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Walid Sadek

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ESSAY



## A surfeit of victims: a time after time

Walid Sadek

Department of Fine Arts and Art History, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon

### ABSTRACT

This essay argues that the questions born of the conditions that marked the post-war period in Lebanon are folded over and replaced by another set of conditions of which neo-victimhood is most dominant. The time of the post war can be said to be over and now is followed by a *time after time* in which the figure of the neo-victim rehearses a monologue of victimisation allegedly beholden to the promise of a future liberated from all that is unfinished in the past. The figure of the neo-victim contaminates the historical anger of the unreconciled victim and further shuts down historical accountability as history becomes the horror of a history *en abyme*. Looking at documentaries, films and ex-combatant memoirs, this essay attempts to give form to this shift from post-war to a *time after time*.

### KEYWORDS

Neo-victim; history *en abyme*; Lebanese civil-war; fetish; Amnesty Law; architectonic memory; Assaad Chaftari; Ziad Doueiri

“The two of them wept like characters from different movies projected on the same screen.” (Bolaño 2011, p. 11)

A mournful widower dressed in blithe clothing. A crime scene hastily festooned with coloured ribbons. Thus, Burj el-Murr (Figure 1) appeared anew, one fine spring morning, dolled-up in motley coloured window curtains. An unfinished skyscraper with an infamous wartime reputation, a hubristic monolith dating from 1974, standing still with an architectural design so faulty that today can neither be completed nor rehabilitated. Burj el-Murr, as the tower is commonly known, is a capacious repository for all the rumoured gruesome practices of internecine war: torture in its rank basements, snipers in its upper floors and in between, a witness to round upon round of shelling, rocket launches and attempted storms. Soon after the official end of the Lebanese wars, the tower became emblematic of unchecked corruption as practiced by its original owner, the engineer and entrepreneur Michel el-Murr, who was turned untouchable under the protection of the Syrian mandate as the Minister of Interior of the 1990s. But all seemed suddenly forgotten or rather inconsequential when in late spring 2018, artist Jad el-Khoury installed colourful curtains in the tower’s gaping windows and claimed, with the earnestness of a youthful artist, that the tower had to be beautified to counter ‘the negativity and bad memories’ it spread throughout the city (Barnes 2018). Made merry, Burj el-Murr was renamed Burj el-Hawa – the wind tower or is it the tower of love?<sup>1</sup> – and given a new subscription into the normative life of the city ‘through the vibration of colors’ (Barnes 2018). Looking up at the colourful Burj, the allegedly dispelled ‘bad memories’ seemed less than a memory, a notional memory at best, substantially empty and therefore unrecalable: a notional memory of someone else’s rumoured memory, a mere bad vibe that can be spooked away with the vibrancy of hues and fanned away by the disinterested aesthetics of coloured curtains flapping in the wind. Perhaps



**Figure 1.** Burj-el-Hawa. Installation art © Jad El-Khoury. Photograph by author July 2018.

this youthful artist is not to be blamed for desiring a prettier city. But the stakes of beautification exceed the claims of a healing art installation that pretends to look forward towards a better future with a token gesture towards a generically unseemly past. Much more, the prettified Burj el-Murr may very well be the first and possibly most eloquent marker of the time after the time of the post-war. A visual event that heralds a time that comes after and is disengaged from a past time, the past time of the post war that was occupied by the complexity of memory and forgetting, by the persistent absence of the forcibly disappeared, and by living with uninhumed corpses, with ruins, mazedly places and labyrinthine temporalities. In this time after time, marked by Burj el-Hawa, the complex past is reduced and named past: that which has passed and of which, nothing remains but a nebulous bad memory to be dispelled by ornament. A past that is nameable but not recallable; a past that lives with itself, turns around itself by itself.

The prettified Burj el-Murr, or Burj el-Hawa, is the monument for this time after time. An apotropaic monument for an evil past we will gradually no longer remember, a monument with a trace of a past catastrophe that is no longer ours to speak and carry. This monument which wistfully calls on something better to come, is in fact the marker of a historical stasis that comes after the post-war period, and in it we stand and therein occupy the one and only available subjectivity, that of the neo-victim.

In 2012, film director Eliane Raheb released the documentary *Sleepless Night* (Figure 2) in which she deftly maneuvers through a meander of human rights sentimentality, trauma pop-therapy and the



Figure 2. Sleepless Nights – film poster © Eliane Raheb.



**Figure 3.** *Sleepless Nights* – film still © Eliane Raheb.

contemporary aesthetics of the archive, (*Sleepless Nights* 2012, 45':36"–46':06"–46':55"–47':08") to bring Assaad Chaftari, a former high-ranking official in the Intelligence Services of the Lebanese Forces (LF), the dominant Christian nationalist militia, face to face with Maryam Saidi, mother of 15-year-old Maher, a young communist combatant, lost in action while fighting against the Lebanese Forces on the 15th of June 1982 during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> Their face to face, (55') (Figure 3) nearly mid-way into the film, comes laden with the promise of fulfilling a wished-for justice, terribly rare and painfully unlikely in post-Ta'if Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> Surrounded by a chorus of photographs of missing people, their encounter has all the trappings of tragedy: A bereaved mother and an ex-militia in proximity but without a common language; she on one shore, voicing a demand that gnaws at her insides to know the whereabouts of her lost son and he, distant on another shore, mute, seemingly weighed down by all that should be said. She, speaking in verbose anger and he, in reconditeness (hiddenness).<sup>4</sup> He, a self-declared perpetrator, consentingly guilty, having published a public apology in the local daily *Annahar* on the 10th of February 2000; she, a bereaving mother, residing in the anti-chamber of a convalescent mourning that she refuses to enter. And we, the viewers, identifying ourselves with the inquisitive camera, counting seconds, waiting to hear an account from Chaftari who years earlier had apologised for acts he had neither described nor enumerated at the time. The face to face ends without any revelation. Unable to deliver a just dénouement, the film folds back upon itself, tragically unresolved. The unreconciled victim-mother retreats to a private world stuffed with images of her lost son (Figure 4) while the ex-militia officer returns to his own narrow familial entourage, to medicated daily routines heavily overshadowed by the concise public apology he published 12 years earlier. (Figure 5)

