

# EVOLUTION OF SEXUAL TABOOS IN LEBANESE POST WAR

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by

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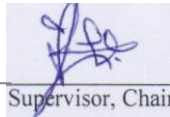
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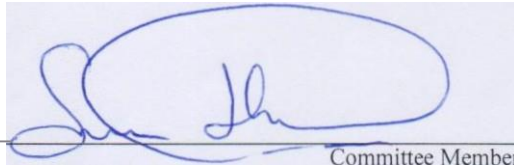
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### **Abstract**

Using Gender Framing and Queer theories, an inductive and qualitative research method; This study looks into the evolution of sexual contents in Lebanese cinema especially in the post-war era, tackling the causes behind this shift resulting in screening of liberalistic rather than conservative contents. It Focuses on the history of Lebanese cinema and how the thematic representations changed in time depending on historical, political and economic factors. Focus was on the themes treated in films and on the occurrence of sexual scenes. Results showed that War by itself was a transitional phase in the Lebanese cinema, yet other social movements calling for freedom and openness played role in accelerating this shift.

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

Film is a composition of pieces of the culture it represents; a cultural index expressing not only people's daily experiences but also modulating them; it shows and thus teaches us how to feel, behave, desire and dream. The relationship between cinema and culture is not as simple as it seems; movies influence mass culture by providing its subjects with a life -modell that infiltrate their conscious as well as their unconscious. Films are an essential product of the culture reflecting concerns, beliefs, traditions, attitudes and trends. They serve as archives of the periods in which they were produced says Lule (2012).

Cinema is a -mirror of society playing the role of a storyteller, reproducing stories from different perspectives (the dominant order, the subjectivity of the filmmaker, the reception of the spectator, etc.). It affects and shapes mass culture's perceptions of social reality. Due to this outstanding capacity, cinema and since its early beginnings in the 1895's was directly controlled by ethical and religious codes dictating the so-called -Do's and -Don'ts in filmmaking. This in itself says a lot about the freedom of expression when it comes to screening in movies of certain topics considered by society as a Taboo.



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According to Sociology index; Taboo is a social, religious or cultural prohibition which can change through time, it is forbidden as it is too sacred or too dangerous for ordinary people to accept and once broken it triggers punishment either by law or by committees.

Society is in an ongoing cycle of change, intersected by trends and cultural norms that are at many times liable to transformation. Every era has its shares of taboos, whether they are visual, cultural, political and/or sexual. Note, for example, the way in which the portrayal of communist or socialist themes was prohibited in American films in the post-World War 2 era due to the cold war conflict between capitalism and communism Whereas, Pro-Russian films were encouraged to be produced during WWII when Russia was allied with the West.

Nevertheless, time has told us that taboos are being shaped and changed bit by bit, with progression of thought and freedom of expression. And although the representation of sexual acts are taboos in some countries but not in others (S. Heller, & V. Vienne (2012), the dissolving of sexual taboos in media and film is growing in a fast pace. Thus, film history cannot be understood in a general term; it needs to be historically contextualized.

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When it comes to freedom of expression and representation of taboos, Lebanese films are definitely overdue. The –sexual revolution‖ that is taking place recently in the Lebanese cinema already aroused in the late 1960’s in the US when the Hays code was replaced by the official ratings system and the West witnessed radical socio-political changes such as the Hippie movement, May 68, the feminist intervention as well as the Civil Rights uprising. In this global atmosphere, filmmakers felt free to include themes like violence, nudity, profanity, sexuality, sexual freedom, free love, feminism, gays, bohemian lifestyles, pornography, sex acts; all those scenes were easily displayed and screened to the public since that time which was not the case in the Lebanese cinema due to moral and other restrictions.

Today, The Lebanese film industry is booming or rather still in its early blooming phases. The talent is there, the resources are there, and the audience is certainly there. However, in a country like Lebanon, filmmakers still face limitations when it comes to expressing themselves in their movies liberally. This has a lot to do with the rock solid of cultural norms that govern the cinematic production activity, and almost all other aspects of the Lebanese society. –

In the Middle East, sexuality is a taboo‖, states Dr. Ketty Sarouphim, Associate Professor of Psychology and Education at the Department of Social Sciences at LAU (Anon 2012).

Against this situation, some would believe that these norms are being chiseled into a smoother texture allowing more and more freedom in media especially in the Post-War era, while others would believe that things would never

be as easy as it is in the Western worlds, or in Europe.

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The evolution in representation of sexual taboos in the Lebanese cinema industry since the early 2000's came as a result of cumulative aspects which will be dissected in this study.

Khoury (2005) assumes that Arab and Lebanese cinema affects and is affected by cultural events, continuities, interruptions and transformation. The allowance or restriction of usage of sexual contents either verbal or visual or stimulating in movies is still controversial.

Thus, this thesis presumes that Lebanese films are witnessing more liberalism regarding their sexual content. It examines how the Lebanese identity was translated in films throughout history and how the transitional phase which can be titled -post war cinematic sexual revolution|| caused a shift in the thematic and visual representations of sexual taboos in Lebanese cinema movies using a gender framing approach. This paper retains its uniqueness in that none of the written sources on the subject matter have dealt with the movies this paper deals with more in depth analysis but also in the way it approaches the stages of evolution of Lebanese cinema.

Using the Gender Framing and the Queer theories, this paper examines sexual content in Lebanese movies and assesses the extent to which this content breaks the traditional representations of sexual themes and how the shares of visual taboos have evolved through time focusing on the turning point in the Lebanese filmmaking industry. This paper specifically looks into the movies: -*West Beirut*,( 1998, by Ziad Doueiry) ||, -*In the Battlefields*, (2004, by Danielle Arbid),— *Bosta*, (2005, by Philip Aractangi)||,

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-*Caramel*, (2007, by Nadine Labaky)‖, -*Hotel Beirut*, (2011, by Danielle Arbid)‖, - *Where Do We Go Now*, ( 2011, by Nadine Labaky)‖, -*Tannoura Maxi*, (2012, by Joe Bou Eid), and last but not least—*Habbet Loulou* (2013, by Layal Rajha).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Media and especially Film is a highly consumptive business, whereby audiences consume what they see and base much of their lives' (social, cultural, political, and economical knowledge on what they see. The messages delivered through media products have high impact on audience's mind. Though; perception of these messages is everything (Dutt 2014).

Studies suggest that there are two types of audiences: First type is sorted by Haidar (2011); the active ones who interpret the themes as critical receptors based on their social, cultural, and individual experiences. Second, the -Passive or -Contemplators type of audiences which accept messages as they are.

The Lebanese film industry has been going through an expedited growth over the recent few years, with much potential for Lebanon to be the main exporter of film in its region. The perception and representation of gender and women in the Lebanese cinema has gone through much reflation and development and has reached high degrees of openness when considering the frequency of usage of scenes that were considered as taboos throughout history. One of the motives behind this -evolution might be audience's preferences as filmmakers produce what the public want because it will sell. The film genres must be readily consumed. It is here where stereotyping takes over and female representations fall victim to the mainstream. Dutt (2014) states that the

imbalance in gender representations are routed in film, however are evolving to break through the broad cultural expression and social values.

In the following part of this chapter; reviews of the main themes treated in Lebanese films throughout history will help shed the light on the evolution of sexual taboos in Lebanese films in the post war era.

## **A. Thematic Representations in Lebanese Films**

### **The War**

It can be said that the Lebanese civil war greatly influenced the film industry. Perhaps this is a way of helping the Lebanese audience come to peace with their dark past. Besides being a means of catharsis, it is a means of enlightenment for the newer generations; a means of teaching, so that the war never repeats itself. *–Mirath*” is one film that tackles the devastating events that ripped the country apart, and ended thousands of lives. Another is *West Beirut*, released in 1998, which portrays the lives of three adolescents amidst the civil war. The trend of war film genres is still ongoing according to Hadi Zakak, who explains that this is so because films now are delving deeper into the issue of war as to try and provide reason and explanation for the war, and why the country seems to be still at war in present time. The ongoing regional feuds and wars are constant reminders that the threat of sectarian war is still imminent, which drives people to understand the past to make sense of the present. It is also remarkable that younger generations who did not witness the events, can only see what happened through film and storytelling, as the history of the civil war is still not included in school curriculums since it is seen as –too sensitive (Khatib 2008).

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Hourani (2008) clarifies that, the war did affect the way film is presented, and also, how film is interpreted. The separation was not only culturally sectarian, but also in perception of history and the lens through which different Lebanese sects view film.

The war not only further divided the country in its aftermath, pointed Abi Assi (2014), but also slowed down the once booming Lebanese cinema. Back in the 60s and 70s, the Lebanese cinema was a regional pioneer, however, after the war this was not the case anymore. The industry struggled to proceed with poor financial investments and funding.

### **B. Breakage of Taboos in Lebanese cinema**

#### **Sexual Representations in Lebanese Cinema**

The main frame of this study is the analysis of breakage of taboos in Lebanese films. Sexual content in Lebanese films, as well as profanity, and nudity, were indeed as previously mentioned, affected by the war and its effects on cultural perception of such content (Haygood, 2007).

Early evidence of such content can be traced back to 1981 in Mona Hatoum's movie *-Measures of Distance* with -fragmented clips of audio recording, written correspondence, and intimate images in a way that accentuates the distance of exile (Westmoreland 2011). These fast-paced series of nude photos obscured by Arabic writings, and voiced over by a conversation between two women meant to depict the communication between mother and daughter during a time where phone lines were bad, and communication involved written messages. During the golden ages of Beirut, there was much liberal sensibilities, and movies did involve partial female nudity and hyper-sexualized plotlines. The war, in 1975, then brought complete chaos and sorrow.

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Thereafter, the war was the main genre of films produced, and up until today, reflections of the war still dominate in Lebanese cinema. Lebanon has witnessed great turmoil over its recent history, and can be easily depicted as a political rollercoaster, with sudden turning points marked by larger insecurities and economic burdens. This has affected the film making industry in its turn.

During the 1990s, post-civil war Lebanon witnessed extensive economic liberalization, privatization, and rapid NGO-ization at the expense of formerly powerful leftist student-worker's unions and syndicates. This era was marked by openness to Euro-American and Western cultural and economic intervention, that sat comfortably with the modernizing and reconstruction discourses promoting the image of a unique –modern Lebanon under late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (Mandour, 2013).

The result of this phase was an ease into a larger tolerability on sexuality and personal freedoms. Mandour, (2013) follows with actual historical facts to back up her analysis; –New secular civil movements started to emerge calling for sexual and personal liberties; relatively –sexually liberated bars and pubs started to open in central Beirut, especially those tolerating same-sex flirtations, which evolved to –gay bars and –gay beaches later on. In parallel, sexual policing over homosexuals and heterosexuals alike was increasingly deployed to soothe the growing social panic over morals, traditions, gender roles and –authentic masculinity in the country. The latest trend throughout the recent past years has generally been one of increased liberalism in the Lebanese movies regarding sexual content, and it seems that the wheel is turning slowly out of that theme, and it is being hurdled by censorship.

Ziad Doueiri's film *West Beirut* combines multiple issues including war, religion, and sex. The movie's main adolescent characters Tarek and Omar lusciously film an attractive



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woman in Omar's house, and venture into the city to discover a brothel. These scenes show how in-experienced these boys are, and how conflict and war seemed to vanish within the brothel they both visited. The film also pinpoints religious taboos through the Christian girl May whom both Tarek and Omar like.

Perhaps the shift into 2<sup>nd</sup> gear came with the film *Caramel*, released in 2007. *Caramel* tackled the real social -taboos and what the Lebanese women dealt with on a day-to-day basis. The filmmaker Nadine Labaky made use of the Westernization of the media taking place in Lebanon. The film was a -social commentary that deals with sex before marriage, the hymen reinstatement surgery, repressed sexuality, female duty vs. desire, and aging struggles claims Haidar (2011). Labaky's movie revolves around five women that deal with their struggles and real life problems while presenting a new face for Lebanese cinematic representations. The content of love and taboos is presented in a somewhat light and cynical approach. Layal is salon owner, and a Christian, who is involved in an affair with a married man. Nisrine is a Muslim woman who is about to get married to a man who is unaware that she is not a virgin. Rima struggles with her fondness of another woman, Jamal constantly fights the aging process, and Rose who is 65 years old, sacrifices love for family. All of what Labaky presented comes in a non-provocative manner to the Lebanese audience says Yara Bayoumy in her online study -*Lebanese movie Caramel Talks women. Not war*, the film also portrays sectarianism and its backgrounds through peaceful coexistence, to show what the situation is really like in Lebanon, and that people coexist in harmony despite their differences, combined with their common life's aims at discovering love and happiness.

