

**Anziska, Seth**

**Revisiting the 1982 Lebanon War: History, Memory and the Making of Akram Zaatari's Letter to a Refusing Pilot**

Israelis, it is said, tend to “forget and suppress” the 1982 invasion of Lebanon.<sup>1</sup> There is often silence or selective remembrance about Lebanon, for some it is even an “exonerated war.”<sup>2</sup> Yet it is not forgotten in the cities of Beirut, Sidon and Tyre, or in the Palestinian refugee camps of Burj el-Barajne, Sabra and Ain al-Hilweh. Israel's presence in Lebanon altered daily life and shaped the political dynamics of a fractured country.

Beyond the history of the war itself, what happens when the Lebanese confront their memories of 1982? In revisiting this war, how might they force us to look anew at dominant narratives of the Zionist past and Israel's fraught place in the contemporary Middle East?

My presentation focuses on the recovery of one moment in the history of the 1982 War, an incident of refusal over the skies of southern Lebanon. It is pieced together from archives, interviews and memories between Jaffa and Beirut. This uncanny story has led to Akram Zaatari's acclaimed film installation, *Letter to a Refusing Pilot*, at the Lebanese Pavilion of the 2013 Venice Biennale.

Zaatari's *Letter* is intended for the mythological pilot revealed as Hagai Tamir, but it is for all of us to read. A portrait of life on the ground, the artist returns to the target and excavates the fabric of a quotidian Lebanese reality forgotten (or never known) in Israel. The documentation of a local site is weaved together with recollections of Zaatari's adolescence, a young boy taking his first photos, growing interested in music, recording everyday sounds in a time of war. Here is a genealogy of the artist's formation alongside a record of Israel's military aims. In recalling the history of the war through this medium, Zaatari enables us to see what once dwelled where destruction arrives and the memories that remain behind.

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<sup>1</sup> Eyal Zisser, “The 1982 “Peace for Galilee War: Looking Back in Anger—Between an Option of a War and a War of No Option,” in Mordechai Bar-On (ed.), *A Never-Ending Conflict: A Guide to Israeli Military History* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 208.

<sup>2</sup> Asher Kaufmann, “Forgetting the Lebanon War? On Silence, Denial, and the Selective Remembrance of the “First” Lebanon War, in Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter (eds.), *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).