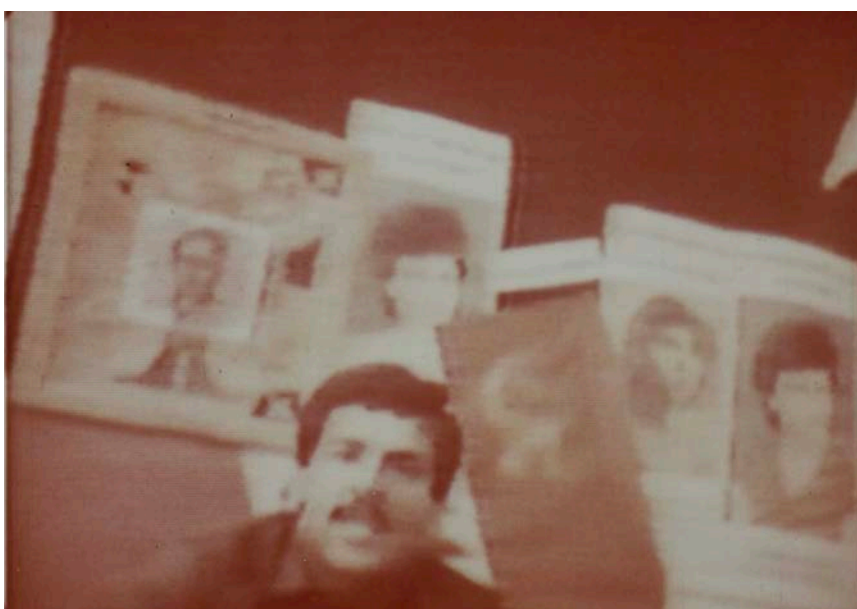
In 1989, Kais made an “archive film,” using archival footage. But the images he re-used did not inherently possess an archival value, in a vacuum. If they have one, it is precisely because of why, how and when he decided to use them:

Their integration in a film participates in their formation, in their archiving, it continues a process of production of the event which has already begun and which takes with this film a new turn. Every documentary film, in its own way, is an archive, potentially called to be transformed in another process of archiving, that is to say to continue in a third film.<sup>68</sup>

68. Olcèse, p 253.

*Wahab al Horriyah* became an archive on two occurrences at least: the first time in 1989, when Kais made it, using archival footage and depicting the events related to the Resistance from 1982 until 1989. The second time, in 2022, when we decided to work on it with *Nadi Lekol Nas*. It is our gaze which turns it into an archive yet again. Not a petrifying Medusa gaze, which freezes the past and turns into stone to fixate it. Rather, a gaze aiming at liberating these images from the dust that had settled on them, insufflating them with a new vital force so that they can be seen again.





Wednesday, July 6

## Images looking at me

*The pain of the archive is the other side of its attraction: it is first of all the pain of time. Lost time, whose search by the film has a singularity: the elaboration of memory, linked by nature to the projection experience, comes to repeat the experience of the past reality, of which the archive wants to be the testimony or the redemption.*<sup>69</sup>

— Raymond Bellour

69. Bellour, Raymond in Olcèse. p 297. (my translation)

I rented the grading room in 2deo to compare the work print edit and the DVD. It is a spacious room with a huge screen and a projector. Examining the 2 files' differences was a bit of a headache. The DVD is actually a digitization of a VHS, itself a capture of a 16mm print (though I do not know which one). Many format transformations took place, and it is impossible to know exactly how they took place and how the image was modified over time, especially when it comes to framerate. I felt stuck so I decided to leave it as such and use the room as a private projection room instead. I watched films about the civil war the entire day. From Jocelyne Saab's Beirut Trilogy\* (whose camera operator was Hassan Naamani, who also shot *Wahab al Horriyah*) to Randa Chahal Sabbagh's *Pas à Pas* (1979). It was painful. It was confusing. It was sad. But I couldn't stop watching. It was bigger than me. Maybe the fact that I was in a dark room, in front of a big screen made everything more intense, including the feeling of time displacement I experienced again. I knew the horror, I had seen it before in images, I had seen a glimpse of it with my own eyes too. Yet, I had forgotten. Watching these films makes me wonder: did we rush to clean up the streets of Beirut right after the port explosion (while the government did not move a finger) because we couldn't bear to see the city in a way that could potentially resemble that of war times? As if refusing to see Beirut the way we had seen it in images from that time? We cleaned so fast that we did not have time to process what had just happened.

In *Beyrouth ma ville*, Roger Assaf's words resonate with me:

An image only has 2 dimensions. You have to hit harder [than the bombs] to destabilize them. An Arabic expression says you have to treat an image like it never existed. You have to act so that it is undone. Images must be terrorized so that men can choose to forget them. But there are images I've looked at so intensely, and similar to images that I've revisited so often, that they seem to be looking at me, recognizing me.<sup>70</sup>

70. *Beyrouth ma ville* (Jocelyne Saab, 1982).

