

# The Atlas Group / Walid Raad

## The Atlas of Explosions

As part of his project *The Atlas Group* (1989–2004), the Lebanese-American artist Walid Raad collected documents related to the contemporary history of Lebanon. Raad presents the results of *The Atlas Group* as a collective work, attributing joint authorship to several fictitious characters. One of these “contributors” is Dr. Fadl Fakhouri, who among other things is presented as the author of the series *Already Been in a Lake of Fire: Notebook Volume 38* (1991/2003), relating to 145 car bomb attacks, of which there were a total of 3641 with 4386 victims during the civil war in Lebanon in the years 1975–1991.<sup>1</sup> Highly mobile, readily available and treacherously inconspicuous, car bombs are a deadly war machine symptomatic of current urban warfare, where the line between militias and civilians is itself tactically blurred.

In *Notebook Volume 38*, Dr. Fakhouri pastes cut-out reproductions of vehicles on white sheets. He presents the cars as serially produced – technically reproducible commodities, much like photography. Selecting the same automobiles which were used as car bombs, he refers to the destiny of individual items, and the singularity of their fateful end as well as the uniqueness of the human lives lost in each explosion, or which were changed by it forever. The specific nature of the historical events in *Notebook Volume 38* is not mediated through photography, but through handwritten captions in Arabic detailing the circumstances, which serve as a framing device to each cut-out. These cite the brand name and make of the car, the place, date and time of the explosion, the total number of casualties, amount of explosives used, and sometimes even the perimeter of the detonation. The tension between the general and the concrete, between typology and catastrophe, between technical image and handwriting, takes Fakhouri’s notebook beyond mere documentary, turning into the impersonal diary of a protracted conflict.

With some pages, there is more than one cut-out car: this in the case of doubt regarding the brand of the car, or its type or colour. This doubt is reflected also in the accompanying caption: *Peugeot 404 or 504. Dark green or light green*. Similar to other projects done under the auspices of *The Atlas Group*, *Notebook Volume 38* bears a double dating. The first refers to the (fictitious) date of Dr. Fakhouri having created the series. The second dating denotes the date of including the document in the archives of *The Atlas Group* (that is, the date of its actual creation). Raad’s project

as a whole, as well as specific instances, reveal errors in chronology. These can be read as symptoms of their fictitiousness: the creative moment of reconstruction which constitutes the process of writing history. These lacunae betray the shortcomings of historiography as a form of knowledge, while at the same time bringing to mind the experience of loss. The faulty chronology reflects the discontinuous, fractured, repetitive temporality of the trauma of war.

According to a statement by The Atlas Group, the composition of *Notebook Volume 38* is not intended to “generalise suffering”, but instead to depict car bombs as “both the cause and effect of continuing political, military, economic and criminal conflicts that have defined most aspects of life in Lebanon over the last 30 years.”<sup>2</sup> Cars perpetuate the peculiar qualities of oil, which (the likewise fictitious) Dr. Hamid Parsani, as quoted by Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani, describes as a lubricant, an undercurrent which renders the dynamism of global narratives, both political and ethical, whose complex plots intersect in the Middle East.<sup>3</sup>

Vojtěch Márc

<sup>1</sup> *Car bomb*, in Arabic سيارة مفخخة is also referred to in the Anglophone context as *vehicle-borne improvised explosive device*.

<sup>2</sup> FAKHOURI, FADL. “Already Been in a Lake of Fire: Notebook Volume 38.” *Grand Street*, No. 71, Danger (Spring, 2003), p. 221 (215–221).

<sup>3</sup> NEGARESTANI, Reza. *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*. Melbourne: re.press, 2008.

pp. 33–37: Notebook volume 38: Already been in a lake of fire, 1991/2003, pigmented archival inkjet prints, 30 x 42 cm, courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut and Hamburg

Summary: This notebook contains 145 cut-out photographs of cars. They correspond to the exact make, model, and colour of every car that was used as a car bomb between 1975 and 1991. Each of the following notebook pages includes a cutout photograph of a car that matches the make, model, and colour of a car that was used as a car bomb, as well as text written in Arabic that details the place, time, and date of the explosion, the number of casualties, the perimeter of destruction, the exploded car’s engine and axle numbers, and the weight and type of the explosives used.



