CHAPTER 2

Jocelyne Saab: Artistic-Journalistic Documentaries in Lebanese Times of War

Jocelyne Saab is the unacknowledged pioneering woman of Lebanese documentary. Lebanese cinema is defined by the country's civil war (1975–90) and so is Saab's film-making career: she started making films at the beginning of the war. While film-making in Lebanon before the war was dominated, as was the whole region, by Egyptian popular cinema, the war really turned Lebanese film-makers' attention to their own society. Before the war, Lebanese cinema was growing rapidly and had the ambition to outdo Egyptian cinema with genre films such as the Bedouin film, the spy and police film, and the fedayeen film, but since the 1980s the war film has confidently dominated Lebanese cinema (Livingston, 2008: 41). In fact, Lina Khatib writes, the civil war ensured that most film-makers, if they continued to make films during the war, turned to documentary film-making and fictional war films after the war. The cause was threefold. First, due to a re-awakened social and political awareness, film-makers became interested in their own contemporary realities. Moreover, the Lebanese civil war coincided with the worldwide liberation movements, the cinematic interest in Third Cinema and the pan-Arab focus on political realism in cinema, thus raising the awareness in film-makers that the camera could be used as a tool in the struggle and as a means of handling the past, the present and the future of the Lebanese people. Secondly, the war caused a brain drain: producers and directors interested in Egyptian cinema fled the country. There was a sense of 'exhaustion' (Livingston, 2008: 41) with the political and sectarian tension in all of Lebanese society, and the civil war was the catalyst which really made them want to pursue their careers elsewhere. Thirdly, a drain on resources followed the destruction of infrastructure, with those who stayed turning to documentary partly out of necessity: a lack of resources and infrastructure led to film-makers re-focusing their activities on the considerably cheaper and practically more independent documentaries. Others turned to making film for video and television, or worked in distribution, exhibition and advertising.

Saab, a newsreader and reporter, turned to film-making in her own city of Beirut when the war started in 1975. She was born in 1948 in Beirut, and was educated in francophone schools. She obtained a postgraduate degree in Economic Sciences from the Sorbonne in Paris. She has made more than twenty films, both fiction and documentary, short and feature-length. Her first feature-length documentary *Le Liban dans la tourmente* (*Lebanon in Torment*, 1975) followed closely in the footsteps of Maroun Baghdadi, Lebanon's most famous documentary maker. His first film, *Beirut Ya Beirut*, also from 1975, was a remarkable prediction of what would happen with the civil war, while it was also a precursor of the many Lebanese films that later came to deal with the predicament of children during the war. Saab had started her career in television, hosting a pop music programme on national Lebanese radio. She became a news anchor and a reporter on television and a journalist for European television, and the civil war really brought her to the front line, in the field, as a war reporter. The physical risks she took to report on the war in Lebanon made her the first woman in the Arab world to bear witness to the horrors of war around the globe, but with an intense focus on Beirut. She has covered war in the Middle East and Iran, as well as the Polisario war in the Maghreb. Her independent films have received numerous international prizes, as they are accessible to both an insider and an outsider audience: her own transnational status has made her documentaries hybrid works, influenced by a European gaze and interest, as well as an insiders' gaze and knowledge.

Her many documentaries, mostly made in the 1970s and the 1980s, are both journalistic and artistic in nature. *Lebanon in Torment* (1975), *Children of War* (1976), *Beyrouth jamais plus* (*Beirut Never Again*, 1976), *Lettres de Beyrouth* (*Letters from Beirut*, 1979) and *Beyrouth, ma ville* (*Beirut, My City*, 1985) combine reportage and experimental elements. These documentaries engage the representation of the absence as well as the presence of memory in a war zone. She also addresses her own and her fellow Beirutis' longing for tolerance and freedom in the post-colonial context in the Middle East at large. In her lament, which is also a celebration of the history of Beirut, Saab observes the city and its architecture, people, streets and parks. At the same time, the voice in the film engages with literary and poetic sources from the city, commenting indirectly on the images. It is particularly in the manner in which she structures her films that the spectator becomes aware of the artistic merit of the films, and the power of this extraordinary woman's voice. Montage is a central technique with which Saab sets herself and her films apart.

Apart from her documentary work, Saab has also worked on and

directed several high-profile and popular fiction films. Her move from documentary into fiction is explained through the lack of reality: 'I make images. First, they were war images, and then I started to invent them, because when everything was destroyed in front of my eyes, I couldn't collect the real anymore. I had to reinvent everything. This is how I moved into fiction' (Saab, 2009, in Mostafa, 2015: 38). In 1981, she was assistant director on Volker Schlöndorff's film about the Lebanese civil war, *Circle of Deceit*. In 1985, her first feature film *Une vie suspendue* (*Suspended Life*),[1] the first film shot entirely in Beirut during the civil war, was selected for the Cannes Film Festival. In 1991, she directed her best-known film *Il était une fois, Beyrouth* (*Once Upon a Time in Beirut*), which is dedicated to the anniversary of a century of cinema and the founding of the Lebanese cinemathèque. It is an experimental film that edits together scenes of Beirut taken from global cinema, where the city has been appropriated by foreign spies and businessmen. It is a riposte to the 'many western films featuring Beirut as a spy haven [in the 1960s] which led the government to protest and insist that all foreign film scripts were vetted for approval before shooting could begin' (Livingston, 2008: 39). In a framework story of two young girls and an elderly cinephile visiting these foreign representations of Beirut and searching for a connection with their contemporary reality, the film critiques the appropriation of the city as the Paris of the Orient. Perhaps Saab's most widely screened and accessible work is *Dunia: Kiss me Not on the Eyes* (2005), a film made in Cairo under difficult censorial circumstances, as it engages with the physical expression of a woman's desires through belly dance, and an intense discussion of female genital mutilation, a custom forbidden but still very prevalent in Egypt. *Dunia* stands out among her films, as it does not refer at all to Beirut or Lebanon – whereas the city is one of the main threads that runs through the rest of Saab's work. Her latest feature, *What's Going On* (2010) returns to Beirut, and is again a complex, experimental film looking at contemporary life in the city, and its failure to resurrect itself, still, after two decades of post-war reconstructions. All her work, then, as Mostafa confirms, deals with a focus on the question of identity-formation and coming-of-age experiences of urban women. She is interested in city life and how it impacts on women's sense of self (Livingston, 2008: 36).

Saab is a transnational artist, commuting between Beirut, Paris and Cairo and claiming all three as her home. Her films are funded and screened internationally at some of the world's most significant film festivals, and she has won several international prizes such as the Arab Critics' Prize of the Year (1975), the Catholic Jury Prize at Oberhausen (1976), the Golden Spike at the Valladolid International Film Festival

and the First Documentary Prize at Oberhausen (1982). *Dunia* won over ten international awards. Saab's work has received a retrospective at the Lincoln Center in New York in 2010 and the Paris National Film Archive, the Cinématheque Française in 2013. However, while the exhibition and success of her work is transnational, Saab regrets not being appreciated in Lebanon itself. She would like her films to be seen as part of Lebanon's heritage of wartime film-making. Nevertheless, most of the content of her work maintains its intense focus on Beirut.

In 2007, the film-maker turned her attention to photography. She presented her first collection at the Dubai Art Fair and Art-Paris Abu-Dhabi. She also exhibited a multimedia art installation entitled 'Strange Games and Bridges' at the Singapore National Museum. This installation consisted of photography, experimental video and a 'floating garden' suspended in the air on a structure that reminds of a bridge, designed by Laurence Rasse, a garden landscaper. In 2008, she presented a controversial photo exhibition in Beirut titled 'Sense Icons and Sensitivity', which dealt with Occidentalism, as a response to Orientalism, and specifically with the image, representation and reception in the Middle East of white Western women's bodies.