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Another example of movies which broke the traditional representations of Love, ideal women and relationships was the Lebanese movie *-Help* (2009, Marc Abi Rashed). It talks about the tale of a teenager, Ali, who lives in a van in Lebanon. His life suddenly turns upside down when he meets Thuraya, a prostitute living with a gay man (*The Observers*, 2009).

Last but not least the movie *Beirut Hotel* which was stopped by the Censorship Bureau of the General Security in Lebanon because it involves sexual scenes and it was claimed that it would endanger Lebanon's security (Banned Beirut, 2011). It is the story of a married woman who falls in love with a man accused of spying, the movie includes sexual scenes and it tackles sensitive topics like cheating, prohibited love and relationship etc.

### **Screening Sex in Queer Cinema**

From the non-stop change in the way sex is being portrayed in cinema, many questions are being asked. The issues analyzed from these questions can be put into three categories. First, the intersection between sexually explicit art cinema and pornography (Smith, 2015). Then we will discuss how lesbian cinema has made its way into queer cinema and lastly, we will tackle the issue of how modern-day queer cinema is shifting towards normativity, marriage of couples from same sex and its more liberated representation of the image of a daily family lives.

### **Pornography and Art Cinema**

The line between pornography and sexually explicit art cinema has never been clear and setting clear borders is at the center of the discussion on this issue noting that the debate on this

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topic acts as a great marketing tool. To understand the engagement of these liberal films in the political moment these sexual scenes are essential one considers the relationship between contemporary sexual politics and sexually explicit imagery. Some people think that the amount of which pornography constitutes the storyline is overrated. Tanya Krzywinska (2006), contends that since the actual explicit imagery is significantly vague and therefore artful, the titillation becomes more complex than it is in hardcore films. She also argues that through the pompous edges of psychological practicality, these sexual acts and desires adds a new set of drama and enigma to the films.

Kelley Conway (2015), says that the difference between porn and art is not the amount of sexually explicit content but rather the intent and purpose. He questions: –How do the recent sexually explicit French films imagine sex? How is sex staged and shot? What roles does sex play in films’ narratives? Conway also highlights the fact that the style, story and stylistic qualities of a film are directly related to how their ability to generate an evocative discussion of filmed sex and politics.

Film critic James Quandt (2004), talks about what he calls the –New French Extremity which are movies that were mostly made in the late 1990’s and are considered to have the most sexually explicit scenes in modern European cinema. It could be said that these films in contrast with the normal sexually explicit films, use these scenes as a method to shock the audience instead of adding curiosity and room for investigation. Moreover it would appear that we cannot merrily dismiss explicit sex in films thinking of it as pornographic.

Nonetheless, Olivier (2014) explains that it was not easy for homosexuality to enter the film industry. Up until the 1960’s the evolution of a queer cinema was held back and compelled to stay underground due to the harsh censorship imposed by the Movie Picture Production Code or

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-Hays code. Getting around this code and displaying homosexuality meant very elusive and indirect clues from the filmmakers. Vito Russo (1976) speaks about how the image of a "sissy" man was the most common representation of homosexuality in early Hollywood. He also calls attention to fatal endings that characters that do not return to "gender normalcy" would meet in the movie ending, thus restoring gender norms. The surge of queer independent films witnessed in the 90's was later labeled "New Queer Cinema" by B. Ruby Rich, a well known film critic.

### **Lesbian Cinema**

The new queer cinema model does not fairly define lesbian desire. Maria Pramaggiore (1997) claims: "...it is important to acknowledge that lesbian cinema participates in New Queer Cinema and to recognize that contemporary lesbian filmmaking is not characterized with enough precision or specificity by such a term". Amy Taubin (1992) says that since sexual desire drives queer cinema and the desire is "exclusively male" women have become more marginalized in this genre than in heterosexual films as women are an attraction in heterosexual films.

Lesbian critics have always been divided into two parties when it comes to feminist film theory where some think that sexual difference is in fact just heterosexuality while the others insist that it refers to "gay male".

Lucille Cairns (2006) wonders to what extent the typical viewer of these lesbian films with masked quality will link them to lesbians in real life. She also believes that "Lesbian thrillers" might become a hopeful consumer option if their lesbian heroes appear identical to their orthodox straight girls. And if they weren't, it might push away the "boys"; and the boys are the ones who still control most characteristics of the film industry.

### **Domestication of Queer Cinema**

The transfer from individual gays to couples has been cross-examined and portrayed by queer films, specifically those of the late 90's. Todd W. Reeser (2008) explains how the neglect to recognize same sex partnerships did not help in the prevention of AIDs. He mentions a few films to assert his point that queer films indirectly introduce the notion of steady family style relationships between same sex couples although they might show otherwise. He adds: -these works are grappling with the new symbolic order in various ways, employing gay or queer adolescents as projections of gay adulthood back onto a younger generation and forward onto an imagined world in which coupledness will be of prime importance as much culturally as legally. To Reeser, domesticity is being taken so seriously by these films that to the viewer it might seem part of the ritual of -coming-out.

Darren Waldron (2009) states that many of the films he studied related to queer cinema were directed by Ducastel and Martineau, a well-known French directing duo. In most of the movies the heroes end up in a monogamous relationship as any straight couple would in other films, thus conforming to the old-fashioned morals and values of marriage and family.

### **Progression of Arab Queer Cinema**

Joseph Fahim (2017) talks about the obstacles queer films in the Arab world faced especially before the 1980's. Egyptian Cinema, which is the oldest in the area, led the approach to homosexuality but was confronted with lots of ridicule misrepresentation of gays. It became even

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harder with the –Saudi-sponsored Wahhabism which gave the progress a halt. He speaks of how the more liberal environment in Lebanon became a sanctuary for Arab filmmakers who wanted to tackle homosexuality in their films. Nonetheless some were persecuted like Samer Daboul with the film: *Out Loud* in 2001. He attributes this to the lack of religious authority as its neighboring countries which still consider homosexuality illegal. He finishes by adding that change is happening and criminalizing homosexuality on the basis of religion is only political, stating that he is a Muslim and that nothing in the Qur'an is against homosexuality.

This literature review focuses on the uniqueness of the paper as multiple studies have tackled the history of Lebanese cinema and how the representation of certain topics has changed through time. Some identified how the Women if presented was portrayed as passive and silent in Lebanese Films (Khatib 2006); other studies focused on the centrifugal role that Lebanese civil war played in post-war cinematic productions (Hourani 2008, Marks 2011); but none of the previous studies investigated the switching point(s) in the representation of sexual taboos in the Lebanese post war cinema. This proves the importance of a current approach which will evaluate the breakage of sexual taboos in the Lebanese cinema in the post-war era from a gender framing and queer approach.

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Framework

Media and its effects on people has always been a topic of discussion by researchers from inside and outside the media field. Researchers' opinions toward this topic were different to the extent of opposition sometimes. Arguments can be mainly classified into two main categories; The first category of researchers see media as an active form controlling people's minds and ideologies; viewers indirectly described as passive receiving graphics and stimulations and learning to accept them as the Truth. The second category suggests that it's about what people do with media and what they chose to view, read, accept or reject (ref). This section discusses two theories that will be guiding the operational phase of this study which are the Gender Framing and Queer Theories.

#### A. Gender framing

-The theory of *framing* has long been used in order to explain how communicative actors, such as news media and state elites, are able to convey a specific narrative to an audience (Scheufelel, 2007). Scheufelel explains that framing is constantly utilized in conveying facets of truths and events in order to promote an interpretation or implication in the minds of those perceiving it; based on a pre-judgment which is in turn based on the gender identity they have already built in the back of their heads. Gender framing is how the relationship between sexes is represented in media specifically in cinema. -

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The usefulness of the framing theory is, most importantly, that it points to the fact that telling a story and arranging a narrative, always involves choosing between what information should be included, and what should be left out (Scheufelel, 2007). The media therefore frames a reality in order to convey a message. Steans (2006) explains that –Indeed, this process is co-constitutive. Media frames help to establish dominant discourses just as they help create, and overlap with other frames. So, media frames are both influenced by, and help to influence hegemonic understandings of issues and actors.∥ This by itself says a lot about Gender Framing in Lebanese cinema.

The woman's role in the social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of life has greatly improved over the past half century, proclaims Dutt (2014) however the male dominance and patriarchal stereotyping is still dominant, especially in cinema. Film has a big influence on public opinion and perception of reality. It seems that the empowerment of women and their freedom is still taking shape in media and film, yet somehow still under a cloak of patriarchal dominance. The importance of the need for further evolution in gender framing is influencing social change. When the imbalance in representation is eliminated, perceptions on race, class, and gender, change as well.

The means of moving forward begins with understanding the problem at hand. Bruckmüller.S, Hegarty.P, And Abele.A, (2012) clarifies that the problem is that film nowadays still communicates –dominant and sexist ideologies through an active male gaze∥. This is done through scopophilia, and sexual pleasure. Women are displayed and brought in to be looked at. The image of a woman in such a manner becomes as an object of display, and loses all meaning. This is far from reality of course, as women of real life are working individuals who aspire and achieve, and are not always the curvy luscious types of models that are displayed on screen. The



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problem lies as well with implicit normativity and identity framing; that is certain roles of identities are attributed by imagery and longstanding stereotyping. For example, mentioning college professors will directly imply a male figure, while mentioning an elementary school teacher would imply a female figure. Examples go on such as -killer or -thief, which are directly presumed to be male, or -nurse and -prostitute, which are directly presumed to be female. The ideology behind this is based on recurrence and repetition as well – for in most cases that have been encountered, these characters were either mostly males or mostly females, hence the predilection to presume which is which. The same applies for groups and characteristics of social status. In a way, framing is an aid for communication that helps to visualize and predict characteristics of the person perceived.

In Lebanon, gender framing and patriarchy is firmly rooted. There is undoubtedly a predisposition of male dominance in the domestic system, and in cinematography as well. However, with the advent of globalization and westernization, the age-old social norm is losing grounds (Haidar 2011).

### **Queer Theory**

Queer is a term that references whatever is dissimilar from the normal. It represents whatever the majority considers legitimate and is thus dominant. It does not refer to a specific idea or action, although it is mostly used to signify gays, lesbians and other individuals with unorthodox sexuality and usually in an insulting manner or as a slur.

The Queer theory was first coined by -Teresa De Lauretis in a 1990 conference on gay and lesbian sexuality held in Santa Cruz. She explained later that the use of this term was to direct notice to three essential issues. First was the refusal of heterosexuality as a base for all sexual formations, the second is to acknowledge a gender that questions how lesbians and gays and

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other sexually different relations fall into the same study group and the third is the persistence on how sexual subjectivities is shaped in multiple ways.

This theory is endlessly evolving and being reinvented to keep up with new sexual tendencies and how people view and treat them.

It flourished in the 1990's and introduced a sweeping critique against the dominant and prevalent heterosexuality in most aspects of society, including politics and culture. This has helped and inspired Queer cinema by giving freedom and courage to filmmakers to freely express their thoughts. The advancement in Queer cinema also helped the theory evolve furthermore and spread by delivering the message to bigger audiences. By focusing on the tradition of deconstruction and feminism, The Queer theory has targeted the disorganization and uncertainty of social norms.

It mainly focuses on presenting the -male, female|| concept as just a social construct. People advocating it are pushing towards a more open ideology that is based on the fact that every person decides his gender and is not constricted to the binary concept which indicates that a person is either male or female.

Alexander Doty explained and asserted what Robin Wood said 20 years before that queerness is more in the perceiver's reception and production of the films than in the texts. Benchoff and Griffin claim that there are multiple factors that make a film queer. The first is if a film includes characters that can be considered as queer. The second is if a film catches the attention of viewers that are gay, lesbians or queer. Another factor is if the film is written, directed, produced or stars queer individuals, in addition to a few more factors.

According to the Queer theory, there cannot be perspective without viewers, and without viewers we lose interpretation. Thus, the whole concept of queer is related directly to the viewer and his

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careful analysis of a film since queer is related directly to what the viewer considers normal and acceptable. Society and religion, therefore, are the base of how queer criticism is applied and how much is acceptable to show in films and media. The more the society is becoming open to different sexualities the more it becomes –OK to include gays and lesbians as characters in films clarifies Bendel (2013).

