

ARCHIVES OF
ABSENCE:
MEMORY AND
RESISTANCE
IN DO YOU
LOVE ME

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IN *DO YOU LOVE ME*
Nicolas Raffin**

Lana Daher's *Do You Love Me* opens with a line that pierces like a quiet lament: 'In Lebanon, contemporary history is not taught in school'. From this assertion, the film unfolds a delicate and ambitious project: not merely to recount events, but to inhabit the spaces between them, giving voice to the silences that haunt a nation's collective memory, using a variety of cultural sources and a multiplicity of voices. History here is neither linear nor contained; it is restless, shimmering, a palimpsest of lived experience, desire, and absence.

Daher, a multidisciplinary artist whose practice balances rigorous research and intuitive storytelling, devoted seven years to the project. She engaged with over twenty thousand materials – films, publications, songs, images, and audio interviews – synthesising them into a form that rejects chronology and embraces the fractured logic of memory. Disorientation, she suggests, is not a flaw but a method, reflecting the experience of inhabiting Lebanon's past, where nostalgia, loss, and the porous boundaries of identity coexist in tension.

The film organises itself thematically, weaving motifs of Israeli invasions, intimate relationships, day-to-day life, passion, resistance, and the enduring traces of war. Alongside mourning and rupture, the film is animated by a persistent vitality: gestures, voices, rhythms, dances, smiles. At the heart of this tapestry lies a dialogue with cinema: Heiny Srour's *Leila and the Wolves* (1984), recently rediscovered internationally, Maroun Baghdadi's seminal *Beirut oh Beirut* (1975) and *Little Wars* (1982), Jocelyne Saab's *Beyrouth, jamais plus* (1975), or Ziad Doueiri's *West Beyrouth* (1998) feature, amongst other recognisable works. Alongside contemporary songs, images, and interviews, these references create a layered conversation across generations, situating Daher's work within a broader genealogy of memory-making and cultural resistance.

The project extends beyond the screen. A meticulously curated website¹ presents an index of the materials underpinning the work, inviting audiences to navigate its labyrinthine pathways. It is a gesture of generosity, acknowledging that memory is collective, provisional, and mediated through the traces we preserve.

At this moment, *Do You Love Me* resonates with an urgent and universal relevance. It speaks to all of us living in times marked by cultural erasure and systematic attempts to distort or annihilate collective memory. In Lebanon, as elsewhere, history has been contested, silenced, and rewritten; Daher's work insists upon the survival of voices, experiences, and identities that official narratives would render invisible. The film functions simultaneously as a memorial, a site of remembrance, and an act of resistance – a testament to the enduring traces of human experience that persist even when history itself is under siege.

Do You Love Me is a work of audacity and rare sensitivity, an elegy and a testament, a luminous intersection of research, intuition, and artistry. It asks the most intimate of questions: how do we love a country whose story has been obscured, whose traumas persist in shadow? Lana Daher reminds us that cinema, guided by rigorous inquiry and poetic intuition, can become a vessel of memory, a mirror of emotion, and a space where history, resistance, and poetry converge, revealing the invisible threads that shape our world.