All her work, across forms and genres, indicates a consistent preoccupation with, on the one hand, the city of Beirut and, on the other, a cross-cultural East–West communication, or the lack of it. Her work defies simple categorisation, but is consistent in its reflection on Lebanon's and the Middle East's violent past and present, and the 'Orient's' dissatisfaction with orientalist representation. Within that space, as we shall see, Saab is especially interested in the situation of women and children.

In what follows, I focus on Saab's first three documentaries that are most explicitly about Lebanon: *Lebanon in Torment* (1975), *Beirut Never Again* (1976) and *Letters from Beirut* (1979). These were made during the first five years of the Lebanese civil war and already reveal an interest in the mix of documentary as reportage and as art, which became more obvious in her later work. Jocelyn Saab is more directly outspoken than Ateyyat El Abnoudy: her voice is at the centre of the documentaries and is powerful in its agency and in its sarcasm. The look here is used in an illustrative manner: the indexical relationship between the voice-over and the image remains strong and challenges the spectator. At the same time she also expresses a stinging nostalgia for the past beauty of Beirut, and uses the past and present to illustrate her outspoken political opinions. This reflects Saab's journalistic interests, which are complemented by her interest in artistic and experimental strengths. The experimental nature of her later work, specifically *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* (1995), has been dis-

cussed in more detail by Mark Westmoreland, in his writing on Lebanese experimental cinema. He explores the experimental nature of the editing in the film, which projects the shallowness of the representation of Beirut in films from around the world, as well as the beauty of pre-war Lebanon. Through the juxtaposition of these two positions vis-à-vis Beirut, Saab unfolds both a nostalgic image of the city she loves and a critique of what it has come to represent on screen.

In his analysis of experimental film and video in Lebanon, Westmoreland states that film- and video-making in Lebanon is the result of an aesthetic ambivalence with mimetic modes of mediation, which points out the limitations of a post-colonial discourse and the politics of representation (Westmoreland, 2009: 41). The experimental documentaries that fall under his exploration of film and video, he says, problematise documentary methods for procuring knowledge and producing meaning. Instead, non-linearity, a Deleuzian 'becoming', and the intersubjectivity of subject, director and spectator in the films politicise representation, something Westmoreland refers to as a post-orientalist aesthetics. Non-linear, non-causal structures in the film, the subversion of historical representation and the expression of the impossibility of providing a unified national narrative, represent the failure of the nation. Lebanese cinema delineates a country perhaps, but not a nation (Livingston, 2008: 37). Saab, Westmoreland states, critiques both the West and the Middle East for their inability to deal constructively with Beirut as a stage for war and sectarian conflict. In an interview, Saab told me that she is always searching for a Beirut that no one knows or remembers. In this statement, a sense of nostalgia becomes apparent, but what is also always apparent is an anti-orientalist, philosophical and poetic preoccupation with a city in turmoil. This becomes apparent in her films' non-linear structure, poetic voice and the trust she places in her audience when it comes to understanding the experimental representation of the city. In what follows, I explore how the marriage of reportage and experimental cinema in Saab's early work attempts to draw in the spectator in order to establish an intersubjectivity that can lead to solidarity.

Lebanon in Torment (1975)

The title of her first film, *Le Liban dans la tourmente* (*Lebanon in Torment*, 1975), clearly communicates that Saab is worried, and upset, about the escalating violence and the start of what will become known as the Lebanese civil war. Being 'in torment' carries the meaning of a passive, innocent suffering, one that is perhaps undeserved. 'Torment' also implies

a protracted period of pain and torture, and, above all, ignorance. It is clear from the film that Saab wants to illustrate this torment, and also try to explain it, although she accepts that explaining the situation in Lebanon might be too difficult, and perhaps even unwanted. She says

> Beside me there were few filmmakers who wanted to show what was going on in the country. But nobody used to go and see these apart from those who were affected, the lower classes. In the end I was criticized by the bourgeoisie, my own people, because I said, 'look at yourselves, let us look at ourselves'. So they hated me. And the lowest class, they said, 'what's she doing, this woman, that's not her place. How dare she change things and talk about us.' Everybody was disturbed by what I was doing – and the more I worked the more alone I felt. (Hillauer, 2005: 174)

The war has often been described as a war of others, fought on Lebanese soil. This tendency to displace responsibility, Lina Khatib has emphasised, served as an excuse for a willing, self-imposed amnesia in Lebanese social and political life. Leaders as well as common Lebanese people stubbornly decided that the war, while it was being fought on their territory, had nothing to do with them. Instead, the popular myth states that Israel, Palestine and Syria fought over and on Lebanon. What Saab does with this film, and what cinema does in Lebanon since this film, is confront the Lebanese people with their own role and responsibility. Outside forces were indeed deeply involved in this civil war, but by no means was there a complete lack of interest from Lebanese people. *Lebanon in Torment* emphasises and lays out Lebanon's stake(s) in the war.

This first film is also her most journalistic one. Animated maps show which area of the country is under consideration, she is seen interviewing people with her microphone, and newspapers illustrate what interviewees talk about. The film attempts to explain the extremely complex social and political situation on the eve of the civil war. It shows Saab's preoccupation with national memory loss and the (mis)representation of Beirut and its peoples.

The film starts with a male voice-over describing how beautiful Lebanon is, with its stunning countryside, delicious food, modern cities and fun-loving, youthful demographic. As this voice-over describes Lebanon as a pleasant tourist attraction, we see ex-minister Khalil El Khoury, relaxing with friends, filmed in a luxurious setting, with smiling young people bedecked with jewellery and wearing fashionable clothes. His discourse on the 'Lebanon of tomorrow', where, as he says, the establishment will have to take into consideration the social underclasses, is contrasted to his actions: revelling in the luxurious surroundings, fashionable women and abundance of food on the tables.

These images of wealth and beauty are contrasted to the next shot, where a gun is cocked loudly, bullets are divided among the actors, buildings are riddled with bullet holes, and the soundscape is also dominated by gunshots, cannon fire and buildings collapsing. Cut to Saab herself, giving an impromptu speech on the Corniche in Beirut, explaining to tourists that Lebanon is a small but beautiful country. This is an ironic performance and she is interrupted by peacekeepers. The voice-over switches to a radio voice, wishing the tourists an enjoyable evening in the clubs and music halls of Beirut. Next, television images of tourists swimming in the sea and sunbathing, followed by a tennis player explaining that the country is ready to explode like a grenade, and he is armed, like everyone else. This montage of images illustrates Saab's sarcastic attitude towards the rich and famous, the tourists and those painting an image of Lebanon that persists: that of the playground of the rich, and Beirut being a cosmopolitan, attractive city. She bursts this bubble by juxtaposing these images with what comes next.