\* *Beyrouth Jamais Plus* (1976), *Lettre de Beyrouth* (1978), *Beyrouth ma ville* (1982)



Is that what I'm doing? Terrorizing my own memories so that I forget what I had seen on August 4 and the days that followed? Usually, I like to take a walk alone in the city after exiting the cinema, but today, I feel like I can't stay alone and that I need to be surrounded by real people, very much alive. I've seen too many corpses for one day.

Tuesday, July 12

## Truth and Fiction

*There is no neutrality in the point of view, only declared commitment.*<sup>71</sup>

— Carlos Amorín

I've been going back to this question of *Wahab al Horriyah* as history and memory, and I wonder about Kais' role as an archivist and historian. In 1972, Kais was defending the documentary form as the only cure to the disease the Arab cinema was suffering from. He actually only directed one fiction feature, all his other films are documentaries.

It is essential that the documentary film reveals, through its faithful and direct relationship with reality, the lie and falsification of this world of illusions that classical Arab cinema has and continues to fabricate [...] The exposure of an image faithful to social reality is a fundamental step in giving an Arab identity to contemporary cinema, and it will unmask the false image that pretends to be related to reality. It will push Arab filmmakers to deal with social reality, according to a faithful realistic artistic approach in order not to become similar to fictional cinema.<sup>72</sup>

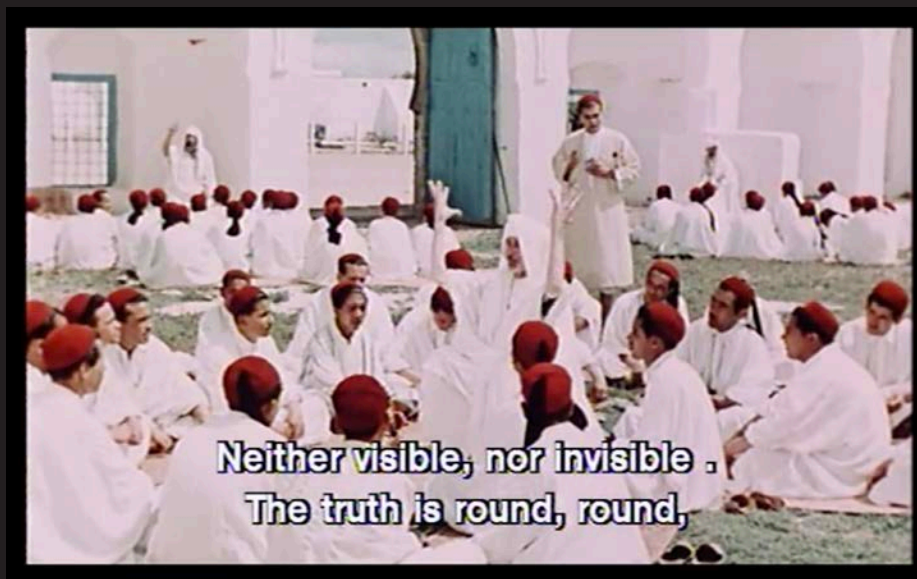
If Kais seems to be concerned with the concept of "truth," it is because he anchors it in "reality," as opposed to the fiction created by classic cinema, which is based on illusions and tricks. By selecting *real* footage, categorizing it, arranging it, and interpreting it, Kais acts as both an archivist and an editor. It is the relation (in)between all the fragments he presents to us that makes the film. As Godard declared: "There is no image, there are only relations of images. And there is a certain form of image assembling: as soon as there is 2, there is 3 [...] The more distant the relations are, the more the image is just and strong."<sup>73</sup> To the archival footage of military attacks and armed resistance, Kais opposed testimonies of the fallen martyrs' relatives, whether family or comrades. Against the unsharp, blurry and shaky archival footage, stand the well-lit and composed images of Hassan Naamani. Newspapers, photographs, TV images, interviews, drawings, excerpts of a feature film: the images are heterogeneous, and used as witnesses to the events depicted. Kais is concerned with the truth: in the sense that his film is an homage to the martyrs of the Resistance, it needs to be accurate to a certain extent. The film assumes quite a traditional structure and form. Formally, its strength resides in

71. Carlos Amorín in Allier Montaño, Eugenia. "Sara y Simon o La Reconstrucción Del Pasado: El Problema De La Verdad En La Escritura De La Historia Del Tiempo Presente." *Cuicuilco*, vol. 11, no. 30, Jan. 2004. p 28.

72. Al-Zubaidi, Kais. "Le Film Documentaire - Une Voie Vers Un Nouveau Cinéma Arabe." *Al Tariq*, no. 7-8, 1972. (my translation)

73. Godard, Jean-Luc. "Jean-Luc Godard Rencontre Régis Dubray." *Jean-Luc Godard Par Jean-Luc Godard*, II, Cahiers Du Cinéma, Paris, 1998. p 430. (my translation)

its capacity to create a space where the dead martyrs and their living loved ones, still co-exist. A potential space, outside of the limitations of linear timelines.