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this study is to examine sexual content and its modes of formal representation in Lebanese films. It assesses the extent to which this content breaks the traditional representation of sexual themes and the turning point(s) that has marked the historical changes in the visual taboos within the Lebanese filmmaking industry. This chapter elaborates on the research approach, the samples picked and justification of such choices in addition to the instruments and procedures.

#### **A. Research Approach**

The object of this study is to look at the magnitude of sexuality in post-war Lebanese cinema compared to films of sexual nature from the past. In order to do so, the study will be based on a qualitative and a social approach which is content analysis. A comparative study of content and themes in modern Lebanese films dealing with sexuality will serve this purpose.

## B. Sampling

West Beirut: 1998 by Ziad Doueiry, narrating the story of 1975 war which transformed Beirut into a war-zone all of Sudden and turned the life of Lebanese Citizens.

upside down

In the Battlefield: A movie by Danielle Arbid released in 2004. It is about friendships, relationships during war time.

Bosta: This movie by Philip Aractangi and screened in 2005, like no other, it indirectly says the story of the war and the wounds it caused in the hearts, lives, bodies, memories of the Lebanese citizens but also shows remedies such as art and openness to new cultures which helps us get out of this -traumatic -circle.

Caramel: A contemporary film by Nadine Labaky that sheds the light on the social dilemmas Lebanese women face in their everyday life; it was shown on screens in 2007.

Hotel Beirut: Narrating the story of betrayal and illegal love affairs, a movie by Danielle Arbid released in 2011 but was banned for both political reasons and because of the excessive usage of -Eroticll scenes.

Where Do We Go Now: A pure Lebanese production telling the story of the post-war division and tensions Lebanese were facing as a result of the hatred. It was produced by Nadine Labaky in 2011

Tannoura Maxi: Produced by Joe Bou Eid, in 2012, This movie is a controversial one as it was banned for one week because it contains Sexual Scenes the church considered as offensive; it's a story of an illegal love affair between a priest and a young lady.'

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Habbet Loulou: The story of Lebanese Women working as prostitutes but each of them has her own reason. This movie was released in 2013 and produced by Viny Roumi and directed by Layal Rajha.

These films produced in the late 90's till present explores sexuality in different ways and attempt to break sexual taboos. Thus, a close analysis of their content and form is essential especially that they were considered as -controversial|| movies and some of them were even banned because of their -inappropriate|| or -Inadequate|| content. In order to assess the reason behind this shift, a study of the thematic representations in movies must be conducted.

### **C. Instrumentation and Procedures**

The sample to study refers to the movies produced in the Post-War era mainly between 1998 and 2015.

The discourse analysis will look into the amount of sexual content presented in the selected films, the relevance of the sexual content to the storyline, and the way in which the sexual content is represented and conceived.

This is important as it gives an in-depth analysis of modern Lebanese film content and form, its relation to historical events which helped shaping those cinematic artifacts and how the representations of sexual taboos have changed through time; in other words, the switch in the representation of sexuality in modern cinema and in gender framing.

To depict sexual scenes in this study, focus will be on coding frames including:

1. Words.

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2. Looks in the eyes.
3. Indirect sexual actions.
4. Direct sexual actions.

In addition, the relationship between codes will be studied by examining:

- ✓ The extent of sexual content presented in the films,
- ✓ The relevance of the sexual content to the storyline,
- ✓ The range of sexual content included in the films.

To Frame Thematic and Sexual Representations in Movies, Movies will be approached following a detailed guideline. (Appendix A).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, we will de-code the films mentioned earlier on. We will be discussing the frequency of usage of sexual scenes and sex-related themes in comparison to the cinematic products based on war or post war themes. We will be defining either filmmakers used direct or indirect sexual scenes and footages and what might be the purpose(s) behind this practice. We will also tackle the aspects (political, social, economic.etc...) which lead to this openness when it comes to the choice of words, images and themes in post war movies. We have watched these movies and used a detailed coding sheet for each to break down the scenes in the films which relate to any topic of representation.

#### **5.1 “West Beirut” (1998) by Ziad Doueiri:**

The first film is -West Beirut by Ziad Doueiri which featured actors such as Rami Doueiri and Carmen Lebbos. It was initially released on October 30, 1998 in Norway. It is full of sexual contents and direct political references.

As mentioned earlier in the methodology part, sexual scenes will be coded for each movie; after an in-depth observation of sexual content presented in West Beirut; we notice:



### 5.1.1 Usage of Sexual Words and Metaphors

At first, the frequent usage of sexual words in this movie is obvious. We have noted down approximately 28 scenes containing sexual verbs, indirect sexual metaphors and flirting words.

Examples such as:

*“What a piece of lamb” (21:06)*, *“this is good stuff” (21:26)* and *“you are drilling a hole in my back” (21:42)*. *“Holy, Moly, Macaroni” (21:42)*, *“You are about to take off” (21:44)*, *“I love thighs” (22:18)*. *“I want to land in this airport” (22:23)*, *“what a valley” (22:34)* and *“Billiard balls” (22:39)*. *“she gets undressed” (23:55)*, *“she takes off her underwear” (24:33)*, *“she brings her lips close to you and bites your lips” (24:43)* and *“she licks your neck” (24:59)*. *“Taste it! Taste it from my hands” (28:21)*, *“Horny guy” (1:13:33)*, and *“whorehouse” (1:15:47)*. Additionally, terms such as *“with nothing, the place gets you horny” (1:16:16)*, *“turn up my candles” (1:17:10)*, and *“the Bra” (1:20:50)* were used. *“May I want the bra” (1:20:51)*, *“show me the stars you stallion” (1:17:10)*, and *“having sex too” (1:20:53)* were also used. Finally, we note *“you pervert” (1:21:41)*, *“the son of a bitch” (1:22:07)* and *“screwed people from different religion”*.

Approaching the purpose behind this usage, we can see that it was used sometimes to keep the simple identity of the movie, as its script speaks the unformal, daily Lebanese language.

Another sexual tactic frequently used by the director all along this movie to deliver sexual messages were voyeurism, male/female gaze.

### 5.1.2 Voyeurism, Male/ Female Gaze

The director used voyeurism which can be spotted in many scenes after examining the looks in the main characters' Tarek and Omar, two young boys that are experiencing new things in their lives and figuring out their sexual identity.

For instance, the scene when Tarek and Omar were peeking from behind the door at their uncle's wife and recording a video of her with close-ups of her body; all while commenting on her boobs and thighs. We can notice the sexual desire in their eyes. We can feel how they crave her body and want it even though she symbolizes the –prohibited yet appealing sex object as she is his uncle's wife and this is not only a social but also a religious taboo; As it is clearly stated in the ten commandments *“you must not be envious of your neighbors' goods. you shall not be envious of his house nor his wife, nor anything that belongs to your neighbor”*. Furthermore, this scene by itself has another interpretation especially that the director Ziad Doueiry is a male, so the way he frames the –Male Desire is tangible and close to reality; this scene shows how males since their adolescence begin to look at women as an –object of desire they fantasize about her, and seek her physical presence to satisfy their sexual needs.

Another occurrence is when Tarek watches from behind the door, their neighbor trying to seduce her husband and drive him to bed. This scene too shows that the woman is the one who seduces the man and makes him excited even though he might not be thinking about it. Women pushes men to –sin by performing provocative actions in front of them. This too is presented from a masculine point of view. Women are accused of being sinful, they are not only object of desire but they are the ones who –create the need of such a desire.

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Also, another voyeuristic scene was deducted; when Omar tried to steal a look while May was giving him her bra. Noting that this film takes place in a time when access to pornographic material wasn't easy at all. This scene shows that when it comes to sexual desires, men unintentionally follow their instinct and try to fulfill their desire at least visually.

We also examine the director's intent to steal the male audience's through Playing on the male gaze; by screening close-ups on women's bodies' whether the uncle's wife or the ladies dancing in the brothel. This continues to assert our theory that titillation has long been used to catch the audience's attention. In advertisement, it is used as means to attract the customer while in films it is used to keep the audience, especially the males, from phasing out or maybe getting bored.

### 5.1.3 Indirect Sexual Acts

We encounter frequent usage of scenes that show indirect yet appealing sexual acts.

For instance, when Tarek unbuckles his pants to show Omar his erection after peaking at the uncle's wife; this shows how men tend to sexualize women after visually- desiring her.

Another scene is when they both laid down on the bed and fantasized about her for a while. This scene too shows how man -Desire|| what they see so that they become controlled by their sexual desire, noting that this scene is presented from a masculine point of view.

An additional instance is the scene when Tarek's parents were sitting in the bedroom early in the film, with the mother discussing her worries while the husband holding her hands and cheering her up, the father had an optimistic view of the situation he asserted his position by saying: -remember *what they said in 58', 64', and 73'*? *They said civil war*" and -these *dogfights are between Syria and Israel; we are used to it*||. He continues by stating: -for 100 years we have been through drastic change||,|| *our country has been through other crises*|| and -you and three

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*million other people are being targeted*". He was trying to convince his wife that everything is going to be fine and declaring that all her worries are illogical. Then he puts into her mouth some strawberries to taste, thus scene implicates the passion for love he holds within himself, then he proceeds to kiss her neck and they kiss each other. This scene grasps sexual associations but it can't be interpreted only in that way as it also embraces a deeper meaning. It shows the difference in -mind-orientation between male and female by nature; the ability of a mother and wife to detect the -danger before it happens to her children or outbreaks her family. As we see the mother was fearing the unknown, she was controlled by her emotions since the day the bus incident happened (official start of the Lebanese civil war) she was driven by her concern, she was too worried about the possible separation in her family; since the earliest deterioration signs she was able to detect the menace that the country is facing.

The image of the protective mother and wife is presented not only in this scene but during the whole movie covered under the umbrella of -fear, -anxiety and -depression she was living; this seemed extremist and nothing but an illusion in the eyes of her husband and son especially in the scene where she was shouting loud on her husband asking him to leave the country now and when he refuses she took her son by hand in a violent way and went in the car, drove in a crazy speed and crashed her car. The dilemma this woman was living represents the concern of every Lebanese mother regarding the insecure situation the country was facing since 1975.

Another scene is when Tarek goes to the brothel and a woman wearing some satin pajamas welcomes him with a cigarette in hand and flashy red lipstick, portraying the cliché look of a prostitute. Satinette is very appealing to men due to its soft touch while a red lipstick is used by women in the purpose of attracting men into looking at their sexy lips. In addition to that, the usage of cigarette in film meant something sexual as Freud interpreted -cigarettes in movies

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never meant cigarettes|| by that he intended to highlight on the diverse and explicit meanings it might signify; the possibly- deduced purpose behind this is to show the sexual dominance of females over males in this case. She looks more sexually experienced compared to this young Man. Correspondingly; Doueiry is showing females as the object of seduction pushing him to commit sexual sins.

He is later seen dancing between two women while they belly dance with close-ups on the women. This scene by itself can be studied from two perspectives: The first is the Male Gaze theory, man seek women's physical attraction. And the second is from a female gaze point of view, most women want a man who is an expert when it comes to physical relationships; both sexes are looking for -physical pleasure||.

Last but not least, is a close-up scene of a woman singling a man with her finger to follow her. This scene too can be approached to the one when the neighbor called her husband to bed; Woman are the ones seeking men, and men is desired by women and this is what awakens the men's sexual desires and needs.

*Moving to a direct search of sexual scenes in the movie; such scenes were absent.*

### **5.1.4 Direct Sexual Scenes**

We do not find any direct sexual actions and it is free of any queer characters which is quite expected due to the era in which the film was released. Until very recently being gay was considered something disgraceful in the Arab and Lebanese community and is still treated as a crime in most of the Arab countries. Direct sexual acts were avoided in order not to be censored by the General Security's Censorship Bureau.

As mentioned earlier on, analysis of movies will be dissected into two main parts, study of sexual scenes and thematic study. Moving to the second part of this study of Doueiry's movie, we came up with this approach:

### **5.1.5 Thematic Study of "West Beirut"**

The events of this film took place in the Lebanese civil war that erupted in April 1975. It pictured how the people handled the war and shows their opinions and thoughts about it. Doueiri focuses on the widely common thought that depicts Lebanon as a victim and how the war was a fabricated game by the world super powers such as the United States, France and Israel.

One scene is at the beginning of the film when Tareq's mother says: -Plan for a long winter based on what the European reporter told her. This sentence by itself summarizes the causes behind the miserable fabricated war of 1975; it was planned in advance, studied and executed on purpose. winter is the hardest season of the year symbolizing difficulties, deaths, hatred. As if the European journalist the mother met in the court was telling her to protect herself and her family because hard times are on their way, winter is coming and only the brave will survive its storms.