In its unfulfilled promise, the film sends us back to one pressing but fundamentally ineffectual question, redundantly iterated over the last two, and by now three, decades: If it had not been for that accursed Amnesty Law 84<sup>5</sup>, the question begs, would not a post-war Lebanese sociality have been able to dress up a judge to adjudicate and resolve all the 'unfinished' of civil war? This question, hurled time and again against the opacity of post-Ta'if Lebanese politics, has tended to produce history as repetition, leading to a fetishisation of Amnesty Law 84. In other words, following the lead of Franz Kafka's celebrated parable 'Before the Law,'<sup>6</sup> Amnesty Law 84 is dressed-up as a gate that cannot be entered and before which we wait interminably for admittance to the Law. It is the gate that interdicts access, as it is also the gate before which we stand and in so doing invest in an inaccessible but desired Law that beckons us from behind the gate. What inhibits us from entering and from accessing the Law is not some daunting gatekeeper, but our own investment in it as inaccessible, as Law.<sup>7</sup> To unpack this last proposition, let us consider a passage in Freud's essay 'Fetishism' in which he gives a temporal and spatial structure to the fetish: '... the subject's interest comes to a



**Figure 4.** *Sleepless Nights* – film still © Eliane Raheb.

halt half-way, as it were; it is as though the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish' (Freud 1927, p. 155). Notwithstanding the gendered psychoanalytic bent of his text,<sup>8</sup> Freud does offer an understanding of the fetish as a chronotope, namely a time and a place, to which the subject returns, at which she lingers and from which she defers and avoids the horrible scene that has already occurred and always threatens to occur again. According to Freud, the fetish is chosen following a first encounter with the troubling object, an encounter, which is then disavowed and misrepresented in the fetish. It is therefore a penultimate object or image, often apotropaically amplified and which, no matter how frightening or disturbing in itself, serves nevertheless 'as a mitigation of the horror' (Freud 1940 [1922]). To think of Amnesty Law 84 as the fetish that constantly performs the inaccessible Law and keeps it at bay is to propose the Law as horror; one already encountered. What this horror is, what is deferred and disavowed by the fetish of Law 84, is the fundamental unjustness of the Law.