*Il était une fois Beyrouth: histoire d'une star* (Jocelyne Saab, 1994)

*The structure of the archive is spectral. It is spectral a priori: neither present nor absent “in the flesh,” neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another where eyes can never be met.*<sup>74</sup>

74. Derrida, p 132.

— Jacques Derrida

Monday, July 18

## The Archive is the Screen

I've read a great essay by Kareem Estefan, in which he focuses on "how Palestinians have responded to archival loss, and to questions of memory, representation, and imagination that emerge when a community is robbed of narrative and visual media intended to document their past and present and to enable emancipatory futures."<sup>75</sup> Similarly to Palestinian archives, Lebanese archives also go against the Foucauldian concept of archives (discourse emanating from and reproducing the sovereignty of the state), and against Derrida's vision of institutional archives being guarded by an authority representative.<sup>76</sup> Although Lebanese archives can be very opaque, they can be found in the gaps, in the absences. A first attempt at a Lebanese film archive was initiated by Maurica Akl (founder of the cine-club Beirut) in 1969. After years of preparation and collecting films, in 1975, a shell destroyed the offices located in downtown Beirut, thus destroying the films that were to constitute the first film archive in Lebanon. Lebanese artists are the ones who are actualizing the *becoming* archives of images, assuming the (failed) role of the state. "The screen becomes the space where archives can be organized, and put in relation to other materials and acts they document."<sup>77</sup> Right after the war, in the early nineties, Jocelyne Saab started working on her film *Il était une fois Beyrouth: histoire d'une star* (1994). In post-war Beirut, two young women, Leila and Yasmine, meet a cinephile, Monsieur Farouk (reminding me of the poster collector Abou Jaoude), who makes them discover their own city through moving images, whether from documentaries or fiction films. The two protagonists travel back in time, through the films, through the images, through the archives, seemingly the only way to get a sense of the city's history. For this film, Saab listed all the films (national, regional or international) in which Beirut appears. After which she managed to get some funding to restore 25 of them, which she then donated to the Ministry of Culture, leading to the creation of the Lebanese National Film Archive in 1999.<sup>78</sup> The one that is difficult to access today. It feels like the most efficient way to get to know Lebanon's past is to watch Lebanese movies.

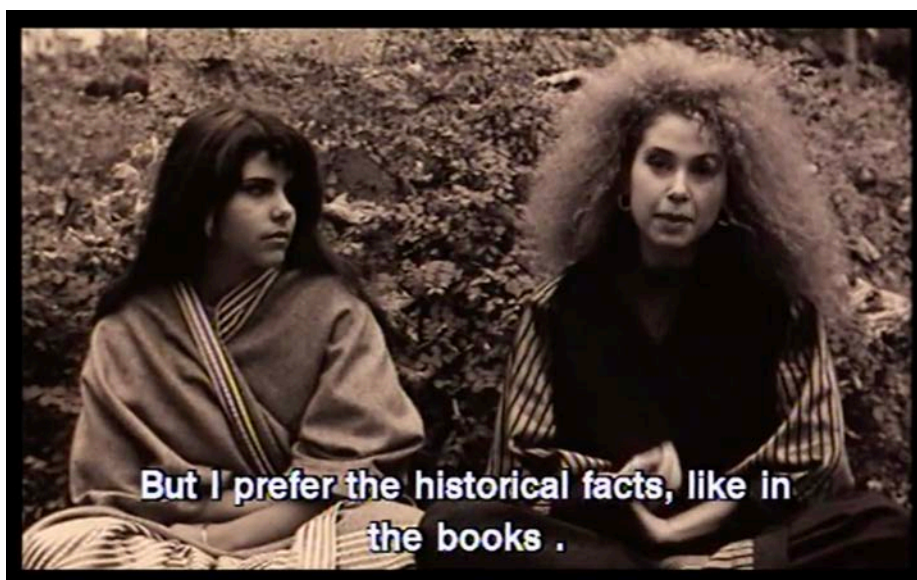
75. Estefan, p 45.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

77. Olcèse, p 294.

78. Nashawaty, Yara. "Entretien: Cinémathèque Libanaise Avec Nour Ouaida." *Regards*, vol. 21, 31 Jan. 2019.





*Il était une fois Beyrouth: histoire d'une star* (Jocelyne Saab, 1994)



*Under the Rumbles* (Mai Masri, 1982)

Lebanon's fragmentation of both its archives and cohesive historical narrative led Lebanese artists from the "war generation\*\*" to "narrate Lebanon's civil war(s) by interpolating fictional characters and events within otherwise factual histories,"<sup>79</sup> using fabulation\*\* and parafiction. With both these tools, fiction is not opposed to the truth nor to the real anymore, it is rather the story-telling function.<sup>80</sup>