Another scene that shows the cruelty of the war is the scene that shows how the Lebanese civil war started when a Bus loaded with civilians was attacked by masked gunman in the street. To focus on this idea, Doueiri uses three visual effects: the first is the background music, which makes the viewer, feel the -horrors. The second visual effect is the date that suddenly appears in the center of the screen as a method to inform the viewer of the importance of this date because it resembles the start of the war on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1975. In a way or another, Doueiry was remembering the Lebanese of one turning point in the Lebanese history, a date that no citizen

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should neglect or forget. The third method is the close up on the face of a woman who fell victim of the shooting and focusing on the blood that covered her face in order to focus on the –horror|| and –loss of any sense of humanity|| during that phase.

We also see Tariq and his father reminiscing about the good old days of Beirut saying –*Arabs once ruled everything between Spain and China*||, –*The Arabs turned their back on us; not only the Arabs, the whole world turned its back on us*” and –*Europeans were still living in the caves while Arabs were inventing medicine and physics...*” Doueiry spoke the language of –Nostalgial|| in the mouth of two main characters. The message addressed was that Lebanon was a growing country but this was ruined by the fabricated war. Lebanon is not blood and separation, it is not subdominant; Lebanon has always been the leader but it was abandoned even from neighboring countries.

Doueiri also shows how the Lebanese people turn to their leaders and wait for their declaration through media to anticipate and try to comfort themselves from what the future holds for them. And this is still an ongoing situation, citizens believe that the future of the country is still in the hand of its politicians rather than in their hands. He shows this in a scene where Tareq’s parents buy two newspapers, one French (L’Orient) and one Lebanese (Al-Nahar), while driving Tareq to school. It shows them trying to understand how serious the situation is perceived by politicians and leaders inside and outside Lebanon because the fate of the country is in the hand of other external countries. Doueiri likewise reflected on the imperialism and sectarianism that occurred in that era. He started by introducing the protagonist character –Tareq|| as a rebel and revolutionist against French colonization. We see Tareq running away while the school director made them sing the French anthem, only to grab an amplifier and sing with confidence the Lebanese anthem. An act which made all other students start singing along with him and

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interrupted the French anthem. Doueiri also showed the discussion that took place in class between Tareq and the instructor in order to reveal the colonization ideology. The teacher says: *-who are you mocking? France?!* and exclaims in a sarcastic manner: *-I am mocking the country that is educating me!*. She goes on to lecture Tareq about how France had helped Lebanon with phrases such as: *-let us not forget that France has created your country, gave you your borders, taught you peace!*, *-we created your civilization*” and *-French education is the only way to free you out of your primitive customs*”. Tareq is shown expressing his rebelliousness against France while his father convinces him to study the French literature shouting out: *-France? We are barely surviving in Lebanon! -and -to hell with Corneille!*.

The film is full of sectarianism references due to the fact that the whole Lebanese civil war was based on religion. We hear throughout the film people saying: *-Christians are not allowing anyone to pass*”, *“only Christians can pass*”, *“they are not letting Muslims pass*” and *“how can I make sure you are not Christian spies?!* Doueiri highlights how different people reacted to opposing religions during that era. The neighborhood baker -Hassan! tells Tareq: *-if anyone asks you about your religion, say you are Lebanese!*. -Oum Walid! is also presented as an anti-sectarianist and against the war. She is heard saying: *-what is this east and west shit... at Oum Walid's it is ONLY Beirut!!*, *-this war of yours stops right on my doorstep*” and *-does the bed have a religion?!* She expresses her anger about how a Christian customer refused using the services of the brothel after a Muslim customer used it. Whereas -Omar!, Tareq's friend, went crazy and wasn't able to accept -May! as a member of their group because she is a Christian. The tension between the two religions is shown when Omar keeps calling May using the term *-Virgin Mary!* and threatens her yelling: *-You, Virgin Mary, if I ever see his cross on you again I'll hang you on it myself!*. Omar also tells Tareq that his father is obliging him to read the Quran



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and has forbidden him from listening to Western music and watching movies because they are considered -Haram|. The kids were not allowed to pass from West Beirut to East Beirut showing how edgy the situation was.

We notice the tension between refugees from the south and locals from Beirut. Fighting and arguments arouse between characters to deliver his idea. Some of the things said are: *-refugees, you do not belong here|*, *-pack your shit and go back to the south|* and *-I'll drag your ass south myself|*. The woman from the south defends herself by saying: *-meet your maker and cleanse your mouth before you talk about the South|* and *-you and your son are lower than the lowest garbage of the South"*.

Doueiri finally demonstrated the different effects of the war on different generations. We notice the adults who were somehow used to conflict and war. They have already witnessed the first Arab-Israeli war and the Lebanese crisis of 1958. They felt fear and were in a dilemma whether to stay in Lebanon or leave. They knew and comprehended that this was a life-threatening situation and that it was mess. As for the teenagers and young men, it was an event that turned their life upside down. At first, they viewed it as fun since they did not have to go to school and they had all the time they wanted to hang out with friends and go for long rides. They discovered their sexual life, enjoyed 70's music and learned how to smoke and dance. But after a while they figured out what they were actually going through. They felt the danger and lost their political security. Tareq appears wanting to save his country and get out of this situation. He conveys to Oum Walid his solution to save Lebanon.

All in all, this film even though holds frequent sexual words, indirect sexual many filmmaking techniques with sexual meanings; It only turns around one main theme

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War. It reminds Lebanese people of the grief that comes with war; delinquency, separation. It showed how even neighbors who lived happily before, started to hate each other due to someone else's conflicts.

### **5.2 In the Battlefield by Danielle Arbid**

Danielle Arbid also directed *In the Battlefield*, a movie about a young girl during the Lebanese civil war. The film shows the struggle Lina faced living in a war zone and having a personal war at home. Her father being a compulsive gambler creates problems and wrecks his marriage to Therese. Arbid did not focus on the war in this movie and used it just as a background for the story in order to show the implications of the war on human's behavior and perception of the world. This can be compared to Doueiry's approach to war in his movie *West Beirut*.

Arbid expressed how she loves screening the human body inflicted with sexual actions. In an interview with *Bidoun*, Arbid said: *"I love to film sex. Really, I love filming bodies, the skin, and the movement of the skin"*. That is exactly what she does in this film. The film is not short on sexual scenes and foul language. However, it had no trouble entering the Lebanese and Arab cinema. Arbid considers that her movies are not made exclusively for the Arab community, and since her films are funded by French, German and Belgian companies, she feels free to film what she wants and how. She expresses: *"It's not provocative, it's just emotional"*.

The film contains various sexual scenes, some direct and some indirect.

#### **5.2.1 Usage of Direct Sexual Scenes "In the Battlefield"**

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Arbid, used direct sexual acts mostly with close up on characters' body postures or their face to show passion more frequently and freely. One scene shows Marwan playing with Siham's boobs while lying in the back seat of his car. Siham is also shown licking his finger. In another scene, Siham and Marwan are shown kissing intensely while smoking hash with Lina and some friends (46:10) and also later in the film while sitting in the car (1:04:50).

Steaming things up, Arbid included direct sexual actions by showing a bit of the sexual intercourse between the characters in the film. Siham and Marwan are screened having sex in the back seat of the car after Siham told Lina to get out of the car. Siham is also shown having sex with the neighbor during the night when suddenly Lina interrupts. The neighbor is shown fondling her from behind while she is pressed against the wall. Siham again tells Lina to go away while she continues her intimate relation (42:10).

Arbid keeps her audience hooked in throughout the film by using sexually appealing footages of both men and women using voyeurism, male and female gazes.

### 5.2.2 Voyeurism, Male/Female Gaze

#### Voyeurism

She included a couple of scenes representing voyeurism. In the beginning of the film, Lina and Siham are shown gawking at a man lying half naked in his bed. They stand silently watching him smoke his cigarette while listening to -Fayrouz|| singing on the TV (03:07). This scene represents the curiosity adolescent girls develop at this age to discover men's behaviors when alone.

In the scene where Siham and the neighbor were having sex, Lina is shown staring at the way he slowly undresses Siham and kisses her from behind. Lina stands still watching with a look of

shock and curiosity in her eyes. By not saying anything shows that she wanted to watch, she was curious to see and to understand but her joy is quickly terminated when Siham notices her lurking and sends her away (42:10).

### **Female Gaze**

Arbid tried to recapture the female audience's attention every now and then during the film by including scenes of that will cause them to gaze. Scenes such as the naked man in his bed at the beginning of the film or the neighbor standing on his balcony in broad daylight wearing nothing but his underwear (15:05). Such scenes show that women desire men who are good looking.

### **Male Gaze**

For the male audience, which is considerably more attracted and amused by such scenes, Arbid delivered. Siham is shown washing the stairway wearing a fairly flimsy dress with a bit of her underwear being revealed when Lina playfully pours water on her (03:50 – 4:50). Siham is also featured undressing and trying a pink dress while with Lina (21:40). Arbid also focused on Siham's Bra strap and legs while she is in the car with Marwan. Lina is shown playing with her hair in front of the neighbor trying to seduce him (1:06:30).

### **5.2.3 Usage of Indirect Sexual Scenes**

This movie held less frequent usage of indirect sexual scenes, yet clear and can be easily classified as sexual contents. First, a scene shows Lina sleeping and suddenly a sound of a woman reaching her orgasm, apparently, Lina's mother, is heard in the background. Lina naively asks her mother if everything is alright to which her mother replies: *-YES, go to sleep!*" (22:51). Choosing to include such scenes which call the imagination of the viewers is smart, watchers

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hear the voice of the woman while reaching her pleasure without visually seeing her, this by itself works on the viewers especially males' sexual emotions.

Also, Marwan's friend was shown making a move on the much younger Lina by kissing her on her neck and face while she sits still without objecting (35:51).

### 5.2.4 Thematic Study of "In the Battlefields"

Throughout the film, we hear a lot of offending words between the characters. The word slut is repeated three times and its synonyms: -bitch|| and -whore|| are used two times each. Marwan's friends say *-If I had seen them, I would have fucked them all||* meaning he would have killed them all (45:47). The word -fucking|| is echoed five times during the films and -the fuck|| twice. The phrase -damn assholes|| is also used (45:31). When Siham asks Lina about what the nearly naked neighbor on the balcony is doing, Lina answers: *-he is touching his body||* (15:44). In addition to a few angry slurs of *-son of a bitch||* and *-sister of a bitch||* by the people that Fouad owes money to as a result of his gambling addiction.

Although the war is not directly addressed in the film, the sounds of bombs and shots fires is clearly heard throughout the entire film. Its effect is represented by the scenes where the family is sitting or sleeping in the shelters. The chaos of war is clear: a scene of armed men who are clearly not police officers stop a car and start shouting at the driver (55:40). The segregation and hatred between Muslims and Christians is shown when Marwan's friends talk about what they would do if they encounter Muslims (45:40). When Siham kicks Lina out of the car so she can have sex with Marwan, Lina denies by asking: *-what if the fights start||* referring to the civil war fights (31:50).

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Arbid focused a lot on the way Yvonne, Lina's aunt, treats her maid Siham. This shows the social and economic division in the country. Yvonne considers Siham and treats her as a slave because she is poor and a Muslim. She also walks all over Fouad and his wife because she has more money which Fouad lacks. Arbid showed how Yvonne thinks she is above others because of her wealth and religion: a symptom many Lebanese have and still suffer.

A few social restrictions occur within the film. The most evident and focused on are Siham's sexual relationships and Fouad's gambling addiction. Siham is a young woman who is having a sexual relation with Marwan and the neighbor at the same time. She isn't married to either of them which makes it adultery in both cases. Fouad's addiction is ruining his life and distancing him from his family. His marriage is on the brink of ending because Therese, his wife, can't handle his actions anymore. As the bookies harass the family more and more, Fouad doesn't seem to be able to stop himself from gambling more. His addiction caused Yvonne to suspend her financial help to the family. Another social restriction present in the film is the smoking of Hash. Marwan and his friends light up hash cigarette and pass it around. The guys smoking is clearly underage and shouldn't be allowed to smoke normal tobacco; let alone Hash (46:00).

Many people have argued that the film is an autobiography of Arbid's Life. The fact that her father was also an addicted gambler while she was growing up and her Aunt playing the role of Yvonne has raised some flags. However, Arbid claimed otherwise, although some elements are autobiographical, and stressed that the movie is simply about a mistreated maid and her friend rather than a story about her own life. Arbid also stressed that her film was not a reaction or a reply to Ziad Doueiri's *-West Beirut*.