A child explains to the camera that he has 'come to learn to shoot a gun'. This interview is filmed at a paramilitary training camp, where everyone is armed. Saab asks everyone she meets, men, women and children, 'why have you decided to bear arms', and the answers vary only in the political party the individual opposes. Everyone who is armed mentions that it is out of self-defence. Most often, this is against the far right political group of the Phalangists. In succession, we identify Pierre Gemayel (leader of the Phalangists), Abou Sleiman (president of the Maronite League, extreme right Christians), Mussa Sadr (Shiite leader and preacher), Raymond Edde (politician of the moderate right), Ghassan Fawas (communist), Farouk Moukadem (militia leader); in short, every possible sectarian leader and commentator is given a voice, identified on screen with his political leanings to illustrate the scope of the complexity of the political, religious and ethnic situation in Lebanon. While Saab does not manage to interview every one of these leaders directly, she does manage to film them as they give interviews for television or on other public platforms. The diversity of leadership and ideals is impressive, but what is most surprising and interesting is the degree to which all agree with one another as to the reason why they are arming their respective groups: self-defence. Some are 'morally obliged' to defend themselves, others are 'forced' to do so. And while they may be successful at finding a voice and a platform to communicate their messages, the messages themselves remain unclear and confusing, precisely because the discourse of each is so similar to all the others, yet they are identified as being from opposing religious sects. The question indirectly posed by Saab here then is: if everyone says

the same thing, and the discourses repeat one another, does anyone really know what is going on in 1975?

Moreover, Saab shows on animated maps throughout the film that she travels the length and breadth of the country to meet these leaders. She travels from Beirut to Bekaa, to Tyre, from the cosmopolitan centre of the country to the agricultural south and the northeast, where poverty holds the unemployed and disenfranchised in its grip. In other words, she places the politicians and religious leaders in their home territories, and indicates that Lebanon is more than just its centre, Beirut. Like so many tourist marketing videos, something the government invested in heavily before the war, she shows the diversity of landscapes in Lebanon, but instead of emphasising their attractions and beauty, Saab highlights their implication in the conflict that is slowly but surely escalating around the common people of these regions.

Not only does she explore the diverse landscapes, ethnicities and politics of Lebanon, she also hands the microphone to those the voice-over calls 'the proletariat': the workers and farmers, just like Ateyyat El Abnoudy did in her early work from the 1970s. First, we get extended interviews with Palestinian refugees, who saw Lebanon as their last resort after having been expelled from or forced to flee their own land. They express their shock after seeing the country they have fled to also spiral out of control. This 'being out of control' is repeated several times by their political leaders as well, and used as an excuse to arm their followers. If Lebanon was the Palestinians' last resort, they say, they have become equally oppressed by Gemayel's Phalangists, thus feeling the need to arm themselves. Secondly, there is an interview that takes place at a tobacco farm, where the workers are shown to be working in desperate conditions, but the factory bosses plainly state that they pay their workers under the going rate, and women earn only half of what the men earn. This sparks Saab's interest, and so she turns her attention to the women workers on this farm, interviewing them about their working conditions: child labour, exploitation and underpayment, and especially bad working hours: 'we don't stop working, from 3am to 6pm'. Thirdly, Saab looks more closely at how children and young people deal with the turmoil in Lebanon. The voice-over states that while the old find work in agriculture, the young often take 'the route of the exodus' from the rural to the urban environment, precisely because they lack work and secure rights. Illustrated with newspaper cuttings, emphasis is put on the injustice done to innocent children and aimless youth, easily impressed and moulded by charismatic leaders. The result is a young demographic constantly on the move, ending up unemployed and poor in the slums surrounding Beirut,

contributing considerably to the politicisation of religion and sectarian conflict.

The film's return from the countryside to Beirut and its focus on the slums once again gives the impression that the intended audience for this film is perhaps not those who know the area. With detailed maps, spectators are given a step-by-step guide to the demographic and sectarian make-up of the many suburbs surrounding Beirut: from Bourg Hammoud, En Nabaa, Tell Zaatar, Aïn Roummani, Chuyah, Bourg El Branjeh to Sabra and Chatillah. These are shown in animation: from Beirut on a map of Lebanon alone, we see the suburbs appear in clockwise order and in different colours, in a simplified visualisation and clarification of what is in reality an extremely disorderly cluster of slums. German war film scholar Eileen Rositzka describes the use of animated maps in war films: 'cinematic maps give us multiple (or "split") viewpoints on a certain terrain – the sense that we are able to grasp a place at first sight and yet the place itself holds several secrets and dangers' (Rositzka, 2016). The animated geographical illustrations make it possible to show a perspective on the issues, an overview for unfamiliar audiences and what cannot otherwise be shown.

Perhaps the most interesting section of interviews in this film is the one dedicated to artists. Saab interviews journalists and artists with whom she identifies much more strongly than either the political leaders or the disenfranchised farmers and factory workers. Etel Adnan, for example, is a personal friend of the film-maker and a poet of the left, and Samir Frangié is a leftist journalist. It is in conversations with these people that Saab really takes an active part in the dialogue. We hear her questions and we see her getting much closer to these figures than to anyone else in the film. She emphasises their opinions through the setting of the interviews and the extended time she spends with them. Precisely because of her own status as a journalist and an artist, she identifies very closely with them. In fact, the spectator comes to suspect that they are friends. She returns to Frangié three times in the course of the film, as if he is not only a representative of the leftist journalists with whom he is associated, but also as if he is a voice of reason serving as a counterbalance to all the militant and religious discourse we hear from the other interviewees. Frangié became a famous and influential journalist and later also a politician. His political stance was directly opposed to that of the many militias during the civil war, and he was one of the initiators of movements that promoted dialogue during the war and national reconciliation after the war. He was never elected to parliament, but he did inaugurate a foundation called 'Lettre de Beyrouth' in 2003, an organisation that retains its political faith

in development, democracy, civil society, transparency, women's rights, equality, freedom and trade unionism.

While Etel Adnan is only interviewed once, and the interview is rather short, the setting within which this interview is conducted stands apart from all the other interviews. Adnan is a close friend, as we shall see, and she returned to all three films discussed in this chapter. She is both a commentator on events and the poet who provides illustrative voice-over texts. In fact, Adnan's poetry is used in, and even written especially for, Saab's documentaries *Beirut Never Again* (1976) and *Letters from Beirut* (1979). In *Lebanon in Torment*, Adnan does not yet serve as a poet, but rather as a commentator. She is interviewed in her car, and from the informal atmosphere it becomes clear that they are intimate friends, or at least allies in their outlook on and approach to the role of the artist in the war. Saab told me about this presence in the film:

> When I made *Le Liban dans la tourmente*, Etel was a must. I interviewed her. Etel, painter and poet, is inherently related to Lebanon of that time (before and during the war). She is a key figure in the country. (Interview with author, 2010b)

Adnan herself said about the film:

> This is an extraordinary achievement. It catches the Lebanese environment which led to this war in a way no previous document, whether written or filmed, has ever done. Through her political courage, moral integrity, and profound intelligence, Jocelyne instinctively grasped the essence of this conflict. No document about this war matches in importance Jocelyne's cinematic achievement in the three films she has dedicated to Lebanon. This is not only a rare work of fundamental importance for the history of our country, but also a study whose implications stretch beyond Lebanon, and should be taught on university courses devoted to sociology and contemporary world politics. (Brenez and Hadouchi, 2005)

Indeed, Adnan is a widely celebrated poet, novelist and painter, who lived in the United States and became a central figure in Arab–American cultural life. She now lives and works as a painter in Paris. Saab worked for Adnan in the period when both returned to Beirut just before the war, which is how they knew one another. Saab appreciates Adnan's philosophical and poetic style, obvious from this interview, but also from the contributions to Saab's other films. Adnan is admired and loved by Saab and this personal bond comes forward through the intimacy in their conversations. Frangié, in contrast, is interviewed in a more formal setting, at a table in a garden, but his body language clearly illustrates that they are colleagues or friends: he leans back and smiles when Saab speaks, and leans forward when he explains something. He rolls and

smokes his cigarettes, and generally partakes in a lively dialogue between two intellectuals.