APPENDIX:

كل هجرة من مورال ١٤٥  
سيارة العارضة في هذا  
الكتاب تمثل سيارة  
استعملت كسيارة ناسفة  
بين سنتي ١٩٧٥ و ١٩٩٠.

انطاش بن الصور وما  
مثله كتي : من الماركة  
الى اللون الى سنة الصنع.

This appendix contains 145  
black and white photographs of cars  
that appeared in the novel  
Al-Bihar. These are color of  
every car that was used as  
a car bomb in the 1970s and 1980s.

Plate 55

Nissan  
4WD  
White  
May 23, 1985  
14.00  
Beirut  
35 killed  
174 injured  
300 kg. of TNT  
Nissan  
800 meter perimeter  
75 cars burned



٥/٢٧/٨٥

سيارة بيك آب بيضاء من نوع نيسان ٧٧٠٠...  
تحتوي على ٣٥ كيلوغرام من مادة تي إن تي...  
وقد انفجرت في منطقة...  
سبباً في مقتل ٣٥ شخصاً وإصابة ١٧٤ شخصاً...  
والتدمير التام للسيارة...

Plate 56

Bmw  
2002  
Grey  
June 14, 1985  
19.85  
Beirut  
7 killed  
38 injured  
30 kg. of 200 kg. of TNT  
2.120mm shells or Hinoxon



سيارة بي إم دبليو ٢٠٠٢ رمادية...  
تحتوي على ٣٠ كيلوغرام من مادة تي إن تي...  
وقد انفجرت في منطقة...  
سبباً في مقتل ٧ أشخاص وإصابة ٣٨ شخصاً...  
والتدمير التام للسيارة...

Plate 57

Volvo  
820 or 830  
Blue  
June 19, 1985  
21.09  
Corniche of the sea, Tripoli  
79 killed  
150 injured  
150 kg. of TNT  
Hexogen



№ 57

سيارتان فولفو...  
تحتويان على مادة تي إن تي...  
وقد انفجرتا في منطقة...  
سبباً في مقتل ٧٩ شخصاً وإصابة ١٥٠ شخصاً...  
والتدمير التام للسيارتين...

Plate 58

Mercedes  
200  
Rope  
August 14, 1985  
10.30  
Beirut, Mar Takig  
13 killed  
109 injured  
150 kg. of TNT



№ 58

سيارة مرسيدس ٢٠٠...  
تحتوي على مادة تي إن تي...  
وقد انفجرت في منطقة...  
سبباً في مقتل ١٣ شخصاً وإصابة ١٠٩ شخصاً...  
والتدمير التام للسيارة...

Plate 59

Volvo  
820 or 830  
Blue  
June 19, 1985  
21.09  
Corniche of the sea, Tripoli  
79 killed  
150 injured  
150 kg. of TNT  
Hexogen



№ 59

سيارتان فولفو...  
تحتويان على مادة تي إن تي...  
وقد انفجرتا في منطقة...  
سبباً في مقتل ٧٩ شخصاً وإصابة ١٥٠ شخصاً...  
والتدمير التام للسيارتين...

Plate 59

Volvo  
820 or 830  
Blue  
June 19, 1985  
21.09  
Corniche of the sea, Tripoli  
79 killed  
150 injured  
150 kg. of TNT  
Hexogen



Plate 63  
Renault  
18  
Date  
September 20, 1985  
12:00  
White  
14 killed  
43 injured  
150 kg. of TNT

№ 63



٩٠٧٠٨٥  
- في يوم ١٠ من شهر ايلول  
- ارتطم في احد الشوارع  
- حيث كانت تسير في اتجاه  
- المنارة في الشايفه بطريق  
- امام الميناء في مدينه  
- حيفا في اسرائيل  
- وحدثت انفجار كبير  
- ادى الى مقتل ١٤ شخصا  
- واصابة ٤٣ شخص  
- من بين ذللك المارة  
- في تلك الفترة  
- بم ١٥٠ كلج TNT

№ 64

Plate 64  
Chevrolet  
White  
November 11, 1985  
Awake  
4 killed  
40 injured  
420 kg. of TNT



