

An Archive of the Lebanese Civil War

By Tamara Barakat

Bridge Book



Introduction Bridge Book

The BRIDGE BOOK highlights the work produced by the Parsons Paris first year students for their Integrative Seminar and Studio classes. By offering insight into the creative research of artists and designers, this publication grants access to the backstage where reading, writing and making come together. Each student project was designed to reflect a central component of the creative process: the reciprocity of practice and theory. On several occasions, both classes met for intense and productive 'Bridge' sessions to engage in a critical reflection on students' work in progress.

An archive of the Lebanese civil war
Beirut 1975, 2018
A hundred photographs retouched
10cm x 10cm (3.9 inches x 3.9 inches)

Project Statement

An archive of the War

An archive of the war follows my grand mother "Tati Lilly's" personal story that, in its own way, meets the collective remembrance and the different stories of the civil Lebanese war (1975 - 1990), with each narrative having its own intricacies.

My work reflects on history, memory and the conflicts in Lebanon, as well as evokes a reflection on time, luck, disappearance and loss. After the amnesia law that marked the end of the civil war, and the general reaction of people to ignore and eliminate the memory about it, I am holding on to the only story that I have of this collective trauma.

In a poetic but also very personal approach, I am representing the Lebanese civil war through a large number of unclear and imperfect photographs of my hand holding a lemon. I am ironically portraying a personal archive of this war; one that I do not know much about. In fact, it is the only story that I know and the

only one that marked me.

The lemon I am holding represents my grandmother's lemon tree, but also, Beirut itself. In fact, some pictures are of a perfect round lemon (what Beirut once was), and others, are of this lemon being destroyed and crushed (what happened during the war).

A lemon is known as a natural cleanser that has the power to heal, and in using it as a symbol, I am also referring to this definition of the word lemon in order to portray a country that hopefully could one day heal from this trauma. By destroying this symbolic fruit with my hands, I also express my frustration, my anger and my personal response in wanting to know more about this violent civil conflict that my family experienced but somehow, cannot talk about.

This lemon tree story is the most meaningful one I know, and therefore, the only understanding of the war that I hold.



Research Abstract

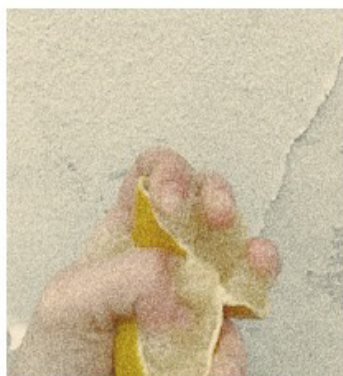
An Archive of the War

The conflicts in the contemporary history of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) provide unexplored ground for a study on human memory: what people want to remember; what people want to forget. While the violence it caused is still visible and impactful, no accurate account and effective truth has been established on the story of the war because of its official denial. This therefore prevents people from fully understanding and acknowledging their country's past.

In response to the country's amnesia, and by recounting stories of historians, war photographers, martyrs, and hostages, the Lebanese war-generation artists have brought together archival documents to confront the conflict and emphasize not only the physical violence of the recent past, but also the important damages it has caused. In doing so, they create works that provide platforms for the critical examination of a collective memory in Lebanon. Yet, how do Lebanese artists elaborate a remembrance of this war through images, despite its general disregard? In other words, how can art play a role in making it possible for Lebanese citizens to approach the traumatic

experiences of a nation whose memory is vague and neglected?

By putting Walid Raad's *Secrets in the open sea's prints* in conversation with Lamia Joreige's short film *Here and perhaps elsewhere*, the paper argues that art has played an important role in drawing thoughtful attention to a national trauma and creating a contemporary movement in response to the amnesty law. By questioning truth and factuality in their works, Joreige and Raad being two of many artists of this generation who respond to the aftermath of the war, express their feelings towards this denial within their society. They also, ironically, examine shared questions about memories, traces, and images of the conflict. Through their archival documents, they permit the youth of the country who do not have access to any official documents or even textbooks material, to witness, at least through this poetic medium, feelings and representations of what their parents have been through and what their country suffered through, for more than fifteen years.