As a piece of journalism/reportage, the film lays out the complex situation between the different factions, ethnicities and religious sects in Lebanon, as if explaining for an audience who might not know about these. As such, it seems to address a foreign audience, although the situation was so complex that it may have been intended to clarify the situation to a home-grown audience. As an experimental documentary, however, it unfolds slowly and intricately, like an unusually complex pattern that is decidedly non-linear and does not seek to create logic out of the complex situation. All the interviews and sound bites do not make up a logically unfolding narrative. While the visuals give the impression at times that the intended audience is one that is not knowledgeable about the different sects and political parties, the diversity of voices is not presented in a way that explains things through a structure that is immediately comprehensible to outsiders. It could be argued that the situation is in fact so complex that Saab is indeed explaining things to an audience that is supposed to know. The way she explains it is pertinent to an Arab audience. Saab herself refers to this explicitly, in an interview, when she says that she refuses to structure her work logically. She says she speaks in the language of her fellow Arabs, and that this at times upsets them. The unusual structure is non-Western (in fact, it is anti-Western) with a view to eliciting solidarity from a local, regional audience, rather than an international one. As such, the film created an outrage, mainly because of montage and structure. Saab said:

> The Islamic world . . . is disturbed by the representation of things. Painting and film only imitate European painting and film. I broke with this way of seeing in my films, by going back to Arab narrative traditions: not like in the Occident with the beginning, the middle, the end. No, you have boxes, like Russian matrioshka dolls, one going into the other. If you show things in this way, people suddenly identify with it. It disturbs them because the art is not foreign anymore, it is theirs. I feel I can communicate with people this way. (Hillauer, 2005: 175–6)

The way she describes her editing process is reminiscent of Laura Marks' theorisation of enfoldment in Arab experimental film. To illustrate this, I will first describe and then schematise the enfolding structure of Saab's first film. (1) In the opening sequence that focuses on the ex-minister and his colleagues and friends relaxing in an opulent setting, we see their jewellery, their shoes, clothes and their fashionable living conditions. The set-up seems to be informal, but it is obvious that the ex-minister is speaking not just to Saab's camera but also to others. It has the feeling if

not the look of a press conference. (2) This is followed by a large number of open-air and set-up interviews with religious as well as political leaders. These are all very formal talking-head interviews: most of them are at official occasions, where the press has clearly been invited to meet and interview the speakers; others are set-up especially for Saab and her crew, for example, the one with Pierre Gemayel, the leader of the Phalangists, who takes her into a conference room, where he takes a seat at one end of the table and requests that Saab sits at the other end. (3) Interviews with journalists and artists follow. These interviews are much more informal and feel more like conversations, where Saab is a contributor to the discussion and where there are people that agree on ideas and ideals. (4) After that, we get to the vulnerable, central issues: the fate and troubles of the workers. She talks to tobacco farmers, fishermen and factory workers, both men and women, old and young, on their farms, in their factories and in their homes. These interviews are much more impassioned and urgent. Here the voice-over sympathises directly with the plight of these people (who are left anonymous, in contrast to the names and functions of the leaders and journalists she interviews) and both directly and indirectly lays the blame for the complex and unfair situation with the leaders: there is no support from the so-called leaders, no acknowledgement of the workers' conditions, which, as the voice-over states, has led to these people either escaping to the city and ending up homeless, which leads them to the urban militia camps, or, if they stay in the countryside, they become militarised there, also in (rural) militia camps. (5) Next, we see continued interviews with religious and political leaders, now emphasising their involvement in the militia camps and detailing their role as trainers and ideological orators. The first interviews here are in the countryside, both in the south in Tyre and in the north in Baalbek, followed by interviews with militias in the urban centres and suburbs of Beirut.

The structure and the content of the interviews are reminiscent of some interviews in El Abnoudy's *Days of Democracy*. In Lebanon, the militia leaders are all surrounded by their followers, as the women politicians were in Egypt. As a consequence, these interviews seem to be conducted in disorderly fashion, in loud voices, with people talking over one another in their attempt to clarify their political or religious stance, and to convince the interviewer of their cause. (6) We return then to another interview or two with journalists, again around a small table and with drinks and cigarettes being shared and Saab taking part in the conversation. (7) The film ends with another ironic look at the rich and famous, with a shot inside the house of a minister, surrounded by women and men in fashionable clothes, the camera lingering on their jewellery and shoes. The dif-

ference this time is that while the man is talking politics, and we hear the same discourse we have now heard several times in the film, clichés and slogans, the camera focuses on the facial expressions and body language of a woman in the room, who is clearly well educated and has opinions on what the man is saying. The man is sitting at the other end of the room to where the camera is, the woman is sitting closer to the camera, and Saab focuses on her precisely because her facial expressions and body language say much more than she could in public. It is obvious from her facial expressions that she is critical of what is being said: she moves uncomfortably in her chair, wipes her hair out of her face and raises her eyebrows. While she does not look into the camera, the camera clearly focuses on her because it is more interesting and perhaps more real than the performance by the man at the other end of the room. The camera then pans around the room and points out among the crowd a few other men and women looking uncomfortable.

A schematised overview of the sequence of things in the film could perhaps help to clarify the enfolded structure:

1. the rich and famous (focus on jewels, shoes, filmed in opulent houses);
2. politicians and religious leaders of different sects (talking-heads);
3. journalists and artists (informal interviews);
4. interviews with workers, i.e., tobacco farmers, fishermen, factory workers;
5. politicians and militias (chaotic interviews);
6. journalists (informal discussions);
7. the rich and famous (focus on jewellery, shoes, opulence).

The sensitive information at the centre of the film needs to be protected. This is the fold. Gradually, in the film, we see an opening up of the conversation, an unfolding of a situation that has, at its centre (4), the vulnerable information: the words of the farmers, factory workers and fishermen, which reveals the ‘truth’, as opposed to the clichéd discourse. What is in this fold, the sensitive statements, are, however, surrounded with interviews that steal the attention away from the ‘proletariat’, and steep the conversation in political discourse, loud voices, clichés and rehearsed platitudes. The real conversation is hidden in the fold of the enfolding structure, and over-run by the louder, more dominant voices. In Saab’s understanding, the smallest of the Russian matryoshka dolls, the central one, is dedicated to the farmers. One needs to dig deeper to reveal their meaning and their value. The spectator is entrusted with the action of unfolding the enfolded information.

In *Lebanon in Torment* we also witness folds within those sections of the interviews that focus on the dominant voices. The audience is here also invited to help to unfold the essence. As leaders are interviewed, the camera lingers on those listening and witnessing. As the voice of the male speaker seems central, it becomes background noise, and in the folds of his discourse, the repetition, the clichés, we witness dissenting looks and body language, or we hear the voices of his subjects repeating these clichés. This reveals (unfolds) the irony in the manner in which Saab's camera observes the leaders. Background faces and voices are foregrounded in rural and urban militia camps, and in the leaders' wealthy surroundings, we witness dissenting opinions in the facial expressions and body language of the women and a few men in the room.

Lina Khatib emphasises that art in Lebanon is in fact the *only* place where the reality of the war is acknowledged and attempts are made to get it represented. In Lebanon, Marks writes elsewhere, 'filmmakers cannot approach history directly' – history is enfolded – and instead must delicately hint at experiences and evaluations rather than confront them directly (Marks, 2010: 243). This delicacy in film and art, Marks posits, results in experiments in form and style, and renews art. As such, art is an unfolding power. In other words, the trauma of the civil war in Lebanon may be conducive to the creation of art, and art is perhaps the only way to deal with the trauma of war: the spectator is requested to help to unfold the art at the centre of an otherwise journalistic body of work. Saab, I have shown, does this through the montage, in structuring her films in such a way as to enfold delicate matters and peoples into discourse, while trusting the spectator to assist her in the unfolding act. Unlike Marks though, I would say that this is an inherently political act not a pre-political given.