في يوم ١١ من شهر تشرين الثاني  
- ارتطم في احد الشوارع  
- في مدينه حيفا في اسرائيل  
- وحدثت انفجار كبير  
- ادى الى مقتل ٤ شخصا  
- واصابة ٤٠ شخص  
- من بين ذللك المارة  
- في تلك الفترة  
- بم ٤٢٠ كلج TNT

Plate 65  
Mercedes  
280 S  
Grey  
January 20, 1988  
11:21  
Renoit  
29 killed  
32 injured  
200 kg. of TNT  
Hexagonal  
5 m. x 1.5 m. crater

№ 65

١٧٠٠٨٦  
- وقع في الاديه مسيره جالوسيه  
- في مدينه حيفا في اسرائيل  
- في يوم ٢٠ من شهر كانون الثاني  
- وحدثت انفجار كبير  
- ادى الى مقتل ٢٩ شخصا  
- واصابة ٣٢ شخص  
- من بين ذللك المارة  
- في تلك الفترة  
- بم ٢٠٠ كلج TNT



١١٧٢٤٤١  
٢٠٠ - ٥٤٤  
٨٥٥ - ١١ ٥٠١٠١ - ٤٤٤  
رقم  
٢٠٠ - ٥٤٤  
٨٥٥ - ١١ ٥٠١٠١ - ٤٤٤

№ 66

Plate 66  
Honda  
Civic  
Blue  
February 23, 1988  
9:52  
Renoit  
4 killed  
16 injured  
20 kg. of TNT



في يوم ٢٣ من شهر شباط  
- ارتطم في احد الشوارع  
- في مدينه حيفا في اسرائيل  
- وحدثت انفجار كبير  
- ادى الى مقتل ٤ شخصا  
- واصابة ١٦ شخص  
- من بين ذللك المارة  
- في تلك الفترة  
- بم ٢٠ كلج TNT

Plate 67  
Volkswagen  
Type 3  
Blue  
February 25, 1986  
13:00  
Roof crushed  
1 killed  
2 injured  
55 kg. of TNT  
Hexogen

№ 67



رقم مبيد  
١ - ٧  
C. 50, A6  
خبر عن الحادثة في الصحف و...  
البريد (المقبرة) في بيروت  
Hexogen

Plate 68  
Volvo  
Bronze  
March 8, 1986  
13:00  
Roof  
3 killed  
53 injured  
125 kg. of TNT

№ 68



رقم مبيد، ١٤٥٦٦٦٥٦  
OE. P. 140007165  
رقم كركيا Volvo  
اسم الملاك: يوسف  
اسم الملاك: مظهر صويحا  
في الممتلكات التي  
يعود لليونيفرسيته في بيروت  
كيلو متر ٢٨٦ من بيروت  
السيارة رقم ١٥  
أى ٤٤٤ ٤٤٤  
وسمى المصانيف وادي  
فيات مع العالم بين فستيفال  
٤٠٠٠  
في ممتلكات الميناء المرسل الامم المتحدة  
من اسبانيا

Plate 69  
Renault  
S  
White  
March 25, 1986  
13:04  
Roof  
0 killed  
89 injured  
75 kg. of TNT  
Hexogen  
2.4 m. x 0.8 to 1.25 m. crater

№ 69



٥٥٠٠٠٠٠٠  
القائمة الممتلكات  
في بيروت  
القائمة الممتلكات  
في بيروت  
القائمة الممتلكات  
في بيروت

Plate 70  
BMW  
320  
White  
April 8, 1986  
13:04  
Rooflet  
11 killed  
90 injured  
79 kg. of TNT  
Hexogen

№ 70



رقم مبيد  
١ - ٧  
C. 50, A6  
خبر عن الحادثة في الصحف و...  
البريد (المقبرة) في بيروت  
Hexogen

Plate 70  
BMW  
320  
White  
April 8, 1986  
13:04  
Rooflet  
11 killed  
90 injured  
79 kg. of TNT  
Hexogen

Plate 70  
BMW  
320  
White  
April 8, 1986  
13:04  
Rooflet  
11 killed  
90 injured  
79 kg. of TNT  
Hexogen