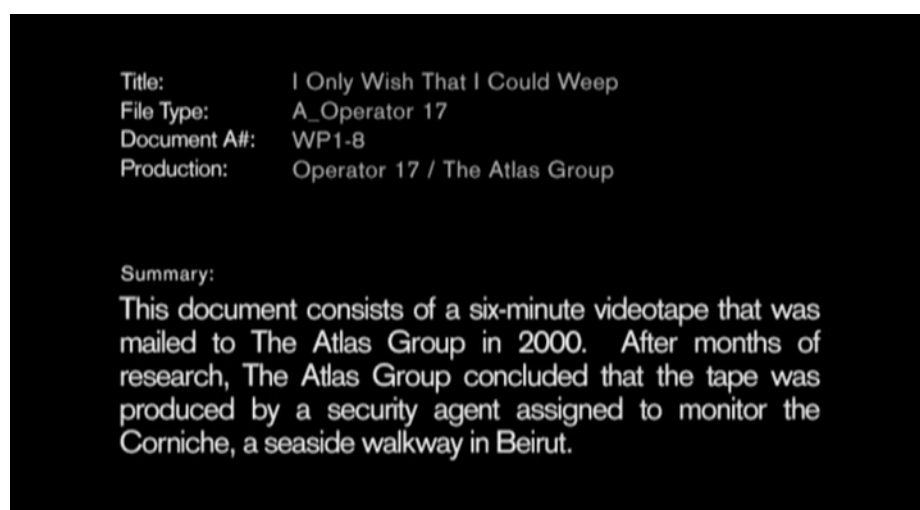
79. Estefan, p 49.

80. Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. University of Minnesota Press, 1989. p 150.

As in the case of Walid Raad's imaginary institution The Atlas Group, these cultural practitioners often invent ostensibly documentary material, and appropriate the documentarian's authority, on the one hand supplementing and animating fragmentary archives, and on the other, foregrounding the fallacies and fantasies of memory as constitutive of emergent truths.\*\*\* Archival erasure spurs a desire not only to bear witness to suppressed histories, but also to speculate about those lives and narratives conspicuously absent from the colonial archive and to interrogate the possibility of their recovery. A lasting effect of archival dispossession is to erode the distinction between witnessing and speculating, as memory and imagination become equally necessary to conjure a suppressed past that nonetheless structures the present.<sup>81</sup>

81. Estefan, p 49.

Fiction and reality merge on the screen to make sense of the past and transform the future. Here, the screen *is* the archive.



*I only wish that I could weep* (Atlas Group, 2002)

\* Such as Walid Raad, Rabih Mroué, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Elias Khoury, Rani Stefan and others.

\*\* According to Deleuze's film theory, fabulation enables "a process of becoming otherwise and the emergence of a reality not rooted in the visual evidence of a world captured by the camera." It is a tool for whom truth has to be created, since it can't be reproduced. Estefan, Kareem. "Narrating Looted and Living Palestinian Archives." *Feminist Media Histories*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2022. p 49.

\*\*\* See Bouveresse, Juliette. "Walid Raad / The Atlas Group." *Les Clés Du Moyen-Orient*, 28 Nov. 2012.

Monday, August 22

## Questions/Answers

I finally received Kais' translation to the questions I had sent him through *Nadi Lekol Nas*, after our phone call a couple of months ago.

*M: Do you remember how the idea of the film came about? Was the film commissioned to you or was it something you proposed?*

**K:** At that time, I had met the director of the Libyan Foundation at the Leipzig Festival and I was trying to make a film for the Foundation. I told him that I wanted to make a film about Libya's official narrative regarding the PLO. When he agreed, I asked him to provide me with rich material on the subject, and things went well. I visited Libya and signed a contract with the Foundation and obtained good archival material and payment for the preparations. I told the Foundation that I was ready for filming, and after a long wait, there was still no response from them. I sent a message to the director to cancel the contract.

I later was in Beirut and Osama Al-Aref knew about what had happened with the Libyan Cinema Foundation, so he set an appointment for me with comrade Karim Mroué. I had written an artistic text about the Lebanese National Resistance (the booklet is in my possession and Naja Al Achkar had a look at it). I submitted the same film project to the Lebanese Communist Party [LCP], which agreed to it, and we named the film's production body: Supporters of the Lebanese National Resistance Front [LNRFF].

I'm quite intrigued by this reference to Libya... Though a bit confusing at first, his explanation clarifies the LCP and LNRF distinction. The LNRF was the armed faction launched (but not exclusively) by the LCP. The LCP decided to produce a film about the resistance under the name: "Supporters of the Lebanese National Resistance Front."

*M: Which year was the film released?*

**K: The film was completed in 1989 and it was shown at the 6th Damascus International Film Festival. It won the Golden Award, which Karim Mroué and I received.**

This is a piece of information I couldn't confirm yet, as the festival's archives I consulted so far mentioned a different title for the 1989 Golden Award, however the date of completion matches what I had assumed from the inspection of the work print, observing material ranging from 1983 to 1989.