Reality enfolds, and art unfolds. Representation is replaced by performativity. Indeed, Lebanon after the war was obsessed with reconstruction. There was no time for reconciliation. A blanket amnesty and a refusal to deal with the implications of the war and the consequences for the country enfolded the war's central causes and concerns. A rhetoric of looking forward diminished the importance of closure, and thus many scholars claim the war stopped, it did not end, evident in the fact that Lebanon has been and is still under constant threat of escalating violence – see, for example, the devastating summer of 2006, and its precarious situation as Syria's neighbour in the current conflict.

While experimentation in Marks' eyes is pre-political, she does agree that it creates a foundation and a source of strength for political acts. The enfoldment in itself is a political act. This is especially true in the case of Jocelyne Saab, who Marks sees as an early proponent of experimental

cinema in Lebanon (although she places the film-maker in a French context). But Marks looks at Saab's later work. Here, I deal with Saab's first documentaries, in the 1970s, when she worked as a journalist for Lebanese and European television. Saab's films are a mix of experimental and journalistic styles, and create a political act by encompassing art and journalism. The unfolding and encompassing of art within journalism is at this point an inherently political act.

While war may be seen as disruptive of the narrative potential of life, and the trauma of war in Lebanon has led to a degree of national amnesia, cinema has, in large part because of Saab's early work, managed to focus on the civil war and confronted the country's audiences with their past and present realities. Saab addresses her fellow Lebanese as her intended audience in an unfolding manner, and she has found a way of speaking to them directly in their own language through montage and structure, as she explains through her matryoshka dolls. Hers was the pioneering work inspiring Lebanese post-war film-makers to confront the war and the people's fragmented memories. Khatib shows that post-war cinema in Lebanon was the only locus where the memory of war was confronted. I claim here that it is through Saab's work that there is a heritage of confronting the war at all. She has stated her desire to be seen as someone who played a vital role in archiving Lebanese cinema and visualising Beirut as a part of Lebanese visual heritage:

> I am waiting for someone in Lebanon to regard my films as heritage, just like I gathered the heritage of others (in *Once Upon a Time, Beirut*). [In 2005] someone showed my films in Lebanon . . . for political awareness as part of the 30th anniversary of the end of the Civil War. If I had not done that, your generation would not have seen them. (Khatib, 2008: 42)

With this statement she confirms the political intentions behind, and content of, her films, while she also acknowledges the importance of dealing with and confronting reality in spite of the nationwide tendency to forget the past. Only cinema is a possible 'substitute for systematic collective amnesia': Lebanese experimental cinema is an 'archive in progress . . . mixing true and false, probable and improbable, through which [the film-maker] inoculates the body of a diseased reality with an antidote of invention, the denial, the return, the subversion' (Cohen Hadria, 2005: 35). While Saab may not abide by official Lebanese ideology and state rhetoric of moving forward and forgetting the past, she has given Lebanese cinema its lively and healthy incentive to engage with the past without fail. In my view, Saab's early work initiated and spurred on Lebanese cinema's success and its renaissance.

Beirut Never Again (1976)

Exactly like *Lebanon in Torment*, *Beirut Never Again* starts with the idea that Lebanon is the ideal tourist destination. Or rather, that it was a popular tourist destination: 'one in two travellers have been here but the city does not exist anymore'. It is now, instead, a ghost city, and its inhabitants live from one day to another. This film really illustrates Saab's preoccupation with children at war. Her focus on children in this film foreshadows another of her short films, *Children at War*, also from 1976. In both films, this preoccupation with children works as a reflection on how memory works in Lebanon, and on how the war destroys memories. CIA statistics show that almost 50 per cent of the Lebanese population is younger than twenty-five and 40 per cent between twenty-five and fifty.[2] This is in large part due to the war, and to the baby boom and relative economic prosperity of the city after the war. In 1976, when these two short films were made, the war had been raging for a year, and the director reflects on her own childhood and youth. In effect, she is still only in her twenties herself, and identifies with the young people she films and interviews. This is already visible in *Lebanon in Torment*, where young Lebanese hippies, teenage militia soldiers and Palestinian children are interviewed alongside the older generation of leaders and politicians.

In *Beirut Never Again*, the director follows the deterioration of the walls in Beirut for six months. Every morning, between six and ten o'clock, when the militiamen from all sides are resting after nights of fighting, she 'goes into town' and observes the developments of the war as they are imprinted on the walls of her city. She reflects: 'the older the war gets, the younger the soldiers become'. This is significant and illustrative of what she worries about with regard to Lebanon's memory: she worries that too many people are dying, buildings are destroyed, and with these people and buildings the history of the country and the memories of the older generations are lost. She says: 'these children have no memories, no fears. The war makes a playground for them that they have never had before'. Ziad Doueiri seems to directly refer to this statement and confirm it in his famous film *West Beirut* (1998). The longer the war goes on, the more people die, and as the militias mostly consist of adults, adults are also the first to die. Because children and young people are the only ones left, as street kids, looting and stealing, or as child soldiers, single-mindedly trying to finish a war they did not start and do not understand, Saab sees not only orphans and troubled kids, but also a devastating consequence for Lebanon's future. She fears a future without a past, where it is not only ignorance of the complexity of the warring sects and factions that ensues

or a willing amnesia in a post-traumatic, post-war reality, but also a forgetting of the past due to a sheer lack of memories.

She most ostensibly turns to children in her short film *Children of War* (1976). The film takes place few days after a massacre – with 1,500 dead – in the Karantina slum near Beirut. This is where the director discovered children who survived. She approached them by offering pencils to draw with. They let her film their games and violent warrior-like acts: they re-enact the horror that they witnessed, and the re-enactment of the trauma in fact shows how the children deal with their own war, how the war in Lebanon is experienced differently by different generations and social classes. As I will explore in more detail in a later chapter, children serve as symbols for interrupted memory and amnesia, but also, paradoxically, for collective memory. Children represent the adult and his or her memories of youth and childhood. It seems to be the case then that children often lose their agency in film. Karen Lury (2010) implies this as well when she theorises the child as Other, as an interruption, and as passive. Children in fiction films are often representative of a rupture of everyday modern temporality. War films, Lury further explains, articulate the relationship between witness, memory and history through the presence and character of the child. She indicates that very often the child comes to stand for the adult's traumatised, interrupted memory. The child is presumed to not have the authority on the facts of war, yet their representation of it is visceral, of and on the body, demonstrating how the interweaving of history, memory and witness can be powerfully affective. Lury writes about Western feature fiction films, and I want to posit here the idea that in war documentaries from Lebanon (and Palestine), children are not left without agency. Saab focuses on them in image and voice-over, and describes them as 'the kings and queens of today'. They are also interviewed, and give powerful statements, and in that way become the means through which the film-maker manages to appeal to a large audience: these children are clever, they have insights into the present that many adults do not because their minds may be clouded with memories of sectarian strife and the complexity of the pre-war situation. Children are not innocent bystanders to this war: they are intelligent commentators.

Children's innocence and naivety is a European construct. Numerous articles have been written about the role of children in humanitarian and political social justice documentaries, with the big-eyed, wide-eyed, sad-eyed children, where the goal is to elicit a contribution from the spectator (Pullen, 2008; Smith, 2009; Martins, 2011). Their portrayal as victims worthy of compassion, in need of protection – in other words a sentimentalised and diminutive representation – is not what Saab subscribes to.