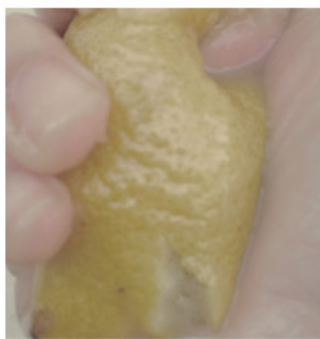
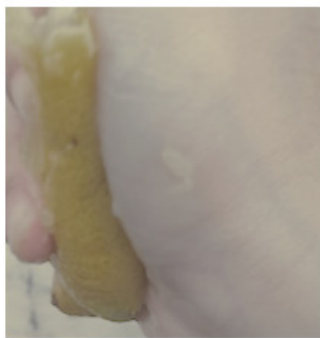
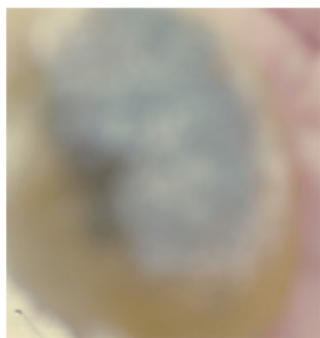


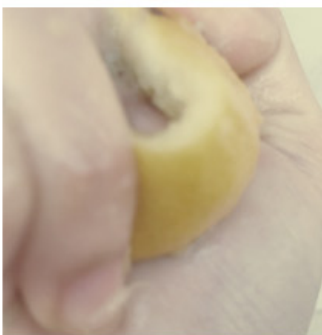
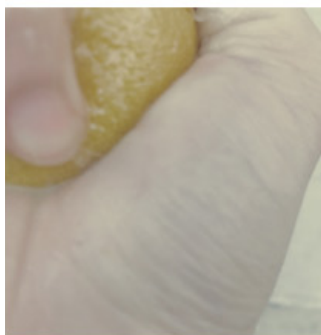
A Part of my paper *Remembrance of the Lebanese Civil War through art*

On April 1975, a bus transporting 27 Palestinians refugees in the suburb of Beirut was attacked by the Christian Militia Gunmen. The passengers all died and this incident was perceived as the spark that led to fifteen years of conflict in the heart of Lebanon. After this event, and during the early days of battle, Lebanese were hiding from the streets' fightings but no one really imagined that what they were witnessing was the beginning of a war that was to devastate their city and divide their country. External conflicts as the Cold war, Palestine-Israel conflicts, Arab nationalism and political Islam intersected with disagreements within the Lebanese government and revolutions over the factional division of power, national identity, social justice and religions within the Lebanese society. During fifteen years of fighting, about 900,000 emigrated permanently, 150,000 people were killed, more than 350,000 were injured, and thousands of people went missing from a population of about three and a half million. It was one of the most devastating conflicts of the late 20th century. In addition to the lives devastated, much of Lebanon's

infrastructure was shattered, and Beirut suffered destructions on many different levels.

Since the negotiated political settlement that ended the war in 1990 also known as the Taef agreement, no attempt has been made to deal with the war's legacy. In addition to this, the General amnesty law of 1991 declares that no investigations will be made to discover what happened to those who went missing, kidnapped or murdered during war-time. This law has been promoted by political elites who played an important role in the civil war and have refused to provide public debates that could implicate them. In protest against this, the international art world's curiosity in postwar Lebanon has come together to remember, analyze and debate the mass violence in Lebanon. Their aim is not to break with amnesia, but rather to interrogate the memory of the war and accommodate existing peace and reconciliation through their art in order to shed light on the war years and stress a causal link between remembrance war and reconciliation.





Artist statement

I have a bizarre relationship with lemons. Summer 1982, Beirut torn by war, Badaro, my hometown, was an extremely dangerous area. My family had to escape the city. To hide, during that time, everybody tried to leave the city. Being very attached to her lemon tree, my grandmother took it with her. It was somehow one of her most valuable and sentimental things, and she wouldn't risk to leave it under the bombs. A few months later, when they came back home, the balcony of my grandmother's room, where the lemon tree used to be, had been completely shattered by the violence of the war. It was destroyed. She was destroyed.

I was twelve years old when I first heard this story sitting beside her. I was shocked.

Yellow. Radiant. Acid.

A natural cleanser, it heals, it spreads joy.

I have a bizarre relationship with lemons.

An archive of the war follows my grand mother "Tati Lilly's" personal story with the war that in its own way meets the collective remembrance and the stories of the Lebanese Civil War of 1975, with each story having its own intricacies.

I trigger a reflection on history, memory and the conflicts in the region, as well as a reflection on time, disappearance and loss, in a poetic but also very personal

approach to the Civil War that I personally do not know much about.

After the amnesty law that marked the end of the civil war, and the general reaction of people to ignore and try and forget it, I am holding on to the only information and story that I have of this national trauma. Ironically, I am capturing my personal archive of it.

This lemon tree story is the most meaningful one I know, and therefore, the only understanding I hold.



Tamara Barakat

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