*M: Where was the film edited? Why is the separate magnetic sound for reel 1 contained in a box from Cineco? What did Cineco do on the film in terms of post-production? What was done in Lebanon?*

**K: Cineco was a Dutch company that had an office in Berlin. I used to deal with its director for my technical work. The editing process took place in Berlin, and other technical operations took place in Damascus. The movie commentary was written and recorded by Saad Allah Mazraani at a sound studio in Damascus. As for the presence of a separate magnetic sound for the first reel, this is an issue that took place after the loss of the film copy that was handed over to the party, and after the departure of Cineco from Berlin to Munich. The search for a negative copy of the film wasn't conclusive.**

This makes sense because I had heard many times that film couldn't easily be processed in Lebanon during the war, due to the lack of electricity and material. Many filmmakers sent their footage abroad to be processed and edited.

*M: Who gave feedback to that initial version you presented? Was it the resistance who saw the film collectively or people who commissioned the film? Do you remember what type of feedback it was?*

**K: Karim Mroué requested that the film be shown to the resistance faction in the Party, and their views on the film were to change and add some clips and scenes. I did changes and additions without damaging the film.**

After I received this, I had a call with Naja and Liana. They explained to me that the Party was concerned about some passages from the film potentially being problematic today, for political reasons. The LCP has been divided by different ideologies over the years, and the Lebanese Resistance landscape has drastically changed after the film was made, particularly after Hezbollah's ascension. Internal divisions were followed by assassinations. The Party wanted to make sure the film content wouldn't cause issues today. Naja tells me it doesn't. I wonder what would have happened if it did.

*M: How did the film circulate? Where and when was it shown?*

**K: The 16mm print of the film was screened after its final completion by a party committee, and a screening was organized for viewers at ministries and national parties in a showroom, as I think, in Hamra. In a discussion after the screening, the audience demanded the necessity of translating the film into English and presenting it as a national, Arab and international work.**



Naja mentions to me that the film was screened at Cinema Estral in Hamra on September 16, 1989 for the anniversary of the Lebanese National Resistance Front, without Kais, who was already living in Germany at the time. According to him, the film didn't circulate much and the VHS was shown in 2018 at the Russian cultural center in Beirut, in presence of Kais, Karim Mroué, and the film's camera operator Hassan Naamani.

*M: On the box in which the film was contained is written in German "Blood Wedding," is this related to this film?*

**K: "Blood Wedding" was the title of the film, and it has been replaced by "Waheb al Horriyah / The Freedom Giver," from a poem by the Lebanese poet Paul Shaoul.**

*M: Is there anything else you remember  
from the film-making process that you  
would like to share?*

**K: An excerpt from “The Resistance,” a book by Karim Mroué, was used.**

**The film’s soundtrack was composed by German musician Wolfgang Schuur.**

**Music and songs by Marcel Khalife were used in the film with his approval.**

**We found at the Syrian TV the series “Wardat al-Dam/ The Rose of Blood.”**

**Some scenes from the movie “Battle,” directed by Roger Assaf, with his approval.**



*Battle (Roger Assaf, 1984) in the 16mm work print scan -  
Wabe al Horriyah*

Colored paintings by Charbel Fares were used in the film.



Charbel Fares's drawing in the 16mm work print scan -  
*Wabeb al Horriyah*

A song composed by Ziad Rahbani ("If the south stands strong, it's because of its people") performed in the film by Sami Hawat.



Sami Hawat in the 16mm work print scan -  
*Wabeb al Horriyah*

Sunday, September 4

## About the future

*Nothing definitive has happened in the world, the last word of the world and about the world has not yet been said; it remains open and free, everything is still before us and will always be before us.*<sup>82</sup>

— Mikhail Bakhtine

82. Bakhtine, Mikhail. *La Poétique De Dostoïevski*. Seuil, 1998. p 234. (my translation)

I'm on the train on my way to Munich, where I will start my 3 months internship at Pharos, a post-production company that has its own restoration and preservation department. The goal is to finish the restoration of the film there, after the internship work-hours. It will be intense. It's funny, Munich is the first city Kais went to in Germany. Many times this year, I've been unsure of the timeline I'm in, displaced by time, disoriented because of images repeating themselves, images repeating memories, sometimes even creating fake memories. I'm starting to think archives aren't so much about the past and the present as they are about the future. Through repetition, they possess their own temporality, in which our usual understanding of past/present/future bends so that timelines can merge in unexpected ways.