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The 2004 film has achieved seven awards and 3 nominations internationally. Arbid was highly praised for her work as a director and won the –New Director award at –Las Palmas Film Festival and –Palm Springs International Film Festival in addition to being nominated to a few more.

### **5.3 Bosta by Philip Aractangy**

Moving to a more blissful film with the Lebanese movie –Bosta. Bosta is a 2005 film written and directed by Lebanese Director Philippe Aractingi. It contained music by Martin Russell and Ali El Khatib, and starred many famous actors including Nadine Labaky, Rodney el Haddad and Sabah. The film is about a young Lebanese that returned to Lebanon after 15 years of exile and forms a dance group consisting of his old high school friends. The group takes the Lebanese traditional dance –Dabke and give it a modern twist. The traditionalists argue that this group is ruining the culture and history of Dabke by changing it while the group pleads that they are only giving it a contemporary and current vibe.

This film also contains scenes with sexual representations and parts depicting the post war tensions. However, unlike West Beirut and Hotel Beirut, the sexual representations are more of a love between the characters. It stressed on the tensions faced in the post-war era due to the religious fears in them.

#### **5.3.1 Usage of Sexual Words and Metaphors**

Recurrent usage of sexual phrases in the film was easy to depict, such as:

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*-flatties? Right that should be a real cock teaser* (11:26) , *-even my boobs dropped* (12:17).

We also find: *-considering that you are so prudish* (54:29) ; *-why, you don't like it this way?* (54:32) and *-I like to be alone, without the traffic* (54:35) being said in a sarcastic manner, those metaphors hold a deeper meaning, taking into consideration that It is a movie produced from a masculine perspective, such words first can be clearly understood as a reflection of how traditional Lebanese men perceive a liberated woman who is not chained by societal norms when it comes to the way she dresses-up , to her job etc...Another depicted example is taken from the discussion between Kamal and the reporter when together we hear her saying: *-yes, just like that* giving him consent and encouraging him. This also shows that a woman knows what she wants, she is aware of what satisfies her physical needs and expects from that man an emotional fulfillment.

Also, when the reporter asks Kamal while he unbuttoned her blouse *-pretty?* This is to show that some women tend to please visually the man and she is the one who pushes him to *-Sin* by revealing parts of her body.

### 5.3.2 Male/Female Gaze

#### Male Gaze

Like all films, Bosta contains scenes that attract the male and female audience with sexual attractions.

Mia, a lonely single lady, is shown sitting on her window after midnight gently applying cream on her skin. This is a typical form of titillation where the male viewer is attracted by the soft-touch of female body.

The male viewer attention is held throughout the film by close-ups on the female dancers' bellies while dancing, such as when Vola is dancing (1:22:36).



### **Female Gaze**

The female audience is not forgotten and is treated equally. They are given scenes that appeal to their sexual desires; The producer focuses on how Toufic looks and stares at Vola. Woman tends to be sexually, passionately desired by the man she loves. She'd like to feel how Selfish and possessive he is when it comes to winning her.

#### **5.3.3 Usage of Indirect Sexual Content**

In addition to the usage of sexual words and metaphors, the film contained a number of indirect sexual actions, we see Kamal giving the reporter a massage after noticing her rubbing her neck from pain. He had unbuttoned her blouse, after a minute or so. There is also a scene where Toufic is touching Vola's naked feet. In both scenes, it is always -Him|| who made the step but as a consequence either of her wearing something appealing on her body gestures looked like a - call|| for him.

#### **5.3.4 Usage of Direct Sexual Scenes**

The producer decided to use flashbacks to show the intimate relation between Kamal and Alia. By using red and black colors in the flashback, he focused on the passion in that relationship and instead of close-ups on the bodies he showed close-ups on their faces, thus representing the strong emotions between the characters, more like a -promise|| that this relationship holds real feelings. This is also clear in the words that appear repetitively during the film.

Another scene where there is intimate kissing and foreplay on the bed between Vola and Toufic, this scene shows that men have weakness towards women they once loved and desired deeply.

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Toufic instinctively followed his emotions and was willing to risk his marital relationship and fatherhood just to fulfill a short-lived- desire, but Vola, because she loved him, she refused to let him –sin. This scene is pro-feminist as it shows that women protect the men they love, they are loyal human beings, even Vola who looks liberated and sinful, held –real emotions in her heart when it came to the love of her life. Noting that this scene is directly phased out as a result of the restrictions set on Lebanese and Arab films by governmental organizations who still have the authority to cut what they deem immoral.

The film treats social problems facing our society in different manners and that is clearly shaped through the themes treated all along the movie; this is why we conducted an in depth analysis of the themes treated.

#### **5.3.5 Thematic Study of Bosta**

First, Aractangi touches a very sensitive subject when it comes to relationships. He chose two cases of forbidden love.

The first is the relation between Vola and Toufic where Toufic is a Muslim married man and Vola is a Christian single woman. This is a relationship which ended because they don't belong to the same religion; they decided to stop it rather than fighting the norms as in Lebanon inter-religious marriage is still controversial and not accepted socially and religiously or in other word it is –Tabooed. This relationship is an example of many other examples in our society which ended miserably due to the religious restrictions and this sometimes lead to misbehavior or making wrong life-decisions

The second case is the sexual relationship between two un-married people: Kamal and Alia. This is also a very common occurrence in Lebanon that is considered socially wrong. While he represents it as a story of love, passion and loyalty despite time and long distance. Aractangi

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chose to defy the norms and include this relation in his film, in order to show that physical relationships between lovers outside marriage even though it is judged as taboo can also hold real emotions which last forever.

Second, he tackled the theme of war, *Aractangi* shows it in four ways. The first and most important is the religious division between the Lebanese people. Even though the war is over and the country is reunited, people still appear to be separated. Most cities can be attributed to a certain sect such as Sidon or Nabatiyeh or Bcharre. The film shows how people have not yet moved forward. They have not forgotten the war and the hatred between each other.

Second is the phenomena of immigration that has swept the country. Every young person's dream is to immigrate to a better country. In this film, we see the characters torn between leaving the country to fulfil their dreams or stay here with their families and friends in their beloved country. Kamal Barakat is shown as the person who just came back from immigration because he believed that Lebanon had potential and holds a better future. Omar on the other hand came back because he doesn't feel he accomplished what his father set for him outside Lebanon and wants another chance. *Aractangi* tried to deliver a message that immigrating is not always better. He wants to show the viewers that Lebanon has potential for those who believe in it. He urged the viewers to give Lebanon a chance by forgetting the war and destruction and focusing on the future and rebuilding.

Finally, *Aractangi* talked about the fear of -Modernization|. The film's main discussion is the war between cultural invasion and cultural heritage. The new style Dabke that the characters perform and work on represents modernization and cultural invasion while the regular Dabke is the cultural heritage that is known to all Lebanese as the norm. We see the dilemma between the

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Kamal's group and opposing people about what Dabke is: The group's –modern Dabke symbolizes the need for something new while the old –traditional Dabke signifies tradition and the need to hold on to what is already known. In the end, Aractingi showed that change is not bad. Introducing something new might prove beneficial to what is already present and the dismissal of what is already used is not necessary in the presence of something new. Coexistence between the modern western world and its values on one side, and the traditional eastern world and its values can be merged into a better and more functional way of life. He also showed scenes of Nostalgia to the –good old days of Lebanon using metaphors such as: *–Politics in this country; they feed it to us in the bottle at birth* (1:07:23) and *–God blessed this country but its people ruined it* (1:22:18).

In conclusion, the film broke through social restrictions that confine our society, holding plenty of defiance to social norms and restrictions including sexually explicit scenes and phrases that push the Lebanese Censorship Bureau's buttons. It delivered a message to Lebanese viewers that the time to move on has come. The war is over and now is the time to rebuild and learn from the past and modernization is a tool to accomplish this while preserving the heritage.

### 5.4 “Caramel” (2007), by Nadine Labaky

Caramel is a Lebanese film, directed by Nadine Labaky and is her first feature-length movie that was first premiered in 2007 at the Cannes Film Festival. Caramel was distributed to over 40 countries hence becoming an internationally successful and exposed film.

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exposed film. Its title is inspired by the mixture used by Arab women as a traditional depilation method composed of sugar, water and lemon.

The story of the film mostly takes place in a beauty salon owned by Layal who is engaged in a relationship with a married man. The film features the lives of five Lebanese women who talk bluntly about men, sex, marriage and happiness defying the Lebanese and Arab norm which restricts women from expressing themselves freely especially when it comes to such topics considered as -Taboo. Their conversations nonetheless, are interspersed with touching and comical scenes of which some will be dissected in the following part.

### **5.4.1 Sexual Content in Sukkar Banat**

Unlike *Hotel Beirut*, there was no pure sexual content in the film. However, comparing it to the usage of sexual scenes in the previously analyzed movie *West Beirut*; we find out that unlike Doueiry's movie, Labaky's movie holds a rare usage of indirect sexual scenes. The clearest example is the scene where Yasmine's future husband touches her legs during a dinner with his family (12:27). The film includes sexual verbs such as the repetition of the word -Slut and the inclusion of sexual joke metaphor -of-couture.

The sexual messages in this movie were not conveyed through direct scenes or words, but rather Labaky chose to show them in a deepest and less-shocking way; the eyes of the characters.

#### **5.4.2 Male/Female Gaze and Voyeurism in Caramel**

As with all films, *Caramel* was enriched with scenes focusing on the gazes of the characters. The film included many male gaze scenes, being a more woman type film, the inclusion of these scenes aimed to prove for men how sensitive a woman is, and how much she suffers to stay beautiful in their eyes, how loyal a woman can be and how much she is willing to sacrifice to keep her beloved one safe and each of these criteria was conveyed through the story of a character. Unlike movies analyzed before, Nadine Labaky used the male gaze to show the humanitarian and emotional factors which makes the woman worthwhile in her relationship with others.

##### **Male Gaze**

A good example of a male gaze is the repetition of close ups on woman's red lips while eating hot -boiled sugar. The scene was repeated three times, (1:22) ;(1:28) and (58:53). It signifies the pain women endures to stay -beautiful in the eyes of her man. And men tend to like the woman who takes care of herself just to grab their attention. Other scenes include removing her pants, getting ready for a hair removal session implying that she is cleaning her body to please him (58:49), or the scene from outside of a woman's voice enduring pain from hair removal (1:34 – 1:41).

We also see the scene between Charles and Rose portraying an image of a caring woman (21:45) ;(20:26), who pays attention to every single detail related to her man She looks picky when shortening his pants to show that a woman cares about the man's appearance.

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Moreover, the scene focusing on the way the policeman was looking at Layla's figure when she was taking care of him (1:04:05-1:04:50), it shows that male like strong, hard to get woman; they are willing to endure pain just to catch her attention.

### **Voyeurism**

Labaky also used voyeurism in many scenes, the policeman was tracking Layal's steps while she was going out quickly to meet another man. In a scene, he was watching Layal on the phone and he was fantasizing a love dialogue (26:47 – 29:19). This shows his strong attraction towards her and his desire to get closer to her.

Bearing in mind that the film is produced and directed by a woman, it is predictable to witness scenes that include female gazes.

### **Female Gaze**

The film is meant to represent the desires of female protagonists and, therefore, to represent the desires of the female movie-viewer (Mulvey,1975). Furthermore, and according to Zoe Disre, who posits that a female cinematographer allows females to be portrayed as they really are and not the prurient demonstration that the male gaze set them out to be (Disre 2013). Some extracts portraying this f include: the scene when the policeman enters the women's beauty salon and the women in the salon were looking at him (1:02:31), and the scene when she was looking and checking his traits in the aim of figuring how to fix him up (1:03:07 – 1:03:47).

In addition to the sexual content included, Labaky tackled two main social issues that are still considered a taboo in our Lebanese society; this is something new in the Lebanese cinema as people still fear tackling this topic as its strictly tabooed in society and in religion.

### **5.4.3 Queer Representations in “Sukkar Banat”**

The concept of homosexuality was well exposed in this movie through Rima’s character, where it was obvious that Rima and her female client were attracted to each other by the way Rima was gently washing her client’s hair and the looks they were exchanging. This was demonstrated in four scenes (23:20),(24:02), (33:26), (56:24). Those two ladies, because sexual orientation is still considered taboo in our society, were at first clearly still stuck in the closet and unable to come forth about their feelings fearing the rejection of their families and surrounding. In one scene, Rima is shown getting a makeover in order to look more –feminine for Nisrine’s wedding reception. But as the movie goes in, we notice that this fear faded through as we see that Rima influenced her client and taught her to free herself and to do whatever she feels like doing without caring about the judgement of the society; she cut her hair and seemed happy walking down the street for the first time confidently like never before.