She purposefully moves away from that. These Beiruti children are not naive, and they are no longer innocent. Instead, they have lived through a war and they have, out of necessity, had to make it their own. The older the war gets, the younger the soldiers get. In the film Saab says: 'they understood quickly that they are the sole masters of their decisions', making explicit their agency and self-awareness as soldiers and Beirutis.

However, while some of these children who are interviewed by Saab clearly know what they are talking about and in some instances display more clarity than any of the political and religious leaders could in *Lebanon in Torment*, there are some sad-eyed, wide-eyed children. As they fight, they construct a new memory, one that mythologises the past. They may not remember the causes of the war, they perhaps never knew or understood the causes in the first place. Instead, what they say, they appear to be repeating from something they have heard elsewhere. They remember whom they fight and who they have killed. They know it has to do with religion, but they have forgotten what they are fighting for. Many of them, interviewed by Saab, sound bitter and disillusioned as soldiers would, but they do not know an identifiable reason for their own fighting. One interviewed boy says: 'I am disgusted with everything, we always lived together, I do not understand why we cannot do that again. The country is destroyed. It will never be like before. All together, we destroyed it. I have lost friends and family, and I revenged them. I have killed people.' Their short-term memory serves them as soldiers, for being able to continue their fights, and therefore makes it difficult to really end the war.

In *Beirut Never Again*, more than any of her other films, the indexical relationship between voice and image is immediate and direct. Saab parallels what she says with what she sees and explains: 'these children', 'that girl', using indexical language to identify the children she speaks about. She explains to the spectator what 'this child' is doing as she worries about them and their futures: 'what is going to become of this child if he is already mixing his life with that of rats and waste'. There is a sense of judgement in this statement. Perhaps not for the child him- or herself, but certainly for the society in which the child lives. Mostly though, there is a sense of worry for their future. The children have replaced the elders on the battlegrounds and have become the sole masters of their fate. Saab says that bitter poetry has replaced the carelessness of the past, so she does hear a certain poetry in what the children say, she does grant them agency, and respects their insights and analyses of the situation. While order has broken down, as she films broken glass, she says there are little suns reflected in the fragments of glass, referring to the fact that the city

and its buildings are destroyed and leave behind nothing but detritus, but the children are not to be seen as detritus. They are not broken, they are the little suns, and represent hope for the future of Lebanon.

For the voice-over in *Beirut Never Again*, Saab returns to Etel Adnan, as a poet-commentator on the war. Adnan co-wrote, with Saab, the voice-over for the film. Their collaboration has not been explored before, not in the extensive work done on Adnan's writings, nor in (the very few) studies on Saab's work, yet it is easy to see how the two women found one another in their poetic, counter-hegemonic treatment of the war in Lebanon. Etel Adnan was born in 1925 and studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1955, she moved to the United States and worked at the universities of Harvard and Berkeley. In 1972, she returned to Beirut as a journalist, and became a cultural editor for both *Al Safa* and *L'Orient le Jour* (the newspaper Saab is seen to be reading in *Letter from Beirut*). She stayed in Lebanon until 1977, and wrote her most famous work in that year: *Sitt Marie Rose*, a novel that has become a classic of war literature. Adnan has said that 'poetry is the purpose of life'. She sees poetry as 'a counter-profession, as an expression of personal and mental freedom, as perpetual rebellion' (Majaj and Amireh, 2002: 14). She appears in *Lebanon in Torment* and wrote the texts for both *Beirut Never Again* and *Letter from Beirut*.

Like Saab, Adnan likes an enfolded style, with a composite of diverse styles and forms. Her literary experimentation is a political critique of life (Majaj and Amireh, 2002: 18). Also like Saab, Adnan makes the city of Beirut the protagonist of her many works especially *Sitt Marie Rose*. In it a handful of characters describe their experiences of the civil war. There is a 'resistance to narration' in her novel, and as well as a decentrist style and form, the novel displays a decentrist attitude to characters and content. In a post-modern reading, the novel 'exists largely as a form recording its own impossibility' (Foster, 1995: 60), and moves from first-person narration in the first half to a fragmented series of monologues in the second half. The novel tells the story of Sitt Marie Rose, a Syrian charity worker in Beirut, who is killed by sectarian violence. The repeated sequence of monologues in the second half of the novel illustrates, says Foster, the decentrist attitude of the author, where seven separate monologues repeat, in diverse ways, the story of Sitt Marie Rose's death. As such, the novel undermines the assumption that anyone can speak for or represent an Other, or 'the people' at large (Foster, 1995: 63). This illustrates the breakdown not just of literary representation, but also of political representation in a country where different sects and political parties fail to adequately represent their followers. At the end of the novel Egyptian Nasser's conceptualisation of the Arab world as a series of concentric circles is expanded to include the

whole world. Adnan shows the conflict in Lebanon to have repercussions for the whole world, while it 'represents the simultaneous breakdown of and desire for an ideological framework where national identity can be conceptualised as a pure and homogeneous interior space' (Foster, 1995: 65).

It is clear then that the enfoldedness, the matryoshka dolls, the concentric circles and fragmentation of the narrative aim to represent the same thing: the impossibility of representation. The experimental nature of Adnan's novel and Saab's films illustrate the two women's like-minded view on the world during the war in Lebanon. But the failure of representation does not prevent them from trying. As Adnan has said in an interview, she believes that women have different options for representing violence and war. She says: 'women pay particular observation to details . . . they translate tragedy into everyday life events. [We] see tragedy in its details and in its suffering in terms of practicalities . . . As women we have a particular sensitivity toward tragedies and disasters, and this is why more women have written anti-war novels than men, especially in Lebanon' (Saba, 1998: 4).

In the early 1970s, when these films were made, Etel Adnan led the cultural department of *Al Safa*, a French-language Beiruti newspaper. Saab was a music journalist at that time, and worked for Adnan. She told me:

> Etel taught us a lot. We admired her. We admired her thinking. She was a philosopher about the world. She was a poet and we were left very free in what we did and wrote. (Interview, 2010b)

One of the instigating factors for Saab to ask Adnan to write the voice-over for *Beirut Never Again* was Adnan's poem 'Jebu', from the collection *The Arab Apocalypse*.[3] Saab found it very prescient and told me it impressed her a lot. During the making of the film, she felt the need to break away from the conventional voice for documentary. She wanted to break with the reportage style she had used in *Lebanon in Torment*. Because normality had disappeared, she saw no more referent to reality:

> I felt I had to liberate myself from the traditional channels and become a totally independent creator. When I look back now, there was in me such strength of conviction about the need to shoot and keep the memory of places and do it my way. The city was being raped, crushed, set to disappear. The way I shot Beirut day after day disintegrated before my eyes. It is very personal. It is the garden of my childhood that disappeared in front of my eyes. (Interview, 2010b)

But she wanted to focus on life, not death. And that, she says, is where she found the poetry that emerges from life: a surreal poetry: 'I do not

allow the spectator to trivialise the war.' Using someone else's words and voice is part of that strategy, as she says the war is both personal and political, both collective and intimate. For the editing, therefore, Saab and her editor Philippe Gosselet took their footage to an isolated place, in a convent, where the heat wave in France in the summer of 1976 did not bother them, and where they could distance themselves from the outside world. She calls the editing, creating the enfolded form, an editing of four hands, as in a piano duet. When they had finished the editing, they agreed the film looked like a love poem for Beirut, which reminded Saab of the poem, 'Jebu' and so she decided to call on Adnan, who was in Paris at the time, to watch the film once and write the voice-over for it. Adnan took two days and Saab adapted the text to the film in what she calls 'a natural way'. Adnan's commentary suits the image, as it is reflexive and incorporates history and future – reflected also in the children. Both Adnan and Saab, therefore, move away deliberately from the morbid side of a city under siege that is exploited in news reportage and other documentaries. The poetry and reflexivity, the distance and the children, then, are all tools to emphasise the life in a place of death, and to reflect on 'a philosophy of life', as Saab sees it.