The archivist produces archives, and that is why the archive never closes. It opens from the future. How can we think of this repetition in general in its relationship with memory and with the archive? It is easy to perceive, if not to interpret the necessity of such a relationship, if at least, as one is naturally always tempted to do, one associates the archive with repetition and repetition with the past. But it is about the future, about the archive as an irreducible experience of the future.<sup>83</sup>

83. Derrida. p 109.

If the archive is constantly open, it is because it can always be re-interpreted, re-translated. Just like a film, with each viewing. A film is always at work, a film with archive images, even more so. Archives are not only open from the future, they are about the future, about potentiality.<sup>84</sup> They are also about the duration (more than a moment) that separates us from them, perpetually conjugated at continuous present, as Lebanese filmmaker Rania Stefan beautifully describes:

84. See Olcèse. pp 285-286.

The archive never comes to us alone. It comes loaded with the layers of the passage of time. This time does not only refer to the date of production of the archive, of the release of a film or of its re-reading in the present. It is also the time it took for these images to reach us, their journey. We revisit these archives charged with the memory of what we have seen before. These two timelines are superimposed in the present.<sup>85</sup>

85. Stephan, Rania. "L'Étoffe Des Songes." *Hors Champ*, 2022. (my translation)

If archives evolve in their own nonlinear, fluid temporality, what does that mean about our understanding of time?

The archive, in favor of the creative gestures that seize it, evolves in a radically open world. Neither the microcosm of the archive, nor the world unfolded by the artwork, in which it is inserted, nor the reality in which this artwork arrives to us, have found their definitive form yet. The forms do not ever finish becoming what they potentially can be, because the world in which they occur and are mobilized, lives to keep itself open to the new.<sup>86</sup>

86. Olcèse, p 315.



*Memories for a Private Eye* (Rania Stephan, 2015)  
"It's incredible! When did this happen?"



Friday, September 9

## Berlin?

A few weeks ago, I had a call with Tobias Hering (whose name was on the box containing the film). In 2019, he curated some films that Kais worked on either as an editor or as a director, and got to spend time with him. He told me about Kais' time in Babelsberg, about his filmography and how some of his films are being preserved in the Bundesarchiv. We talked about the possibility of me visiting Berlin to meet Kais and present him the work I've done, with Tobias accompanying me to introduce me and translate for us. Yesterday, I had a long conversation over the phone with Irit Neidhardt, one of Kais' closest friends, who (among other things) mediated the deposit of some of his films in the Bundesarchiv. Irit's work takes on many forms, but she mainly appears to me as an Arab cinema specialist. She told me about the PLO, its relation to East Germany, Kais' life, his work, his relation to the PLO, his friends, his personality... She shared so many anecdotes about him I felt like I could see him clearer than when looking at a picture of him. Sadly, she informed me that since Tobias last saw Kais, his health condition worsened and that visiting him might be deceptive, as his state is very fluctuating. Taking into consideration her warning, I decided today that I will not bother him. I'm truly amazed by Tobias and Irit's generosity in sharing so much with me, just like Anais Farine did. All of these different perspectives made me feel like I got to know Kais better than if I had only met him in person for a couple of hours.

Tuesday, September 13

## Censorship

I just learn that Subversive Film's\* project *Tokyo Reels Film Festival* was censored at documenta 15 in Kassel (one of the biggest international contemporary art events). The project is a cinematic program centered around a speculative documentary using recently restored fragments of films, originally made between the 1960s and '80s, exploring Japanese and Palestinian anti-imperial solidarity. "Subversive Film proposes to collectively reflect on possible processes of unearthing, restoring, and momentary disclosure of the imperfect archives of transnational militant cinema. By bringing back into circulation these moving images, they carefully reactivate present-day solidarity constellations, reflecting the lively utopia of a worldwide liberation movement."<sup>87</sup> After showing for a few days, the program was removed from the exhibition, based on documenta's advisory council problematic categorization of the films as antisemitic propaganda. Critique of the 21st century Israeli state and its occupation of Palestinian territory is being mislabeled as antisemitism and films are being censored because of it. In such a context, *Wahab al Horriyah*'s fate wouldn't have been any different than the *Tokyo Reels Film Festival*. Showing these films has and always will matter, if only to make sure no version of history is left untold.

87. "Subversive Film." *Documenta Fifteen*

\* Collective composed of Muhanad Yaqubi and Reem Shilleh

Thursday, September 23

## When to stop?

It's been 20 days since I started the internship. It's strange, I don't really understand how I ended up here, finishing the restoration of the film in one, if not the most expensive post-production company in Germany. I feel like I've been transplanted into somebody else's body, someone whose routine includes 2 hours of daily commute to work in a giant suburban film studio complex. Quite a change from Beirut and San Sebastian. After the time disorientation comes the spatial confusion.



*Figure 25*

I feel lucky though. I finished grading the film... It took a very long time (around 2 weeks?), even more than expected, since all the different filmstocks had aged differently and hence had different color fadings. Andy Lautil, one of the senior colorists at Pharos, helped me a lot. I learnt much more with him than if I had worked on it on my own. At one point, he was suggesting to grade a shot in a certain way, which in my opinion didn't really match the light I used to see in that street intersection. It felt nice to grade images from places I've been to. I also worked on the synchronization of the sound coming from the DVD so that it matches the 16mm work print with Thomas Orthofer, sound restorer. At last, the 16mm work print has a soundtrack that matches the images exactly. We also removed some of the clicks and dropouts in the soundtrack to improve its quality, without changing the way it feels to the ear. All of this work has been extremely satisfying and I'm happy I was so well surrounded to carry it through. Usually, on restoration projects, the amount of time that will be spent on a task is defined by the client's budget. In this case, there is no budget, only my own time. I decided to take advantage of the structures I am working in to learn at my own pace, without counting the hours. It's quite hard to quantify how much such a project would have cost, but it is a lot more than *Nadi* could have ever afforded. Not only in terms of time but also in terms of resources. I'm not sure I will ever work on a film in such conditions, so I'm taking my time, trying different approaches. Yet, at some point, I need to decide that the work is "finished."