**Figure 5.** *Sleepless Nights* – film still © Eliane Raheb.

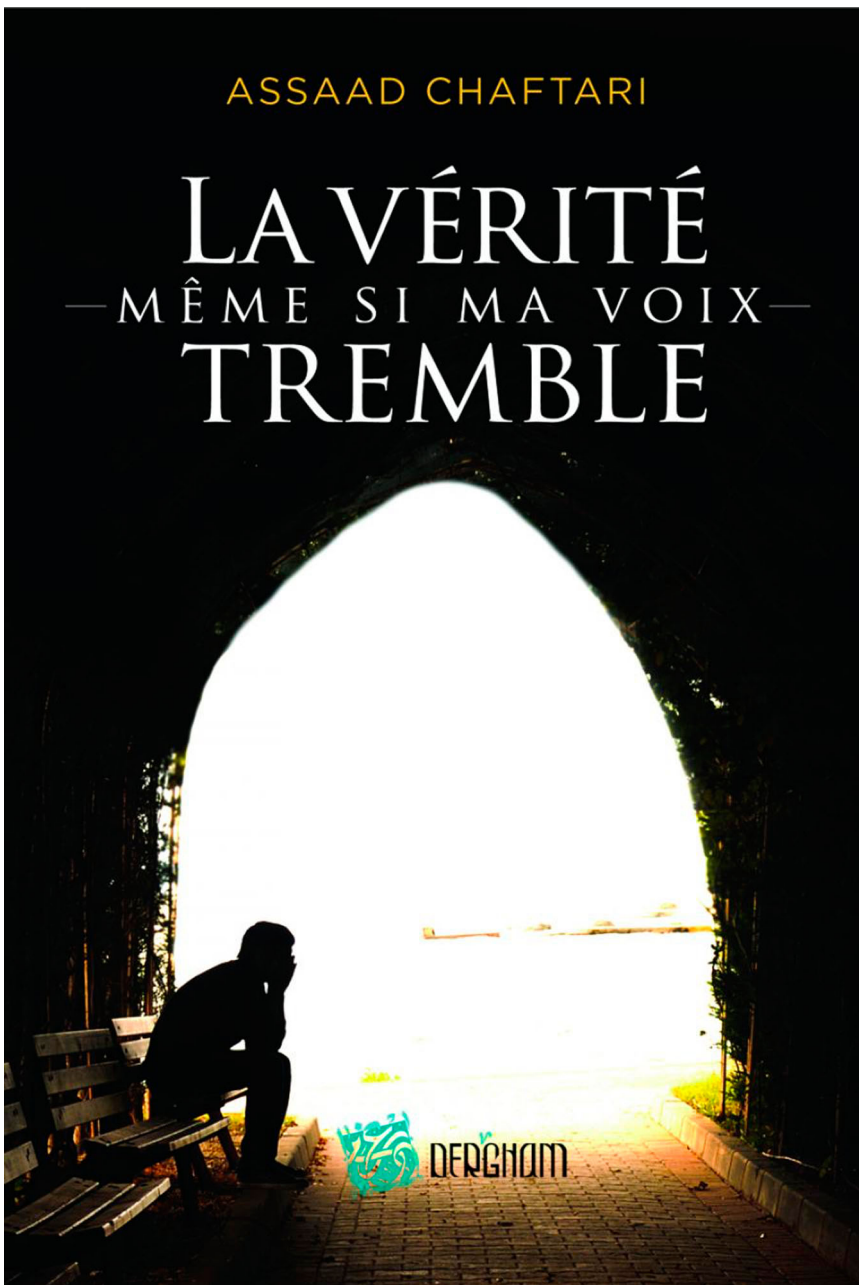
The public celebration of the documentary film *Sleepless Nights* would have us see its merit in its attempt to overcome Law 84 – understood as a techno-legal obstacle – in search of the truth. That is to enact, even if on a filmic screen and framed within one emblematic encounter, an adjudication and therefore the start of a post-war sociality based on the recognition of the deeds of the perpetrator and the initiation of a process of mourning towards a personal and collective convalescence. The film's merit is supposed to lie in its valiant attempt to undo the obstacle. Yet, as is often the case when working under the dominant logic of protracted civil war,<sup>9</sup> the merit of this film lies rather in its inability to deliver the wished-for cathartic overcoming of the obstacle. The impasse, so well captured in the film, is not caused by the opacity of Law 84 as an obstacle, but rather by our fetishisation of that law against the horror of the unjustness of Law itself. Amnesty Law 84 is the nameable manifest of an unconscious inhibition, and accordingly the film *Sleepless Nights* – the staging of a face to face between what the film reasonably assumes to be a perpetrator and a victim whom it so obviously is partial to – is the symptomatic representation of what we do when we linger at the fetish, at the fetish as chronotope, that is, at the gate and before the Law. For when we misrecognise the fetish, we perform repeatedly the terms of the same question, asking the perpetrator to confess, the victim to witness, history to prosecute and justice be served.

To ask and search for what could dislodge the fetish, that is of what could interrupt the hold that Law 84 has on us, and therefore unhinge the seeming repetitiveness of history, cannot be willed or engineered. If it is to happen, it must happen inadvertently, through unexpected coincidences, a flash of the forgotten erupting in the protracted now of civil war, through a revelation that will not earn its name as such until it is captured and made worthy of the secret it holds. In other words, the hold of the fetish is as inflexible as the unjustness of the Law is fundamental. What could disrupt this situation is an unexpected and unintended collapse of one or more of the dominant terms that buttress the fetish: victim, perpetrator, adjudicator and justice.

The publication of Assaad Chaftari's book-length memoir titled *La vérité même si ma voix tremble* (The truth even if my Voice trembles) (Figure 6) relating his activities and experiences during the war, as vice-director and later as director of the intelligence services of the Lebanese Forces, offers ways to reshuffle the terms of the impasse so well captured in Raheb's documentary. In more than one conspicuous textual punctum, the memoir makes explicit Chaftari's position as not one repenting perpetrator but rather as one misunderstood victim. The book's recasting of Chaftari as victim begins with an unlikely title that rearranges a well-known statement by Maggie Kuhn (1905–1995), founder of the Grey Panthers, a pacifist activist and a vocal supporter of the elderly: 'Stand before the people you fear and speak your mind – even if your voice shakes.' The image used for the book's cover, although maudlin, cast the memoir as a journey towards the light. Clearly, the packaging of the book seems to call for a de-familiarization of Chaftari. The memoir is not to be read as a substantiation of his activities and crimes during the war for which he publicly apologised in 2000, but as a revelation that overcomes the apology with the complex story of a man fallen victim to impersonal and crushing historical forces. Such a reading is warranted as the early chapters of the book begin with Chaftari recounting and describing his education and youth within the narrow horizons and formative prejudices of a middle-class urban Christian family, a narrative strategy well practiced by other ex-combatants who published their memoirs in recent years.<sup>10</sup>

What is significant and revealing about the memoir are two passages that recount, in poignant language, two moral defeats suffered at the hands of two admired leading figures in the Lebanese Forces, namely Samir Geagea<sup>11</sup> and Elie Hobeika.<sup>12</sup> The first came during a crucial meeting of the Lebanese Forces in 1985. Assembled to vote on what came to be known as the Tripartite Accord,<sup>13</sup> Samir Geagea demanded that all those present and of denominations other than Maronite Christians exit the room. Chaftari writes:

The incident made me realize that for some I was a second-class Christian. It was then that I first understood what a Muslim, considered by Christians as a second-class citizen, could feel. I was hurt, outraged, and desperate: thus, all those years spent defending Lebanon were forgotten, and only because I was an Orthodox Christian. This time it was I who was the 'second-class citizen', the 'other'. (Chaftari 2015, p. 143)



**Figure 6.** La vérité même si ma voix tremble – book cover. Accessed at <https://dergham.com/book-157> © Assaad Chaftari.