In Sukkar Banat, Homosexuality was treated as something familiar, existing between us but yet it is still secret because homosexual fears societal rejections. A Homosexual character was presented as a person like others with shy and tender emotions but holding other vision when it comes to interests, for example Rima appeared rather wearing a jean and keeping her messy hair rather than making over her look as she founds the idea silly.

### **5.4.5 “Breakage of Relationship norms” in Sukkar Banat**

Other social restrictions that were portrayed through the women’s storyline: relationship with a married man that represents a forbidden love affair, sex outside marriage, sex before marriage, losing virginity before marriage.



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An example is the scene where Layal is trying to book a hotel room without an ID. She knows that people won't accept the fact that she is an unmarried woman having a sexual relationship and is afraid of the reaction of family and friends. All this shows the struggle faced on this level. Another scene is when Nisrine with the help of her friends was searching for a Doctor to do a hymen-reconstruction surgery in order to save herself from familial and societal judgments and to hide the Truth showing that she had experienced a -previous love affair before getting married and that she lost her virginity. Even though this scene was represented in a comic way, its message is a deep one; Females in Arab countries are judged based upon past relationships. This message is purely-feminist, raising the voice of Arab women who still fight to show their worth, aiming to prove that they are worth living freely without being condemned, they are much more than their bodies, they are thinking minds, productive human beings, and must have the free-will to live their lives the way they want to as they are equally responsible like men of the consequences of their behaviors and choices.

The film addresses various subjects such as forbidden love, binding traditions, repressed sexuality, the struggle to accept the natural process of age and duty versus desire. The women face social issues that are typical in today's Lebanon but that are still perceived as taboo.

#### 5.4.5 Thematic Representations in “Caramel”

One character, Nisrine, played by Yasmine is a Muslim woman about to get married, but her future husband is unaware that she is not virgin. Rima’s character, played by Joanna is a tomboy who struggles with her feelings for an attractive female client, while Jamale casted as Gisele goes out of her way to prove she is still young. Rose, on the other hand played by Sihame, a 65-year-old seamstress, sacrifices love to care for her elderly sister.

The uniqueness of this film does not just lie in the social issues raised but in the fact that they were treated from a women’s perspective. Moreover, Labaky’s film was the first Lebanese Arabic film to include such scenes, language usage, etc... Films with this notion either were imported from the west and dubbed or produced in different Arabic dialects. Also, to be noted that even though many attempts were produced conveying similar social messages, this was the first film to reach so many people worldwide.

Although the film is not intentionally political, it portrays the women, who are from a mixture of sects and backgrounds, as living in harmony — a message one might see as trying to address the sensitive issue of sectarianism in Lebanon. In another scene, the tensions between Christians and Muslims was also exposed where the policeman had a fight with one of the characters named -Bassamll.

Labaky also reinforced the idea of Lebanese women’s repression and social restrictions that both Christian and Muslim women had to deal with on a daily basis. She focuses on portraying how -The Lebanese woman always feels as if she is stealing her moments of happiness; she has to use all kinds of tricks all the time to live the way she wants; and when she succeeds , she feels guilty (Review of -Caramell 2008). Her aim is to emphasize on how Lebanese women tend to live

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contradicting lives, and are in constant struggle between what they desire and what they are allowed or expected to have

According to the review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, -the film reported an average rating of 7.1/10 with 78 counted reviews. The critics considered the film -... both an astute cultural study, and a charming comedic drama from a talented newcomer (Movies | Movie Trailers | Reviews - Rotten Tomatoes 2008). The film, being locally produced, appealed to many women on several levels. It was a tool to safely voice their opinions about social norms in an indirect way, avoiding the shames of being accused of speaking or acting against social norms.

### 5.5 “Hotel Beirut”, (2011) by Danielle Arbid

The second film under-study is -Hotel Beirut. It is the third long feature film released in 2011 by Danielle Arbid, a Lebanese director. It premiered in the 2011 Locarno International Film Festival. The film included actors such as Darine Hamze, Fadi Abi Samra and Charles Berling. The film was banned in Lebanon. Some said because it holds distressing political messages while others say it is because of the despicable sex scenes it contains which jumble the Lebanese figure.

The film talks about a Lebanese woman who dances in a nightclub. She meets a French man who was later accused of being a spy. The film takes place in the time after the assassination of former prime minister Rafic Al Hariri. It contained a lot of sexual scenes which many critics stated as unnecessary and used for the sole purpose of getting the audience’s attention.

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At first, the two main characters in this movie execute socially-critical and unacceptable jobs. Zoha is a dancer, this occupation by itself was not well appreciated by the Lebanese society at that time; dancing is not considered as an art of expressing oneself as much as it is perceived as act of seduction; in other words, women dance to show their body and curves, which awakens man needs. Mathieu is a spy and this means a traitor who lives in a country and works for the benefits of another country and this by itself is not only critical but crucial. Since as stated in the article 14 of the Lebanese constitution law: "The citizen's place of residence is inviolable. No one may enter it except in the circumstances and manners prescribed by Law."

Secondly, the love affair between a married woman and spy constitutes a controversial topic to be discussed as any love affair outside the marriage institution is a taboo and such kind of relationships is considered as off-limits by society.

Now moving from a general analysis of this movie to an in-depth study;

### 5.5.1 Usage of Sexual Words and Metaphors

The film, contrarily to *West Beirut*, did not contain a lot of vulgar language. Only a few phrases were noted down, the most prominent are: *-ton corps est beau* which translates to -your body is beautiful, *-ton visage est beau* which translates to -your face is beautiful. In addition to the repetitive cussing every now and then to show the anger of the characters.

This film contains a lot of unspoken words. The love affairs and espionage create an atmosphere of ambiguity and silence. But the emotions are expressed through looks in the eyes of these characters.

### **5.5.2 Voyeurism, Male/ Female Gaze**

Danielle Arbid focused on the looks in characters eyes and gestures in her choice of scene representation.

#### **Male Gaze**

In the introductory scene of the film, Arbid presents the main character Zoha in the image of -La Femme Fatale or -the deadly woman. She shows her in a black dress holding a cigarette in her hand while playing with her hair. She closes-up on her lips and gestures while she puts on her eye catching make up. This is to reflect the character and personality of Zoha. She wants to show her as an independent, seductive and powerful woman who is able to melt the heart of the cruelest man. This scene is directed by a female yet is presented from a masculine point of view, although Zoha is portrayed as a totally attractive woman, she is seeking man's affection. In another scene, we see Zoha singing in the club where she works. Arbid screens her from behind to focus on her feminine and alluring voice which captivates the audience. She concentrates on the way she holds the microphone and on the red nail polish on her fingers. This scene full of appealing representation of women, holds a feminist message; Females are great lovers, controlled most of the times by their emotions. Arbid didn't disappoint the female audience as well, she used scenes speaking the desires women hold within themselves as they were produced by a female which speaks the same language, the one of emotions and passion.

#### **Female Representation**

At First, Mathieu is seen staring at Zoha while she performs. The look in his eyes expresses how much he likes her and is attracted to her sexually, this visually translates the way every woman

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wants to be attractive, sexy but most of all she needs to see in the eyes of the man that she is truly wanted. Also, lot of scenes show Mathieu's masculinity and virility through displaying his postures and gestures. Some of which is when he pulls Zoha to his bed and proceeds to have intercourse with her, other is the close-ups on Zoha's breasts while Mathieu touches and fondles them. On the other hand, another is when he is sitting in bed listening to Zoha speaking, while half-naked. A close-up on his fit upper-body. Arbid reasserts her defiant approach and style by screening Mathieu masturbating Zoha with close-ups on both emphasizing how much the latter is seduced and mesmerized by Mathieu. Those scenes are a pure representation of –feministic needs a woman keeps secret within herself fearing societal judgment especially in an Arab country like Lebanon which still holds the traditional point of view regarding women do and don't when it comes to relationships. Arbid as a rebel producer openly portrayed it in the eyes of the main female character while sparkling passion towards this relationship; She intended to show that similarly to men, women desire men, fantasize about them and search for a –strongll male figure who can satisfy their physical and emotional needs.

Unlike West Beirut which indirectly holds sexual contents, we have noticed occurrence of direct sexual scenes in Hotel Beirut.

### 5.5.3 Direct Sexual Scenes

Arbid did not hold back in this film. she added as many sexual scenes as possible. Many critics argued that Arbid had exaggerated the use of sexual graphics to an extent that it became annoying. Beirut.com's movie reviewer said: *–how about not presenting them in a despicable way but rather in an artistic way?||*

In regards to the pure sexual content in Hotel Beirut, there are over ten acts of kissing and around 5 sexual intercourses throughout the entire film. Some might argue that it is normal,

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while some might say that it is excessive not from a conservative point of view but since the movie does not require that much.

Hotel Beirut is considered liberated due to the way and frequency of usage of direct sexual scenes and to such –excessivell usage of erotic visuals.

### **5.5.4 Thematic Study of Hotel Beirut**

Arbid focused on the societal restrictions being broken by Zoha and Mathieu. The actions considered as degenerate and corrupt in both social and religious standards are presented as common. She shows how the community has progressed with the effect of Western media. We see couples divorcing; we see love affairs outside the constitution of marriage as is in the case of Zoha and Mathieu. We see them engaging in sexual acts while still unmarried which has long been a disgraceful act in Lebanese and Arab societies. This act has always been condemned and is still harshly punished for in many Arab countries.

In addition, we see Zoha performing in a nightclub, an act usually related to prostitution and –Ladies of the night!!

Although the film's setting doesn't occur in a time of war, the film contains a lot of post war tensions. It portrays the fears and anxiety that Lebanese felt after the of former Prime Minister Mr. Rafic Hariri's assassination and the fear of another civil war. We see a guy stopping Zoha and Mathieu in the car and shouting at them for no apparent reason. The mess and chaos is shown via footages from local media reporting news about a civilian being kidnapped. Another scene is Zoha and Mathieu listening to the news on the radio while in the taxi. Arbid dedicated a dialogue between the characters about the assassination to show how much people are worried and that this event is taking a major part of their daily life.

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Arbid also sheds light on the outside interventions that Lebanon has grown accustomed to. She displayed the French interventions on major decisions taken by the Lebanese government. To spice things up, Mathieu is thought to be spy for the French which complicates Zoha's affair even more.

This film was not highly rated and was criticized by many critics, but it still delivers its message clearly. It shows how the political conflicts in Lebanon affected people's life on a daily basis. Arbid broke the limits and restrictions set by the Censorship Committee in Lebanon which caused the film to be banned from screening in Lebanon.

### 5.6 “W Halla2 La Wen” by Nadine Labaky

In May 2012, *-Where Do We Go Now?* was released. It was directed by the famous Lebanese director Nadine Labaky featuring actors such as Julien Farhat, Yvonne Maalouf and Adel Karam. The movie takes place during the Lebanese civil war in a small secluded village where Christians and Muslims co-exist. The village is deprived of the news because the war left the village with no contact with the outside world except through two boys who venture a dangerous road to get supplies for the village.

#### 5.6.1 Usage of Sexual Words and Metaphors

The film contains no sexual scenes or intimate moments. However, it does include some sexual jokes and metaphors. One of the women says: *-he uses it only for watering* (38:05) implying



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that her husband, the mayor, only uses his penis to urinate. Another woman tells –Fatimall –*let Abo Ahmad change tastell* (38:25) meaning let him try another woman. After –Fatimall shrugs from hearing that, another woman jumps in saying: –*if you're scared about Abo Ahmad (cheating), tie it for himll* also referring to Abo Ahmad's penis (38:25). These words show the idea that women fear the idea of husband cheating on them.

The women are heard saying: –*you're dancers? That's why you have such nice figurell* to the prostitutes they brought (41:10). This joke is presented from a feminine point of view showing the –*superficialll* importance men give to the appearance and body-look of women.

–Yvonnell gets jealous that all the men are drooling over the prostitutes and says: –*the breast of the smallest woman in our village can breastfeed half of Ukraine*ll (43:19).

Analyzing the purpose behind this frequent usage of sexual jokes, in addition to entertaining the viewers; Labaky tended to show that the problem is not as –*deepll* as it seems, they are not opponents, they are all united when it comes to the wish of living peacefully and forgetting about the war.

She also delivered a sexual approach through male gaze but from a feminine perspective.