Figure 26

Friday, October 14

## All subjective

I'm at the last stage of the restoration. I started with the digital clean-up of the film, like I had done with *Bilan de la Guerre* earlier this year, except I have more experience with the software now, so I can go faster. It is still a lot. Many questions arose, regarding what to keep and what to remove, and it hasn't been easy answering them, considering each filmstock used has its own issues. Markus Kappelmeier, digital retoucher at Pharos, has been counseling me and helping me save a considerable amount of trials and errors.

I decided to fix the instability caused by my imperfect splices, but not to fix any tear, nor big scratches that removed some of the emulsion (and hence parts of the image), nor projector marks. Other than that, I am mainly removing dirt that had accumulated on the film, as well as residues of tapes: things that I couldn't remove entirely when I cleaned the film manually with alcohol and with the cleaning machine in Madrid. The level of dirtiness is not the same throughout the whole film, some shots are very dirty, some barely have any scratches, big or small. The cleanliness can't be perfectly equalized throughout the whole film, due to the (now limited) amount of time I have until the projection in Beirut and the school deadline. I confirmed from watching the DVD and the VHS that the film contained some dirt back then, so I'm not trying to make it perfectly clean. I am trying to be consistent in what I remove, enough so that the dirt doesn't disturb the viewing experience as much as it would have if left untouched. Maybe I cleaned the film too much, maybe not enough. Since there is no clear reference of what the film looked like when projected, and since this particular print was never projected, I tried to find a middle ground. It's only a subjective process after all.

I am still waiting for the subtitles and I am finalizing the opening titles which will explain which elements were used for this restoration. After that, I will be done.





Digital cleaning - *Wahab al Horriyah*

Sunday, October 30

## Not an epilogue



*Il était une fois Beyrouth: histoire d'une star* (Jocelyne Saab, 1994)

Looking back at the beginning of this project and this diary's first entry, it amuses me to see that I was hoping that my work on the film wouldn't romanticize the past. It did not. Instead, my work developed its own temporality, displacing past, present and future. Ghada Sayegh expresses beautifully what I felt this year:

What is that moment when everything falls apart? The moment that you have always been expecting? In the course of a movie, of a damaged image, of a scratched film, of a broken word, you recognize the wound, the crack that is hidden deep inside yourself. This familiar experience of fracture, of time broken in two. From now on, it has a presence, an existence within a wide web of images and words which, by their constitutive discontinuity, form a language, separated from itself. The origin of the rupture comes from a singular temporality, that of the aftermath of the catastrophe, which ceaselessly revives any discourse or any image related to it. Thought, writing and image disintegrate, carried by an impossible factual, temporal and historical linearity.<sup>88</sup>

88. Sayegh, Ghada. "La Faille Du Temps, De l'Image Et Des Mots." *Hors Champ*, 2021. (my translation)

Sayegh's words as a bandaid. It is impossible to make sense of this time displacement, this sensation of time failing, of the archives' own temporality, if I accept time (and hence history) as linear and rigid. There is so much more to understand, so much more to be felt, so many more aspects to interrogate by challenging this understanding of our world's temporality. In *Potential History*, Azoulay describes the archive as "a graveyard of political life that insists that time is a linear temporality."<sup>89</sup> Challenging this linearity (which she associates with imperialism),<sup>90</sup> she proposes a re-defining of history, a potential history as a "form of being with others, both living and dead, across time, against the separation of the past from the present, colonized peoples from their worlds and possessions, and history from politics."<sup>91</sup> Azoulay's proposal also comes with a rejection of the Gregorian calendar, which "suppresses defiant elements, pushes them 'back' to their 'right place' within the temporal unit delegated as 'the past,' on top of which subsequent units are stacked."<sup>92</sup> I made it a point to write a chronological (even dated) diary to document my work, only to end it with an acknowledgement of the necessity to abolish this linear understanding of time. I'm not sure how I feel about it. Maybe more at peace, less "displaced."

It should be remembered that preservation is only a means to an end; when it becomes an end in itself it ceases to advance its prime functions of use, of instruction, of delight [...] It is an act that preceded some aim to be served through it. Preservation is not action or epilogue; it is only prologue.<sup>93</sup>

The same applies to restoration. I can only hope that my attempt at restoring *Wabeb al Horriyah* is a starting point for these archival images to be used again, for untold stories to resurface, or new images to be (re)created. Not an end, but a potential beginning.