The second telling passage recounts an event that came years later following the ousting in 1986 of Elie Hobeika by Samir Geagea's loyalists from the Christian-controlled areas of East Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Defeated and shunned, Chaftari relocated with Hobeika and his entourage to the Syrian controlled Beqàì city of Zahleh. There he remained until 1995 when he was disowned (*repudié*) by his admired leader. Chaftari writes:

In 1995, Hobeika suddenly stopped receiving me. I became a persona non grata, and from one day to the next, I was disowned by my clan ... Twice expelled, in 1986 from the Christian camp and then in 1995 from my own

clan, I suffered much but without desisting to love my community, nor my comrades from the Hobeika clan but neither those of Samir Geagea, the Kataëb and loyalists of Amin Gemayyel ... (Chaftari 2015, pp. 219–220)

In light of Chaftari's memoir, it becomes evident that the impasse of Eliane Raheb's documentary was in fact caused not by a face to face between a mother-victim and a repentant – albeit disturbingly recondit – perpetrator, but by one victim tragically misrecognised by another victim as perpetrator. The documentary read in the light of the later memoir inadvertently arranges a surfeit of victims on a historical stage. What this surfeit causes in the film is a stalling of a history in which victims are pre-occupied with individual therapy and trapped within an interminable transitional time as they wait for justice to arrive from an unbeknownst future (Figure 7).

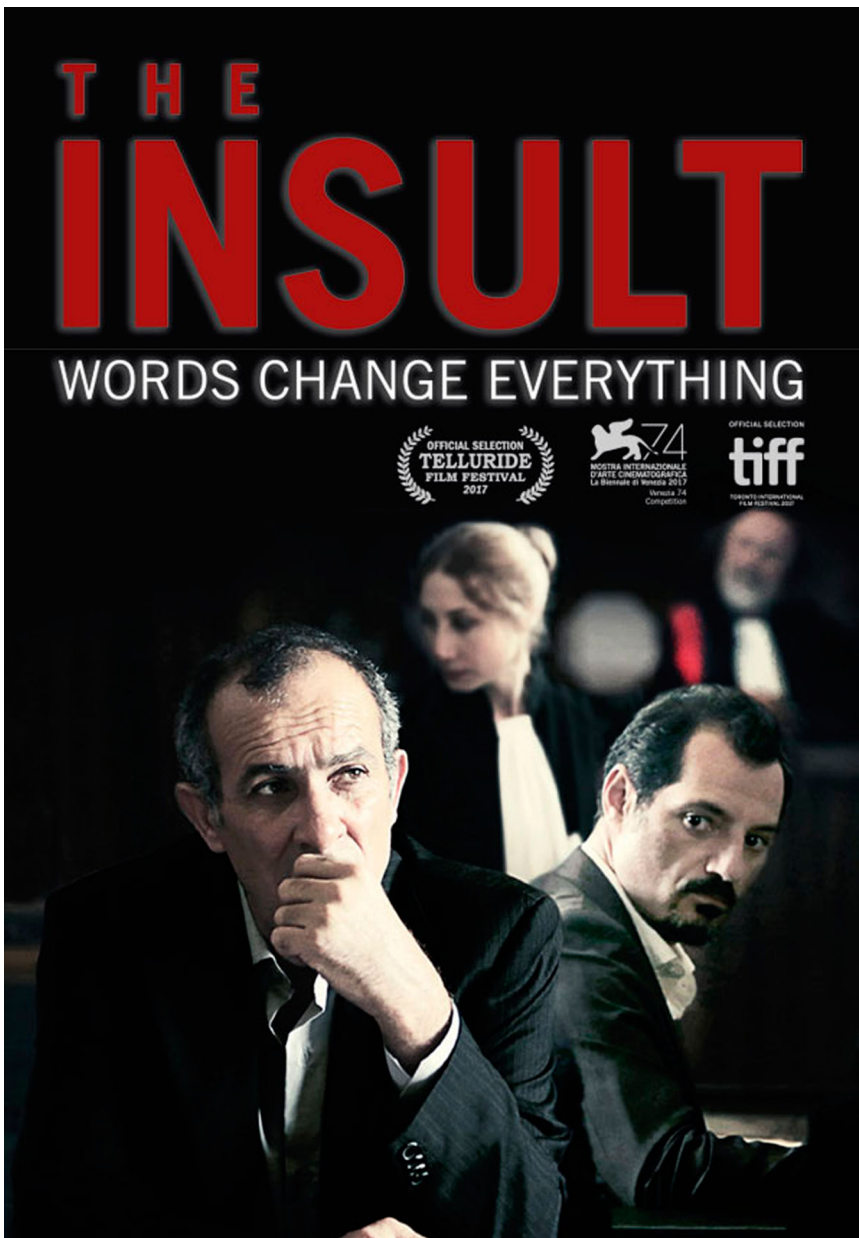
The case of Chaftari is complex and I will return to it in my notes towards a theory of the neo-victim below. But first I would like to consider Ziad Doueiri's recent film *The Insult* (The Insult 2017) to pursue the effect a surfeit of victims has on our comprehension of history and our imagined agency within its possible narratives.