### **5.6.2 Male Gaze from a Feminine Perspective**

Labaky included a few scenes that support male gaze. She focused on the prostitutes for this mission. Close-ups on their feet and bodies while playing in the water were used for this purpose (47:30). Another scene is when the prostitutes dance wearing very revealing clothes and seduce the drugged men of the village (1:22:18 – 1:25:40).

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The usage of male gaze in this movie is to show the weakness men hold towards women, they can be easily tromped because they follow their instinctive desire.

As Nadine Labaky's movie *Halla2 la Wen* is not rich when it comes to sexual content; studying the themes treated was a must.

### **5.6.3 Thematic Representations in “Halla2 La Wen”**

The movie mostly tackles the sectarian divisions and problems between Christians and Muslims and how it affects the people's daily life and drives people away from each other. It shows how the love relation between a Muslim and a Christian was doomed because of this feud.

Nadine Labaky opened up with a scene showing the very dangerous route that has to be crossed to get in and out of the village and then switched to a scene of the village women all dressed in black to resemble grief over the martyrs who had passed away. The women were shown walking all together towards the village cemetery. They finally separate: Christian women go to the Christian cemetery and Muslim women go to the Muslim cemetery. This scene is strong as it conveys an awareness message, to Lebanese citizens from all religions. The usage of black clothes accompanied by the sound of the foot stepping and the hands on the chest refers to the pain Lebanese mothers, wives, daughters and ruined families are facing because of the war's consequences. The loss is the same and the pain is the same on both Christians and Muslims.

A lot of scenes represented the tensions between Christians and Muslims. A scene showed the Muslim men leaving the mosque only to find that their shoes had been stolen. When they go to the village coffee shop, a -Christian man joked about the issue provoking -Rabih who directly replied with an insult which caused a fight to ensue with a sectarian tag. Another scene showed

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the news anchor talking about the fights between Christians and Muslims in a neighborhood called -Wardehll. One instance was when the Sheikh found goats inside the mosque. As a first reaction, the Christians were directly blamed for it and they started shouting at them with one of the furious man -Abo Ahmadll running towards a nearby statue of Virgin Mary and breaking it with a stick while shouting: *-The house of God you bastardsll* (27:50). This scene showed how the hatred and resentment between the two religions is smuggled inside the people and at first opportunity it will expose itself and conflict will occur. Following that incident, someone put blood in the Holy water at Church during the Holy Communion of the village's Christian children. Again the first reaction was to blame it on the other religion. -Ahmadll and a few Muslim kids were watching through the church window and believed to be the ones behind the vandalism thus attacked. The point here is to show that unless Lebanese truly forgive each other the fire will rekindle each now and then for no reason.

Nadine Labaky, from a feminist perspective tried to show the women in the movie as the real victims of the sectarian war. Every woman had lost a father, a brother or a husband in this cruel, meaningless war. In this movie, the women try their best to prevent any further conflicts between the men. They start shouting and causing disturbance when the anchor woman starts talking about the conflict in -Wardehll. (21:55) They also burn the newspaper since it contained news about how a personal dispute turned into a sectarian conflict (referring to the -Wardehll conflict). We see -Fatima saying: *-Am I crazy to tell Abo Ahmad''* after her kid was hit following the blood in the Holy water incident. This shows how she is willing to forget what happened to prevent the issue from getting bigger (31:48). Also, the women act as if they have converted to the other religion as a final attempt to stop the men from fighting. *-I am one of them nowll* says Fatima to her husband when he sees her standing on the roof without her veil. They are trying to tell the

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men that if they really want to hurt and kill their neighbor's they should start with the ones they love. They want to show them that they are fighting with the people they were having fun with the previous night over disputes happening somewhere else.

They try shaming the men to stop fighting by pretending that -Yvonnell had a spiritual revelation and that -Virgin Maryll talked to her and said that the blood in the church was a sign of God's wrath because the men were fighting (34:00). They also try to distract the men by bringing prostitutes to the village. They made them pretend that their bus broke down and had to stay there for a couple of days thinking that the men will forget their differences and disputes when it comes to pretty ladies (38:50). This proves futile as conflicts arise again shortly after the prostitutes leave.

As a desperate measure to stop her son from starting a fight with the Muslim men in the village after he found out that something terrible happened to his brother -Nassimll and directly assuming that one of them hurt him, -Ritalll shot -Issamll in the leg to stop him (1:15:51). She also, took the body of her dead son and hid it and cried over him inaudibly and this scene can be approached to a religiously well-known scene when Virgin Mary held the body of her crucified son and cried over him silently.

An important point that Labaky turned to is the role of religious leaders. The priest and sheikh in the film try their best to avoid fights. The priest was shown saying that the cross was broken by wind so the Muslims are not blamed. The Sheikh, likewise, was shown trying to restrain the men from getting carried away after the goats in the mosque incident. He was then shown telling the praying men that this was not an act of vandalism. Instead, he blames the incident on the lack of maintenance to the mosque and says the door was not locked properly. They eventually help the

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women in their plans to calm down the men. They are shown talking to each other and agreeing that God will not forgive them if they don't intervene and help stop the conflicts that are ironically happening as a result of disagreement on who is right about God. This message is addressed to the religious clergy, to remember them that their mission is to promote peace in the name of God not to stimulate sectarian strives.

Labaky chose to end the film as she started it with a scene showing the people all wearing black and mourning. They were walking towards the cemetery holding a casket of their beloved -Naseemll who used to help the entire village. He used to risk his own life to get what the villagers needed no matter what religion they belong to. The people who shot him did not know his religion, pointing to the innocent lives that are lost in such conflicts. When the men reached the cemetery, they turned around and asked -Where Do We Go Now??.ll This question makes the viewer realize that the sectarian conflict will not lead to anything good and war and fighting will not solve it.

The film received many awards such as the -Francois Chalais Prizell award and the -Audience Choice Awardll. It held a very straight forward message from the director about the sectarian dispute in Lebanon in a time where the disputes seem to be rising again.

### **5.7 Tannoura Maxi by Joe Bou Eid**

Back to movies about the war, it's time to analyze -Tannoura Maxill. Also, known as -Heels of Warll, this 2012 film by Joe Bou Eid was banned by the Lebanese Censorship Bureau for one week following a complaint from the Lebanese Catholic Information Center. It is somewhat a biography of the life of Joe's father who was a deacon during the Lebanese civil war

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when he fell for Joe's mother. The reason of the ban was the extreme explicit scenes of sexual talk and actions within the sacred grounds of the church.

A scene by scene study of this movie was led in order to approach the extent of usage of sexual content and its relevance to the storyline.

### 5.7.1 Usage of Sexual Words and Metaphors

At first, Bou Eid repetitively used curse words in an attempt to approach the viewers with the spontaneous way Lebanese people talk with each other as curse is used casually. Some are used as means to offend a person while others are used in a humorous and friendly manner.

The director included a scene which is clearly inspired from the utterance of -The Woman Caught n Adulteryll from the bible (John 8:7) when Jesus was tested by sending him a sinful woman; instead of accusing Marie la Magdalene he replied: -Who among you without sin will throw her with a stonell. In this scene Alya is shown in a white dress in front of the church being stoned by many people, the director might have used this resemblance to deliver what people might think of Alya which in this case represents any liberated girl who dares to defend the societal or religious rules, for having a relation outside the bonds of marriage. He showed that people don't have the right to judge her since human are sinful by nature. Alya, alike Marie la Magdalene was judged and punished by the people around her but Jesus Christ stepped in and defended her. Even though this scene is represented from a masculine point of view, it is clearly defending the freedom of women when it comes to relationships r. Bou Eid was trying to show how condemnatory and harmful our society can be when it comes to judging each other. In this scene, many curse words are used by the people stoning Alya such as: -Slutll, -whorell and -promiscuousll with repeated shouts of wishful death to her.

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The word -brother of slutt, a very common Lebanese curse word is frequently used throughout the movie. this word, translates the intellectual closure Lebanese society is still facing when it comes to sexual freedom, implicating that the privileges of the family members is menaced if the woman is not virgin and not obeying societal and religious rules.

One instance is when Najwa's brother beats her lover after he had hit her. The town -flooziess are shown talking in church before mass started. They call each other offending names such as -tramp and -whore. This shows the low level of communication when it comes to describing each other.

Like most already studied movies, Bou\_Eid used female and male gazes to keep the audience's attention.

### 5.7.2 Voyeurism, Male/Female Gaze

#### Male Gaze

The male gazes are normally more occurring in this movie.

The first spotted occurrence is a scene showing Alya taking care of her beauty in the bathroom (19:00). This shows that men tend to desire women who are soft looking and beautiful. Another scene is her dancing wearing a revealing black dress (9:40) which can be approached to the look of the -Femme fatale, this representation portrays Alya in a seductive and dangerous way in order to justify the weakness the priest had towards this undeniable allure which pushed him to sin.

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She is also shown wearing a sexy black dress and red high heels entering the church when everyone else is leaving (25:34). This reassures representing her as the femme fatale, who is aiming to hypnotize the man she desires by her super powerful charm and beauty. A close-up on her face shows the desire she holds for him (35:10)

Bou Eid, by using male gaze, was representing not only his vision of how dangerous a woman can be when she desires something; but also, it is an affirmation of the stereotyped-vision about female stating that its –Evell who condemns –Adamll to sin.

He also included some scenes from a feminine point of view by playing on women’s desires through the usage of female gaze but this was rarely spotted in this movie.

### **Female Gaze**

Some of the female gazes include Amer chopping wood early in the morning (12:29) to accentuate on the virility and physical strength women seek in men. Another scene is focusing on him getting a shave at the barbershop (34:38), this shows that he is clean, good looking man and these traits too attracts female.

As Tannoura Maxi was censored because of its –too liberatedll sexual content, a study of the inclusion of direct sexual scenes is a must.

### ***5.7.3 Sexual Scenes***

Sexual scenes included in this movie were diverse and yet controversial and critical in the eyes of the commentators and viewers;

First, intense and passionate kissing between Amer and Alya during the party (41:05). Second, the scene of having love affairs in front of the church window; which caused the Lebanese



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ensorship committee to ban this movie as making love in a cherished place was considered a shame for Christianity. Also, the scene of Najwa having intercourse in bed while Loulou, the mentally challenged girl, is awake (44:19) and when wine is being poured on her body and then licked (51:35). Another scene of passionate kissing takes place during the movie (1:13:15).

Tannoura Maxi, compared to previously analyzed movies can be considered like Hotel Beirut as rich in direct sexual content. But if we look closer, those scenes had deep messages to convey as in the case of Amer and Alya; Bou Eid was trying to show that love cannot be controlled by time and space it's a powerful feeling which makes the lovers cross all the boundaries without thinking of the consequences. The repetitive sexual scenes which Najwa took part of were used to raise the voice of a problem nowadays many women are facing, they try hard to reach the pleasure in relationship but they don't, either lack of experience or because the man doesn't know how to satisfy their needs so they fake it due to fear, as women do have the right to talk about sex-related topics because it is still considered as a taboo.

This movie also included indirect sexual scenes.

### ***5.7.4 Indirect Sexual Scenes***

A scene with background voices of a woman having an orgasm is shown implying and hidden sex scene where Bou Eid decided to inform the viewer that people are having sex without actually displaying it (1:00).

### **5.7.5 Thematic Representations in Tannoura Maxi**

Many argued that other movies have included much worst scenes and language in relation to the church and the -Men of God|| but were not treated this harshly. One example was the scene from Nadine Labaky's -Where Do We Go Now?|| when a woman barged into the church and threw

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some dirt at the Statue of the Virgin Mary. Others said that the only reason it was banned was because it portrays the Lebanese Forces in a bad manner.

The film focuses a lot on the Lebanese civil war and the Israeli invasion of 1982. The director chose to portray this using -text on black to show news titles from that time, news footage and voice clips from radio news.

The first text on black informs the viewer of the June 1982 invasion supported by a sound clip of the news. It explained how devastating the Israeli attacks were on the Southern Suburb of Beirut . The next scene shows militants fire at passing cars then explaining that the result of the invasion was the immigration of around 85 thousand citizens towards Jizine, a Lebanese village in the mountain area of the south. Bou Eid continued with the usage of text on black to tell the viewer that multiple raids were carried out by Israel and that heavy damage had been sustained in various parts of Beirut including the Sports city, Sabra and Shatila. We see a man watching the news on the television with footage of tanks and fights.