89. Azoulay, Ariella Aïsha. *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. Verso, 2019. p 278.

90. *Ibid.* pp. 262-263.

91. *Ibid.* p 56.

92. *Ibid.* p 267.

93. Lowenthal. p 77.



# واهب الحرية







*Wabeb al Horriyah - restored*









*Wabeb al Horriyah* - restored









*Wabeb al Horriyah - restored*

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# Filmography

*A Summer Not To Forget* (Carol Mansour, 2007)  
*Anti Siege* (Kais al-Zubaidi, 1977)  
*Battle* (Roger Assaf, 1984)  
*Beirut... Points of view* (Hady Zaccak, 2000)  
*Beyrouth, "la rencontre"* (Borhane Alaouié, 1981)  
*Beyrouth ma ville* (Jocelyne Saab, 1982)  
*Bilan de la Guerre* (Jocelyne Saab, 1982)  
*Diary Entry No.168* (Rita Mounzer, 2022)  
*Far from the Homeland* (Kais al-Zubaidi, 1969)  
*I only wish that I could weep* (Atlas Group, 2002)  
*Il était une fois Beyrouth: histoire d'une star* (Jocelyne Saab, 1994)  
*La Septième Porte* (Ali Essafi, 2017)  
*Lettre de Beyrouth* (Jocelyne Saab, 1978)  
*Lettres d'un temps d'exil* (Borhane Alaouié, 1988)  
*Looted and Hidden* (Rona Sela, 2018)  
*Mémoire 14* (Ahmed Bouanani, 1971)  
*Off Frames AKA Revolution Until Victory* (Muhanad Yaqubi, 2015)  
*One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* (Christian Ghazi, 1969)  
*Palestine in the Eye* (Mustafa Abu Ali, 1976)  
*Pas à Pas* (Randa Chahal Sabbagh, 1979)  
*Memories for a Private Eye* (Rania Stephan, 2015)  
*Under the Rumbles* (Mai Masri, 1982)  
*Testimony of Palestinian Children in Wartime* (Kais al-Zubaid, 1972)  
*Topologie d'une Absence* (Rami el Sabbagh, 2021)  
*Zionist Aggression* (PFU, 1973)

## Image credits

Figure 1: Film cans at Nadi Lekol Nas' office (my own photograph)

Figure 2: Plastic box containing only 1 of the 2 reels of 16mm magnetic sound (my own photograph)

Figure 3: Mansion building ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziade\\_Palace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziade_Palace))

Figure 4: Original Ziade Palace interior (<http://www.singhbartlett.com/beit-ziade>)

Figure 5: Signed statement of responsibility and agreement between Nadi Lekol Nas and me in Arabic (my own photograph)

Figure 6: Signed statement of responsibility and agreement between Nadi Lekol Nas and me in English (my own photograph)

Figure 7: DVD of *Wabeb al Horriyah* provided by Nadi Lekol Nas (my own photograph)

Figure 8: VHS of *Wabeb al Horriyah* and its paper container provided by Nadi Lekol Nas (my own photograph)

Figure 9: VHS of *Wabeb al Horriyah* provided by Nadi Lekol Nas (my own photograph)

Figure 10: Analog monitor during the VHS tape digitization process at EQZE (my own photograph)

Figure 11: Panasonic VHS player during the VHS tape digitization process at EQZE (my own photograph)

Figure 12: Box containing the 2x16mm reels of *Wabeb al Horriyah* provided by Nadi Lekol Nas (my own photograph)

Figure 13: Writings on the box containing the 2x16mm reels of *Wabeb al Horriyah* (my own photograph)

Figure 14: Labels on the box containing the 2x16mm reels of *Wabeb al Horriyah* (my own photograph)

Figure 15: Handwritten labels on the box containing the 2x16mm reels of *Wabeb al Horriyah* (my own photograph)

Figure 16: The 2x16mm reels of *Wabeb al Horriyah* and handwritten notes on each reel (my own photograph)

Figure 17: Work station at EQZE for film inspection and repair (my own photograph)

Figure 18: Splicing instructions (*The Film Preservation Guide: The Basics for Archives, Libraries, and Museums*. National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004. pp. 29-30.)

Figure 19: End of the second 16mm reel of *Wahab al Horriyah* (my own photograph)

Figure 20: Self portrait (my own photograph)

Figure 21: Shireen Abu Akhle's funeral (<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/12/business/abu-akleh-memorial-ramallah-intl/index.html>)

Figure 22: Ocho y Pico in Madrid (my own photograph)

Figure 23: Ocho y Pico in Madrid during the film digitization process (my own photographs)

Figure 24: Abboudi Abou Jaoude (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/beirut-movie-archivist-preserves-lebanons-celluloid>)

Figure 25: Munich subway (my own photograph)

Figure 26: Door of the Preservation and Restoration lab at Pharos in the Grunwald offices in Munich (my own photograph)