To summarise, the filmic diegesis of *Sleepless Nights* is without a judge. The two protagonists, Chaftari and Saidi, are called upon to initiate a search for the truth without an evenhanded adjudicating third. What makes *The Insult* so attractive in comparison to Raheb's documentary is that it includes representatives of the Law who take on the responsibility of adjudicating. As a cinematic drama, *The Insult* seems to provide, already within its diegesis, and without any prerequisite effort, an overcoming of the fetish and an access to the Law. (Figure 8) The conflict in the film between Tony Hanna, a Lebanese Christian and devoted member of the Lebanese Forces, and Yasser Salameh a Palestinian refugee working as a contractor under the precarious protection of one populist local politician is raised to the level of history and given stage in a court of Law where contentious and contradictory narratives compete for the court's decree.

The court scenes in *The Insult* weave a complex text that names the events of history and attempts to place the lives of two contending individuals within their warp and weft. Following the logic of cause and effect, attorney and prosecutor spar on a stage set before the attentive eye of the Law, seeking first causes that could vindicate their clients' respective claims. But as the case lingers and the list of wars, invasions, exiles, massacres and defeats grows longer, attorney, prosecutor and the judges retreat towards the circumstantial individual incident that sparked the conflict. This retreat occurs after the prosecutor forcibly argues that the insult that the plaintiff hurled at the



Figure 7. *Sleepless Nights* – film still © Eliane Raheb.



**Figure 8.** The Insult – film poster – Accessed at <http://www.3bproductions.com/tessalit/linsulte/images/mini-en.jpg> © Ziad Doueiri.

defendant and which ostensibly ignited the conflict, was motivated by the trauma of surviving, when a child, a massacre perpetrated by Palestinians and Left-wing militias on his southern coastal hometown of Damour on January 20, 1976. Exceptionally, the film provides ample archival footage of that battle and ensuing massacre. Of the many historical event conjured up in the film, the Damour massacre is the only one that is corroborated with images of destruction and mutilated corpses. The choice to visualise this particular historical event among the many others named or mentioned, expedites both the conclusion of the court's case and the film. Yet, I argue that far from simply prompting a conclusion to the case, the visual spectacle of the Damour chapter acts in the film as a warning and

an interdiction. For one can reasonably propose that the film's scenario regresses further in its search for first causes by depicting the massacres of Palestinians, Kurds and other disenfranchised groups in the area of Karantina in Beirut on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1976<sup>14</sup> merely two days before the Damour massacre; or even further back to the so-called Black Saturday on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1975<sup>15</sup> and to previous events in Lebanon's conflicted history. But it seems that the horrible visual footage of the violent Damour massacre comes to warn against another and more fundamental horror that the film has brought into close proximity: That fundamental horror is history, and more precisely it is the horror of a history en abyme. In other words, the horror is that of a history, already dispersed and dismembered, duplicating itself in an infinite series of mirror events foreclosing therefore any possible narrative of responsibility and accountability and indeed of any change. With the visualised massacre, the film proclaims a necessary conclusion to its search for historical accountability. Not because a search is impossible but because it understands the search as inevitably horror-bound. The film suggests that to seek in history a cause for what happens in the present is a lost effort, for all that awaits us on such a quest is the abyme or abyss, which must be warded off not only at an interpretive level but also to safeguard the aesthetic credibility of narrative film. For at the narrative level as well, the *mise en abyme* poses an inordinate threat. To gather the extent of this threat, a brief excursus is necessary to review the intellectual history of this concept.

The theory of the *mise en abyme* was first introduced by André Gide in 1893 (Gide 1948). Jacques Derrida picked up his predecessor's indication of an infinite multiplication and developed his theory in contradistinction to Edmund Husserl whose classical reading of the *mise en abyme* posited a chain of reduplicative representation that can eventually be brought to a closure once all the levels of representation are penetrated and the object of the last level is reached thus arresting the 'seemingly infinite play of reduplications.'<sup>16</sup> For Derrida, the *mise en abyme* is a textual operation and therefore there is no last object outside the text to be sought after. In a chapter on the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Derrida writes:

But it happens that this theme [of supplementarity] describes the chain itself, the being-chain of a textual chain, the structure of substitution, the articulation of desire and of language, the logic of all conceptual oppositions ... the concept of the supplement and the theory of writing designates textuality itself in Rousseau's text in an indefinitely multiplied structure – en abyme – to employ the current phrase.

Derrida continues:

... the indefinite process of supplementarity has always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self. Representation in the abyss of presence is not an accident of presence; the desire for presence is, on the contrary, born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc. The supplement is quite exorbitant, in every sense of the word. (Derrida 1977, p. 163)

In Derrida we begin to see that the cost of the *mise en abyme* or supplementarity is not the loss of a referent, not a lament over the inaccessibility of what was once present. Much more, supplementarity calls for an understanding of presence as a textual effect. The abyme or abyss is not something that happens to the text and robs it of its referent. Rather, a text, 'always already' structured by the supplement, generates a longing for presence that is often misrecognised as antecedent to the text. What in Derrida's deconstructive strategies can be liberating, even if at an exorbitant cost, presents an inordinate threat to Doueiri's filmic narrative logic, which requires nothing less than a conclusion to safeguard its diegetic sanity, claiming: if history is placed in the abyss, a compensative presence must be shored, one that can be equally shared by all. This, the film generates emphatically in the concluding monologue of the prosecutor:

If Yasser Salameh is a refugee, Tony Hanna is also a refugee, even more so, for he is a refugee in his own homeland. His life is filled with the same suffering, the same tragedy, the same injustice. The only difference is that we did not show Tony Hanna and many like him the kindness they deserve. On the contrary, we silenced and renounced them. While we knew exactly what happened with the Palestinians. They gave your cause too much attention, so much that there was no more room for anyone else. The catastrophes of 1976 in al-Jiyeh,

Damour and al-Na'meh, those we are not allowed to speak of. Yet the words of Tony Hanna to Yasser Salameh, those we can speak about from morning till evening. And the truth is that they are the result of an old wound that is yet to heal. What is happening in this court of Law is the beginning of looking at the other. There is something that must be said. Something true, something essential. No one has the right to monopolize suffering, honorable judges, no one!<sup>17</sup>

Under the cloak of equal justice, the prosecutor in fact occludes any possible historical justice, and concludes his intervention with a clear rejection of any monopoly of suffering, calling instead for opening the subject position of victim to all. The conclusion is that we are all victims with gaping wounds. The presence that compensates for a history en abyme is the wound. In other words, the wounded victim is the present fetish at which we linger together, even if with residual disagreements – the two-to-one majority vote of the court for instance – at bay from the greater horror that is history en abyme. The final decree of the court in Doueiri's film is unequivocal, as evidenced in the principal judge's words:

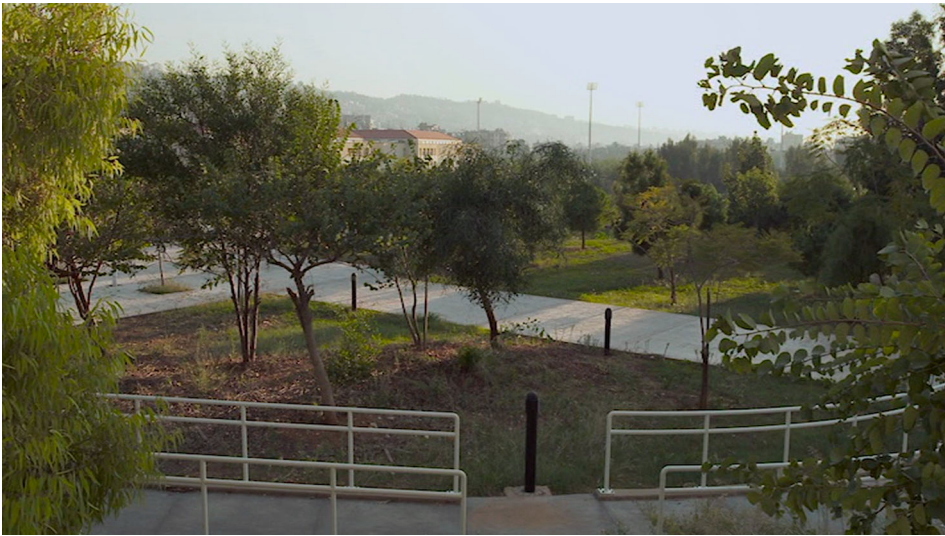
I will not hide it from you. At one point we were going to consider you both guilty. But after hearing the evidence put forth by both parties we returned to the origin of the problem, to how the whole story started. The decree by a majority vote of 2 to 1: This court finds Yasser Salameh not guilty.<sup>18</sup>

In a final gesture, the judges join prosecutor and attorney in a common effort to drive guilt away from all so that everyone can join the subject position of victim. In this sense, *The Insult*, much as in Chaf-tari's discourse, is politically complicit with a contemporary dominant discourse of neo-victimhood. It provokes history into a violent and incendiary appearance but only to remind us of the need to return and linger at the apotropaic fetish of the wounded victim, where we can all be sheltered from the horror of history. The figure of the neo-victim that appears in *The Insult* is called on to be docile and content within the egalitarian suffering of the universal victim.

Eliane Raheb's *Sleepless Nights*, where the bereaved Maryam Saidi remains unreconciled and combative, avoids this extremely reactionary position, which is well in line with the dominant sentimentality of Human Rights Discourse (Meister 2011). In this documentary's last scene, the bereaved mother of the disappeared young combatant is led to what is allegedly the location of the mass grave from where her son's remains can possibly be exhumed. Her response is a long skeptical look and a tergiversation. (Figures 9–13) She turns her back to the supposed referent of her search in a telling refusal to exit her anger, for not even the exhumed corpse of her son could terminate



Figure 9. *Sleepless Nights* – film still © Eliane Raheb.



**Figure 10.** Sleepless Nights – film still © Eliane Raheb.

her bereavement. Against reconciliation that performs a public levelling of all wrongs, she raises the unexchangeability of the historical index, namely, the time-lapse between a wrong committed and the apology; a differential that cannot be subsumed in one's personal process of mourning. For whereas individual mourning may end at some point for reasons as diverse as recognition, boredom or fatigue, the historical index remains unless repressed by more powerful contrary forces. The important point here is that in her tergiversation, Maryam, by the end of the documentary, seems to remove her victim cloak and don instead the scarf of a retributive return to the unfinished past, a return to a non-subjective and non-violent violence (Benjamin 1987). In walking away, she neither accepts the levelling fetish of the neo-victim nor capitulates to the supposed horror of a history en abyme. The loss of the referent cannot be simply undone with the recovery of a son's



**Figure 11.** Sleepless Nights – film still © Eliane Raheb.



**Figure 12.** Sleepless Nights – film still © Eliane Raheb.

corpse. Rather, the loss of the referent generates a dynamic textuality that moves away from any search for a conclusion or denouement in the terminal evidence of the uninhumed corpse. What remains to be asked, and lies outside the purview of the documentary, is whether this tergiversation can remain individual or whether it must be collectively undertaken as a making of justice? In other words, can this be anything but a call for an action by a collective as numerous as the corpses in mass graves over which we walk?