Another voice in *Beirut Never Again*, is that of a singer. Saab illustrates the underbelly of the past Lebanon that she pointed out at the start of the film, with images of poker rooms and bordellos. As she says that Beirut was not only the prime tourist destination in the Middle East, but also the capital of sin, she plays the music of Sabah, a diva-singer of the 1950s, and her medley of *Lebanese Legends*. Again, there is an irony in the juxtaposition of nostalgic legends of times past with the images of the capital of sin. She takes this irony further when she laments the demise of the cafes and shopping centres, destroyed by cruelty, a 'paradise we will never have again', while the soundtrack moves from *Lebanese Legends* to an experimental soundscape that reminds of a train screeching to a halt on its tracks. This unpleasant sound of metal on metal stands in stark contrast to the sung legends as well as to the image on screen, leaving the indexical relationship between sound and image behind at this stage. Instead, Saab is satirising the image of a Beirut that political leaders would like people to maintain: that of an exotic place that is familiar enough to visit, but where one is still free to smoke the water pipes, watch belly dancers and visit bordellos.

The sudden return to the armed children, who are wiling away time until their next battle, is confronting and dark: they are in their early teens, but carry automatic rifles and speak of the atrocities they have committed. The manner in which these images are not only juxtaposed

but also enfolded again reminds of the preoccupation with protecting and revealing knowledge. Moving from the descriptions of Beirut as the ideal tourist destination, with entertainment and hedonism at its centre, to children as victims of the war that was started by adults, to children as thieves and looters, to the poetry of the past and children's hopes and futures reflected in shards of glass, to the singer Sabah and her 1950s *Lebanese Legends*, to Beirut as the capital of sin, and lastly back to child soldiers – the film enfolds the children's future at its centre into so many layers of complex reflections of Beirut's past, present and future that it is clear, upon reflection, that it is almost lost between them. But the last scene of the film, with the child soldiers, is so shocking that the audience is aware of these children's centrality to the director's concerns. Unfolding this central concern for the future is something an audience must do for the sake of the children, and it is something the experimental nature of the documentary allows for: the lack of a linear narrative and the experiments with sounds, indexicality and juxtapositions are what pulls in the spectator and enables and encourages them to embody an intersubjective relationship with the children, and watch in solidarity. The experimental nature of this documentary, then, does not alienate but approaches its audience successfully, through its preoccupation with children and the affective nature of children's embodied experiences in war.

Letter from Beirut (1979)

The fragmentary nature of history, memory and storytelling is further explored in Saab's 1979 documentary *Letter from Beirut*. The epistolary structure of the film emphasises the fragmentary nature of life in Beirut not only in the content of the film, but also again in the way the film is structured. She writes to a friend – this is the voice-over, again co-written with Etel Adnan. Saab puts herself centrally in the frame as the letter writer. She describes her experiences of being in her beloved city after a few years' absence, and seeing it so destroyed. She finds it hard to readjust to life in a war zone, and admits it would be easier not to remember. If she could forget about the past, she writes, she would not worry so much about the future. But she remains traumatised and, having come back to her city, the repressed memories return. The letter takes on a confessional mode and she admits that everyone is a prisoner of their own thoughts.

As Hamid Naficy writes in *Accented Cinema*, epistolarity is often a consequence of the reflective nature of the exile. It reveals the split subjectivity of the character speaking (reading or writing the letter) in voice-over, and the non-linear structure of the thought process and the way in which

Figure 2.1 Jocelyne Saab writing a letter to a friend about seeing Beirut again after years of absence, from *Letter from Beirut* (1979) © Jocelyne Saab

the traumatised exile deals with memories (Naficy, 2001: 103). There is also an archaeological aspect to letter-writing, but in reverse: 'instead of digging deeper for information, it is added, layer by layer'. While the layers here are different to those that an exchange of letters could illustrate, they are present. Saab decides to ride buses in Beirut, and interviews people who board the bus. She changes route at least ten times, and as such adds layer after layer of interview, confession, testimony of witnesses of the war, of the deterioration of the city, and of the fighting between militias and sects. Naficy says that 'each letter compels spectators to revise their earlier hypothesis about the writer' (2001: 114), and in *Letter from Beirut* Saab compels the spectator to revise their opinions about Beirut and Lebanon with each bus she boards and each interview she films. The film is fragmented not only through the letter-writing and the bus-hopping, but also through the military checkpoints Saab has to stop at as she travels through the city and the country. Every checkpoint has its own sectarian ideology, but all want the same thing: control over who passes in and out of their territory. A repetitive structure, as Naficy writes, 'results from the inability to close the gap of exile' (2001: 114), and it is in this film then that

Saab's distance from Beirut is made more explicit than in the two previous ones. The gap in this film is twofold: there is a gap of exile, but there is also one as a result of the trauma of the civil war. There is a distance between Saab and her home town, and there is a distance between the time she left Beirut and the time she writes about. The constant return, both in space and in time, to the Beirut she knew, this constant search for the past space, emphasises the vast changes the city has had to undergo since 1975. This 'regime of erasure and desire' (2001: 114) aims to redress historical wrongs, but ultimately fails to do so. Each sequence is a fragment, or maybe a paragraph, in her letter, without there being a larger picture of the situation presented to the receiver of the letter or the spectator of the film. She says: 'we live between chaos and sadness, second by second, in an involuntary nomadism'. No one feels at home anymore.

In epistolary films, Naficy writes, the voice is of central importance. There is an orality and an acousticity of the voice that is foregrounded in these films (2001: 120). Accented epistolaries, moreover, emphasise the co-existence of orality and literacy, of the colonial and the post-colonial. There is a unique relationship between voice, interiority and identity, where the voice-over reads out the letter (being written or being read), where the writing is inherently self-reflexive, and where the identity of the speaker, the owner of the voice, can switch between writer and reader without the audience being aware of the identity switch (Naficy, 2001: 121). Taking this further, the way letters are read out over images in films foregrounds the non-synchronicity of these films, and as such these letter-films or film-letters are actually counter-hegemonic. Silence, voice, non-synchronicity and doubt about who is speaking – the writer or the reader, the speaker or the listener – potentially create ontological doubt regarding the owner of the voice.

The voice-over writing/reading the letter coincides with the act of writing the letter only at the very beginning of the film, where Saab is seen on the terrace of a café by the Mediterranean. She is writing/reading about the 'psychosis of violence' and her struggle to come to terms with how Beirut looks. The letter is very self-reflexive, signifying the writer's torn subjectivity about having been abroad and being removed from the developments in Beirut. While she is seen writing, she is being photographed with an ancient static camera on a tripod, by an old man struggling to make the machine work. The self-reflexive voice-over discussing the shock of being back in her home town, the trauma of being in a war zone, and the memories of Beirut before the war and at the start of the war are framed by letter-writing and vintage photography. Both these tools, the pen and paper, on the one hand, and the camera, on the other, are

indications that there is a certain nostalgia at work. Saab confronts reality at the start of the film by returning to older times, referring to a Beirut before the war, the Beirut she knows from childhood, a home that was not yet destroyed. This emphasises her exilic identity, and it also problematises memory. The action of letter-writing soon stops, and is replaced by filming on buses and travelling through Lebanon by car, in an old Beetle.