The timeline of the war is continued with scenes of the military (supposedly Palestinians) saluting President Yasser Arafat and a text on black that clarifies that Arafat had called onto fighters to inflict as much damage as possible to the enemy and that the Lebanese politicians demanded that the army intervenes. Another text in black illustrates that the Lebanese resistance had refused to surrender and that Syria asserted that Israel will not decide the destiny of Lebanon. It also states that the invasion has incurred massive civilian casualties.

A scene later on shows Lebanese forces militants attacking a Muslim family while the mother of that family begs the militant to let them go. More footage from the war are shown displaying the destruction of Beirut. Text on black exposes the horrific number of casualties and that the

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political status is troubling with fears of a civil war breaking out. The assassination of Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel and the subsequent public anger is also shown in a text in black followed by footage of the protests that occurred as a result. Finally, we hear a radio broadcast saying that people are returning to their homes and villages after the bombarding had stopped.

In Tannoura Maxi, the theme of war was treated in order to remind the people of the damage, division and deconstruction it caused to the country,

### **5.8 Habbet Loulou by Layal Rajha**

Last but not least, Habit Loulou. This 2013 film by Layal Rajha is a nice change from all the war related films that Lebanese directors can't seem to shake. This movie is about three Lebanese women who have suffered greatly as a result of the lack of support from their society and had to turn to a demeaning profession that is greatly unaccepted in the Lebanese and Arab communities. In addition, it is pointed out in the introduction that the film is supposedly based on a true story but nothing more on this topic is elaborated or discussed.

Unlike the rest of the films mentioned and discussed, the settings of this film take place in a much more recent time where the Lebanese civil war has long ended and Lebanon has been rebuilt. The only relation to the war is the fact that Faten was molested and raped during it, causing her to get pregnant with Layal. This film sheds light on the social and economic division that is taking place in modern Lebanon.

#### **5.8.1 Usage of Sexual Words and Metaphors**

The use of sexual words and metaphors is very frequent in this film. The phrase *-your scent is so delicious* is uttered by Fares while he sits in front of his shop and stares at Faten (6:22). While getting, their nails done and chatter about men, Faten exclaims: *-Men only care about this thing*

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while she grabs her breasts (9:48) to which Hala responds sarcastically: *-we too only care about a certain thing* referring to sex with men (9:51). Another scene shows Hala and Layal asking Faten if the reason behind her not getting with Fares was his pants, denoting the fact that he wears the same pants every day, Hala suggests: *-then take his pants off* (26:00). Faten then sadly mentions: *-even if you decorate it with diamonds, I don't want anything to do with it* referring to the male penis (26:15). This shows how Faten is still psychologically damaged from what happened with her when she was young. When Layal asks Hala what she wants her name on Facebook to be, Hala responds that she wants a *-Feisty name* (19:37). When a customer tries to pick up Hala for some late-night fun, Hala tells him the prices. She states: *-if you want something average or substandard* he can pay less (31:40), and continues to say: *-but if you want me to take good care of you and love you long time* he has to pay a lot more (31:47).

The phrase: *-violating my sanctity* is repeated four times throughout the film. *-Eat, drink, sleep, erection* was mentioned five times in the film meaning that men continuously think about the female body and intercourse. *-Lonely and with no one to take me in* is used twice by the girls with the same Lebanese answer: *-May God help all the girls*.

A couple of references from songs were used. *-I'm pretty and I know it, I'm stronger than the night* is used five times. *-Many before you have tried* was used twice. These phrases are used as an assertion of power by the girls. Also, many words were used by the characters to show anger and resentment towards men. These words include *-dog* and *-animal*. Likewise, men used the term *-son of a bitch* to describe women who mistreated or hurt them. One instance is when the man lied at Layal by not showing up at the hotel and she retaliated by posting pictures of him with the caption: *-You will be missed* in the neighborhood, implying that he died.

Ironically, the film did not contain any scenes of nudity or sexual activity. For a film that talks about three women, two of whom work as prostitutes, the film is fairly decent. Rajha decided not to include scenes that might cause her film to be banned or considered as an inappropriate one. The only scenes that remotely reference romance or indirect sexual acts are a few kissing scenes, some hugs and a few scenes of the girls on beds.

Yet, Rajha kept the attention of her viewers by using some scenes including voyeurism, male/female gaze.

### **5.8.2 Voyeurism, Male/Female Gaze**

#### **Voyeurism**

The director also entailed a couple of scenes that epitomize voyeurism. Faten's neighbor, Fares, is shown observing and peeking at Faten from the balcony more than 3 times. Another scene displays Nassour, the driver, glancing and stealing a look at Layal while she changes her clothes in the back of the car. These scenes imply that men cannot help themselves but looking at and appreciating the beauty of the female body.

#### **Female Gaze**

For a female gaze, Rajha decided to use what every girl and woman crave for from birth: -The Night in Shinning Armor. Layal's boyfriend is publicized as the caring and understanding man. He is not judgmental and is very protective of his lady. He is shown as rich, proper and clever which is what all single ladies consider and refer to as the -perfect partner.

#### **Male Gaze**

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However, considering that the film is about three ladies, many scenes included male gazes. Rajha included a close-up of Hala while she was going up the stairs wearing tight clothes and high heels. Close-ups on her lips occurred more than four times throughout the film with some while she was gesturing nearby men in a seductive manner. Another scene shows Hala trying to seduce Chawki. This shows Hala as the subdominant woman offering herself to him.

Also, Rajha included a scene that captures Layal's sexy and appealing appearance. She is filmed wearing a sexy black dress and red shoes with her hair in a short style representing the iconic -femme fatale. Rajha also used close-ups on her red, clean and soft nails. A scene also showed Faten grabbing her seemingly braless breasts. Moreover, many scenes focused on the lady's legs and tempting bodies.

As mentioned earlier, the movie treats tabooed social issues, dissecting the themes treated is a must

### 5.8.3 Thematic Study of Habbet Loulou

The film revolves around three women: Faten, Layal and Hala. The three women fight the judgments of the Lebanese society which do not cut slack to anyone. A society that does not accept variances of what they consider normal no matter the circumstances. A society that is still struggling to remove any sort of blame from victims of rape and sexual harassment. A society that does not consider the reasons that might cause a woman to get involved in prostitution, even if the reason is major.

In a time of chaos and lack of any kind of law, Faten was raped when she left the shelters to get some food. Unfortunately, she got pregnant and was forced to raise a child alone. Her entire family abandoned her as to not be associated with a -single mother. They left her at the time

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that she needed them the most. Furthermore, the Lebanese government does not make it any simpler to single mothers. Children that are born outside the norms of marriage cannot be officially registered which denies them their simplest and basic human rights such as education. Faten was thus forbidden from living a peaceful and respectful life and destined to a lifetime of hardship and struggle to survive and support her bastard child with the judgment of her family and society instead of its help.

Faten however took care of her baby and did her best. She is represented as the protective mother figure. Although she is sensitive, the struggles she has faced made her strong and capable of taking care of herself and her daughter.

Layal was born into a predetermined life of misery and deprivation. She is the result of rape. A reminder to Faten of that fateful day when her life got destroyed. Being a bastard, she was never registered and therefore denied from a good education and forbidding her from pursuing a normal career or a decent life. She was forbidden from enjoying her life or to have a fruitful relationship. Her mother's reputation did not help. Society also judged her and labeled her as a product of a taboo relation. Layal is the image of - la femme fatale and this is shown by her softness, extreme good looks and seductiveness while also being intelligent.

Last but not least, Hala is a poor lady that found salvation in working in the oldest profession known to man. The very poor economic status has given her no choice but to work as a prostitute in a means of insuring an income and not becoming homeless. Eventually, she had to sell herself to a deputy to make him give her money. She represents the stereotyped -prostitute that is regarded as a highly dishonorable job in Lebanon and even internationally. Although the reason behind her going into this business was financial, it is arguable that many other options were

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available that require no or low levels of education that could have spared her from selling herself to strangers.

Unlike other movies, *Habbet Loulou* is poor when it comes to screening sexual acts, yet too rich when it comes to occurrence of sexual messages, jokes and metaphors.

Moreover, a serious plot twist occurs: Hala gets pregnant from Chawki. She is in the same position that Faten was in when she was pregnant with Layal. However, this time she is not alone and instead has Faten and Layal by her side to help and support her. Hala is shown talking to the baby in her belly with affection which is bound by nature. Hala decides to give up her infamous profession in order to take care of her baby and raise her well, an image of a –bad girl who became a –good mother. She even goes to church and prays for forgiveness. Rajha shows Hala experiencing great pain during her labor which occurred on the stairs before the ambulance arrived. Unfortunately, Hala passes away while giving birth to her baby showing how sacrificial a mother can be for her child, just as Faten gave up all her life for Layal when her parents made her choose between getting an abortion and leaving the house.

Finally, Faten and Layal get their well-deserved happy ending, even if their best friend wasn't there with them. They take care of her baby and raise her. Faten finally gives Fares a chance. Layal gets a wedding proposal from her boyfriend which means she can get an identity at last and turn her life around.

Overall, the film touches upon very sensitive social issues that are occurring in our society as much as they are overlooked and ignored. Many girls get raped with no law to properly protect them or their children. The film is a wake-up call for the society to stand by the victim and help



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them in their time of need, remarkably it is away from any kind of war-oriented themes or clichés that were recently taking over Lebanese huge screens.

## Chapter Six

### CONCLUSION

This study investigated the evolution of sexual content in Lebanese cinema following the 1975 Lebanese civil war. Eight movies were analyzed based on their themes and scenes, to show that the Lebanese cinema in the post-war era was –rich|| in sexual content and topics. Therefore, this indicated the shift towards a more liberalistic representation in Lebanese cinema in the post-war era. The selected movies dated back to the late 1990’s till the mid 2000’s, and the choice of selection was based on the audiences’ reviews and critics; noting that few of them were criticized and some were banned due to their usage of sexual scenes.

After analyzing –West Beirut||, –In the Battlefields||, –Bostal||, –Caramell||, –Hotel Beirut||, –Where Do We Go Now||, –Tannoura Max||, –Habbet Loulou|| the results prove that the war is still the centrifugal theme presented in the Post-war cinematic productions, but the way it is presented has changed over time. War is not depicted only from the perspective of destruction, death or political conflicts, but also as forbidden love affairs, increased delinquency, negligence of social and religious values, hatred between Muslims and Christians, lost childhood etc. In other words, war in itself caused a breakage of norms and values that were ruling the life of the Lebanese citizens in the pre-war era and the cinematic productions were nothing but a representation of the evidence of this –changell.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

This study has limitations like any other research study. The first and biggest limitation is that there are no previous studies conducted on this topic in Lebanon. The only available literature on Lebanese post-war cinema movies was limited to gender representations and none has studied the way sexual representations were changing since the end of the war. The second limitation is that the films chosen are exclusive to the timeframe between 1998 and 2017, and were subject to censorship. Censorship in Lebanon is relatively strict and movie directors always account for it in their productions.

As for the importance of this research; it helps many disciplines of social sciences by shedding light on how freedom of expression was represented in Lebanese cinema in post-war society. In addition, the evolution in cinematic sexual representation occurred due to social, political, and economic evolutions in society after war. The cinematic productions thus presented in this research are mere representation of actual societal living that has in itself evolved, thus pushing the limits of sexual representations in Lebanese cinema. Although the theme of war remained as the main drive for most Lebanese productions, the breakthrough representations of sexual content have evolved into a more liberalistic outlook onto what is really going on in the daily lives of the Lebanese people. There is yet much more ground to cover, and censorships to overcome, in order to achieve fully liberal representations of yet untouched taboos, that remain controversial in reality and in cinema.

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### Appendix A

In order to avoid coding errors, here is the codebook used in this study.

For coding, sexual content, the coder has to write down scenes containing:

Category	Meaning
Words	Sexual verbs and descriptions. Indirect sexual metaphors and jokes. Flirting words.
Looks in the eyes	Voyeurism: Watching others doing sexual actions or engaged in intimate activities. Male Gaze: Presenting women from a masculine point of view. Female Gaze: Decentering the masculine gaze and writing a new language of desire.
Indirect sexual actions	Holding hands, touching feet, direct and indirect appealing actions.
Direct sexual actions	Kissing, being in bed with someone, intercourse.



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For coding, thematic representations, the coder has to look closely and conclude themes and classify them under one of these categories.

Category/ Theme	Meaning
War	Blood. Destruction. Division between Lebanese. Orphanages. Martyrs.
Post- war tensions	Christian and Muslim conflicts. Political fights.
Societal restrictions	Sex without marriage. Love between people from different religions. Masturbation. Homosexuality. Transsexuality. Women Liberalization. Rape.