### **Coda: Notes towards a theory of the neo-victim**

1. The neo-victim does not appear with the end of civil war. Post-war reconstruction is inimical to him/her. The neo-victim waits until a post-war sociality's aspiration to rejoin history is deflated.

*Co-incident: Assaad Chaftari's public apology was published in the daily Annahar on Thursday the 10th of February 2000, that is, during the two-year interim<sup>19</sup> when reconstruction tycoon Rafiq el-Hariri was ousted from his leading position as Prime Minister by pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud and replaced by Selim el-Hoss who a decade earlier headed the first cabinet after the official end of the civil war with a mandate to implement the National Reconciliation Accord otherwise known as the Ta'if Agreement.*

2. The figure of the neo-victim is an anachronism that seeks for itself temporal rectification through a public apology that affirms a present status as a previous perpetrator. The neo-victim claims a substantial perpetrator role in a past conflict and wages on his renewed relevance for the time after the post-war, for the time after time.

*Already, in his concise public apology, Assaad Chaftari is investing in a future role by presenting his apologies 'to all the noble ones from all sides and of diverse affiliations who risked their lives and have even sacrificed it for a given conception of this country.'(Chaftari 2000) Years later, he publishes a text entitled, 'A Plea for a New Homo Libanicus,'(Chaftari 2010) having established himself as an unavoidable and mediatised figure of a purported reconciliatory discourse.*

3. The neo-victim's apology is an exit-pass from history denounced as a victimising impersonal force and an entry-pass into a time after time in which s/he joins the ranks of unreconciled victims. In doing so, the neo-victim robs the unreconciled victim of the historical sense of his/her unappeasable anger.



**Figure 13.** Sleepless Nights film still © Eliane Raheb.

*The merit of Eliane Raheb's Sleepless Nights lies most poignantly in its closing sequence as Maryam Saidi, a figure of the unreconciled victim, exits the stage of a stalled history unwilling to stand side by side with the neo-victim.*

4. The neo-victim apologises but does not elucidate, describe or enumerate the allegedly reprehensible acts committed. The neo-victim's memory is one that releases information but also one that withholds.

*In his memoir Croix de guerre, Maroun Machaalani constructs a two-part narrative folded over a redounding silence. He first tells of noble military exploits untarnished by wanton excesses and second divulges profound guilt that nearly led him to suicide before finding salvation in the Virgin Mary.<sup>20</sup> Between the two incongruent narratives lies a well-kept truth that is the neo-victim's treasured capital with which s/he sparsely employs and with it ascertains a central role in a previous war, as well as evidencing the crushing impersonal history that victimises all.*

5. The neo-victim has a finely wrought narrative memory, complete with heroes and sinners, defeats and victories. The neo-victim is therefore not bereft and does not occupy the position of a victim suffering from a disjointed and fragmented symptomatic memory. On the contrary, the neo-victim has an architectonic memory that is highly organised with a well-rehearsed system of classification.

*Apologetic and recondite, self-publicizing and secretive, Assaad Chaftari intimates his knowledge without divulging and for it finds a suitable form in the Christian confessional, wherein he practices his memory-scape and hints, to those not privy to the secrets, just how much he can possibly say.<sup>21</sup>*

6. The memory of the neo-victim is also his museal-prison. In it he ambulates indefinitely, visiting its various places but without ever exiting. The neo-victim is engrossed in the spectacle of his memory, a lone spectator to his own life. Locked in the rubble, Chaftari is a figure of an eternal repetition, a recondite Simonides of Ceos, roaming the loci of his past, recognising the dead but never naming them.

*In his memoir, Chaftari constantly defers the release of any substantial information. Regarding the dealings of the Lebanese Forces with Israel, he writes, 'From my point of view, the underside of my relations and those of others with the Jewish State do not yet belong to the public domain and are still the property of a large segment of Lebanese Christians represented by the LF.' (Chaftari 2015, pp. 48–49) Also, when pressed to communicate information about the disappeared, Chaftari emphatically states, by way of engaging the responsibility of other militias active in the war, 'I will unveil and reveal nothing as long as the Truth is not known and not until a solution is found at the national*

level, a solution to be sought with NGOs who have been investigating the fate of the disappeared since 1982' (Chaftari 2015, pp. 272–73).

7. The memory of the neo-victim is also a castrated memory-scape. Ambulating in his well-organised architectonic memory he is without the leading masculine aesthetics that could otherwise keep accountability behind as it races, regardless of cost, towards what it beholds as crisp and clear ideals.