Again Saab's interest in poetry appears: she co-wrote the voice-over with Etel Adnan, apparent in such poetic reminiscences and reflections as when she says that the race course is the barometer of war: if there is too much tension, there is no race and the track will be deserted. If there is no tension, they will run. But even when they run, the horses run faster than history, which represents the collective attempt to forget: Lebanon's collective amnesia. She emphasises that the horses are pure-bred Arabian horses, which makes the pleasure of the game more intense and their ability to run faster more symbolic.

Riding the buses in Beirut, she also films apparently spontaneous conversations between passengers. It becomes obvious though that these conversations are not as spontaneous as they appear at first sight. Saab emphasises the snapshot aesthetic of her film on the bus: she seats students together who have political debates, older men who sing nostalgic songs, women who talk about their families and their children, as well as social workers who ask one another about their charity work. As in *Beirut jamais plus*, the film-maker's contributions become indexical and commanding: she says 'listen to this woman', 'listen to this man'. This seems to foreground the people's voices in compensation for the earlier dominating voice-over of the letter-writer/reader. The film-maker in this part of the film no longer wants to do the interviewing. At the centre of this documentary is a part where she is moving away from the reportage-style film-making. It is a tactic on the part of the film-maker to extinguish her own voice and foreground that of the passengers. Nevertheless, in spite of the frustration she films, her voice-over returns in epistolary mode once in a while, and she says 'but I am happy to be here, to see familiar things, and the city I love', returning to the letter and to her own voice.

Saab's own memories in the letter-writing, the memories and testimonies of the bus passengers, and her reflections on who and what she witnesses while riding and filming on the buses, is followed with a return to reportage journalism in the latter half of the documentary. Here, she travels around Lebanon in her Beetle in order to interview UN soldiers. On the road, she films a family who are loading everything they own into a car, as she reflects in her typically poetic tone: 'These refugees live from second to second. This is a new form of nomadism, typical for our

century.' She says: 'In March 1968, there was an exodus of nomads, and in May 1968 they all returned.' This is accompanied with sepia images of the Palestinian refugees, and is followed with images of the car full of Lebanese refugees, thus emphasising the parallels between Palestine and Lebanon in their struggle with the Israelis, and the perpetual nomads, or refugees, of the Middle East. She asks rhetorically: 'Can we say there are non-refugees here? No one is at home anymore.'

As she drives south, closer and closer to the Israeli border where most of the UN soldiers are stationed, she claims that 'this is a no man's land, for the sake of Israeli politics. They erase every trace of what they have destroyed, and the Palestinians launch a style of mimicry,' critiquing this adaptive style of copying. On the road the Syrian Army, Fatah, the Lebanese Army Forces, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (FPLP), and the UN all check her identity and her car. Once past these checkpoints, she points out that everything is close together here: that she travels through ten countries in five hours, pointing out the camps of the international UN soldiers. Drawing parallels with the nomads and the bus passengers, as well as her own epistolary and voice-over reflections, she points out that even the UN soldiers experience homesickness: 'being international is hard', the voice-over reflects, and she interviews soldiers who miss their families, who do not enjoy being in Lebanon. She finishes with the French soldiers, who have returned, not for the sake of the Tricolore this time, but for a much more complex issue which they do not entirely understand. As all these soldiers are replaced by colleagues when they go on leave, she says that they are just replacements of the status quo, and nothing is ever resolved. This is reiterated when in the last five minutes of the film, she focuses on Arafat and his emphasis on return to the homeland. She celebrates the power of his discourse and the celebrations of those who live and die for their homeland, but indirectly reveals the endlessness of the battle: out of Arafat's long speech she highlights the parallels he draws between their fight and that of Godfrey of Bouillon, who also fought for the Holy Land long before the Israeli state was established. The repetition of the word revolution is juxtaposed with the boredom experienced every day by the UN soldiers, the sectarian militias and the Palestinian fedayeen waiting to go to battle. Time consists of patience when you are Palestinian, she says, and meanwhile life goes on just 50 km north of here.

'Nothing is better than an evening in Beirut, but what do we talk about? The War.' Again, there is a hint of nostalgia for the old Beirut of her youth, and the realisation that this is now impossible. A discussion with friends shows her that there is a constant uncertainty: the situation is

not really a war but also not peace. And the voice-over returns with 'this situation grabs me by the throat'. On her trip back to Beirut she admits: 'if we continue calling this war an event, it is precisely because memory does not function anymore. Disaster follows disaster like the waves of the sea,' thus referring to the collective amnesia and the fragmentary nature of memory. She laments: 'if the young generations are separated and there is no dialogue, the country will have no past and no future'. She visits the painter Aref el Rayess, whose artwork combines the beauty of Beirut's landscapes with the machinery of modernity and war. This leads her to visit a Ferris wheel, which is empty but somehow still working, turning without passengers. This might signify a return to the buses going around the city, full of people with no memories but plenty of stories to tell. She says: 'Beirut turns, as it always has, but it is empty, and with her, time is blind and history is banal. But this is my country, in fire and blood.' The free association at the end of the film, between the painter and the Ferris wheel, as a reiteration of the busses and their passengers, shows Saab's willingness to commit memory to poetry and experiment with the voice and the look of the film-maker. She is speaking about and looking at Beirut through the eyes of an exile, who embodies the lived experience of the Lebanese as well as the distance of the foreigner. The complexity of her identity (Lebanese and transnational), of form (art and journalism), of style (unfolding the enfolded) and subject matter (children and ancient cultures) reflect and parallel the complex developments of war and sectarian conflict in Beirut.

Conclusion

Jocelyne Saab's early documentaries about Lebanon and Beirut are experimental in nature. With a strong voice and an attentive ear, listening to the poetry of the Beirutis, she shapes an image of a complex country. While she was influenced by European journalistic tactics, and reportage-style documentaries are at the centre of her output during this time, she also speaks directly to her fellow Lebanese and Arabs. Through the non-synchronicity of voice and image, the fragmentary nature of the content of the film, of the journeys she undertakes and of the structure of the films, she emphasises interrupted memory and the difficulty of reconciling past and present. The enfolded and unfolding structure of *Lebanon in Torment*, *Beirut Never Again* and *Letter from Beirut*, a preoccupation with children and young people in all three films, and a dominating self-reflexivity as a journalist, an artist and letter-writer, all indicate an ultimate preoccupation with the future. If Lebanese cinema is the only space in Lebanon

where the past is remembered and where reconciliation is starting to be considered, then Jocelyne Saab was a frontrunner of this tendency, as the mainstay of Lebanese cinema at large. Saab's earliest experimental documentaries not only deal with the past through reflections and discussions, they also deal with an enfolded historiography as they are unfolding their matryoshka doll structure, and reveal a preoccupation with the future of Lebanon's children and young people, mainly through self-awareness as a reporter, a young person and a returnee. It is not only a home-grown audience, then, with which she manages to communicate. A larger, transnational audience is able to identify with her and with the subjects in her film, as solidarity is elicited from a self-reflexive, compassionate and knowledgeable oeuvre.

Notes

1. Not to be confused with Palestinian Mai Masri's documentary *Suspended Dreams* (1992).
2. As a comparison: in the United Kingdom just under 30 per cent of the population is under twenty-five and 40 per cent is between twenty-five and fifty.
3. The third edition of this book, published by Post-Apollo Press in 2007, has a foreword written by Jalal Toufic, the philosopher whose work is used by Laura U. Marks when she theorises withdrawal and enfoldment.