

**Images** - From the collection of Diab Alkarssifi. **Writer** - Joobin Bekhrad, founder and Editor of Reorient.

## A Lebanese Archive: The best of times, the worst of times..remembering Lebanon through photographs

I've been living so long with my pictures of you that I almost believe  
that the pictures are all I can feel ...

- The Cure, Pictures of You (1989)

They came from different worlds, Ania and Diab, who met each other one day in the squalid splendour of Camden Town, with its smell of rancid noodles and grass and whistling plastic birds by the canal. Diab was down and out, having split from his wife, and Ania had just begun an artist residency at the hostel where Diab was staying in the interim, as he wondered where life would take him next. With his broken English, and Ania's 'non-existent' Arabic, communicating through tongues was trying, but it didn't matter. Where words failed them, pictures filled the voids – lots of pictures; for Diab not only took pictures, but lived and breathed them. Alone in manic London, trying to find his way, it seemed the pictures of his cherished homeland were all he had. He hadn't left those gilded days of late in faraway Beirut and elsewhere, beneath rubble and ash and the crags of memory; you could see them in his eyes and the lines on his brow, feel them in the breaths that looked, in a way, like the fog of the Corniche when condensed in the cold autumn air. And of course, one could see them, if they wanted, in boxes and bags brimming with those photographs, faded, scratched, and weathered, each telling tales of the thitherto untold and unseen; tales that, with the vision of the young girl from faraway communist Poland, would be told once again. Someone once said that pictures make ghosts of people; better to open the trove and let the spirits fly again, then.

Ania's book of photographs from the archives of Diab Al Karssifi, simply titled *A Lebanese Archive*, is a thick, warming volume of people, war, dreams and those golden years when nothing could touch one. Co-Published by Book Works and Arab Image Foundation



'Ania's encounter with Diab is at once intense and ambitious as it takes place across all of those territories (in the sense it takes place across different cultures and times and practices). It is an evocative encounter, so inspiring and so enriching to her. With his photographs in mind she writes her own.'

– Akram Zataari

Clockwise:  
The Caracalla family wedding with Ahmad Caracalla, Abd Al-Karim Salah, Abu Saeed Solh, Abu Fakhr Shalha, Mustafa Caracalla, Ahmad's uncle, Mohammad Caracalla, Walid Solh, and Ali Holhal, now a singer in Lebanon (photograph by Diab Alkarsifi)

Beirut, 1960s (photographer unknown; from the Baalbek Family Archives and the Baalbek Photo Print Studio; courtesy Hikmat Awada; from the collection of Diab Alkarsifi)

An unknown woman in the 50s (photographer unknown; from the Baalbek Family Archives and the collection of Diab Alkarsifi; courtesy Hikmat Awada and the Baalbek Photo Print Studio)