*Chaftari's memoir conclude with two lengthy letters longingly addressed to his two inspiring leaders, Elie Hobeika and Bashir Gemayyel, both prematurely assassinated<sup>22</sup> and therefore ever incarnating the potential of a lamented unfulfilled promise.*

## Notes

1. Although written Arabic distinguishes between *Hawa'*(wind) and *Hawa* (love), spoken Arabic, especially in the long tradition of song, poetically conflates the two.
2. In a highly mediated TV documentary, Bashir Gemayyel is said to have been angered by those who took the decision to launch the attack. Gemayyel was then setting the stage and recasting his persona in preparation for his nomination to the nation's presidency. See Bashir (2012).
3. The official end of the Lebanese civil war was declared in phases, starting with the Ta'if Agreement in January 1989 and concluding in March 1991, when parliament passed an amnesty law that pardoned all political crimes prior to its enactment.
4. In the film, the director reluctantly cedes to Chaftari's demand and allows him a 'hidden' conversion or perhaps a (second) confession with the aging 'red Bishop' Gregoire Haddad (1924–2015) bedridden in a retirement home.
5. Law 84, passed and promulgated on August 26, 1991, grants complete amnesty to those accused of political crimes including homicide, kidnapping and torture committed before March 28, 1991.
6. 'Before the Law' (German: 'Vor dem Gesetz') is a parable in the novel *The Trial* (1914–15) (German: *Der Prozess*), by Franz Kafka published posthumously in 1925. 'Before the Law' was first published in the 1915 New Year's edition of the independent Jewish weekly *Selbstwehr* (self-defense or self-help).
7. The following reading of Kafka's parable is highly indebted to the leading work of Jacques Derrida. See Derrida (1991).
8. Accordingly, and in line with his stated task of providing proof for the castration complex, Freud offers undressing as an example of a fetish that 'crystallize[s] the moment of undressing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic.' See Freud (1927).
9. The logic of protracted civil war employs violence as 'return to order'. Fear of violence mobilises people to seek safety under the aegis of the various politico-sectarian factions. Artistic works that stage and offer release of this logic fall under two categories: cathartic therapy or aspirational overcoming of the past. What both categories share is an investment in the a-political individual and therefore a reduction of structural constraints to practices of personal betterment. See Sadek (2015).
10. For some of the more recent examples see for example El Murr (2014), Sneifer (2006), Saadeh (2015), Khoueiry (2005).
11. Samir Geagea (b. 1952) became the executive chairman of the Lebanese Forces after ousting Elie Hobeika on the 15th of January 1986 following the latter's ratification of the Syrian brokered Tripartite Accord. Geagea remained the uncontested strong man in the Christian controlled areas of Lebanon until the ill-fated and so-called Elimination War which began on 31 January 1990 and pitted him against the mutinous Army commander Michel Aoun. Unwilling to fully cede to the Syrian control of Lebanon following the official end of the civil war, Geagea was eventually tried in 1994 for ordering four political assassination and was sentenced to life in prison. He remained in solitary confinement until after the Cedar Revolution, and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, when a newly elected Lebanese Parliament voted to grant him amnesty on 18 July 2005.
12. Elie Hobeika (1956–2002) was a commander in the Lebanese Forces. During Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, he was the liaison officer to Mossad. On the 16th of September 1982, he oversaw with Israeli officers the massacre of thousands of unarmed Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila camps by Lebanese Forces militiamen. In 1985, he changed his allegiances and rose to prominence as a key player in the Tripartite Accord signed in December 1985 under the supervision of Syria's president Hafez al-Asaad. Following the official end of the civil war and the liquidation of the Ta'if Agreement, also known as the National Reconciliation Accord, in the summer of 1992, he, like other militia leaders, was elected to the parliament and named minister several times during the 1990s. He was assassinated on the 24th of January 2002 in the Beirut suburb of Hazmieh.
13. Backed by the al-Assad regime in Syria, the accord was signed on December 28, 1985 by Nabih Berri, Walid Jumblat, and Elie Hobeika on behalf of the three dominant militias at the time: the Amal Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party and the Lebanese Forces. The accord was short lived as Hobeika was ousted by Samir Geagea and forced to flee to Syrian controlled city of Zahleh in the Beqaa valley on January 15, 1986.

14. In his memoir, Maroun Machaalani, an ex-combatant in the special commandos Béjine (BJ) of the Kataëb Party, dates the attack on the Karantina encampment to 19th of January 1976. See Machaalani (2018, p. 95).
15. On December 6, 1975, the day after four Béjine commandos were ambushed and killed, Kataëb militiamen led by Joseph Saadeh, the father of one the murdered men, lashed back by setting up roadblocks and killing innocent Muslims who happened to be passing by. The number of the massacred ranges between 150 and 400. See Saadeh (2015, pp. 127–165), Machaalani (2018, pp. 79–89).
16. Craig Owens makes a similar argument in his essay 'Photography en abyme'. See Owen (1994).
17. Translation of the prosecutor's final intervention in *The Insult*. (Translation mine)
18. Translation of the court's decree in *The Insult*. (Translation mine)
19. Rafiq el-Hariri was blocked from the position of prime minister between 2/12/1998 and 23/10/2000.
20. The narrative that concludes with Machaalani witnessing the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, begins with a transformative visit to the shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa, Mount Lebanon. See Machaalani (2018, pp. 315–324).
21. See note 4 above.
22. Bashir Gemayyel (1947–1982) was the son of Pierre Gemayyel, founder of the right-wing Christian Kataëb party. He founded and commanded the Lebanese Forces militia during the early years of the Lebanese civil war. Draconian and charismatic, he slowly engineered his military and political ascendancy and was controversially elected President on August 23, 1982 during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. He was assassinated on September 14, 1982.

## Notes on Contributor

*Walid Sadek* is a Lebanese artist and writer. He is a professor of arts at the American University of Beirut and currently chair of the Department of Fine Arts and Art History.

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