

*Routledge Studies in Religion and Film*

# **NEW APPROACHES TO ISLAM IN FILM**

Edited by  
Kristian Petersen

**ROUTLEDGE**



# 15 Together in the midst of war

## Muslim and Christian coexistence in Lebanese cinema

*Sérgio Dias Branco*

Popular representations of Lebanon are often framed around its unsettled social, political, and religious history, especially tensions between Muslims and Christians. Several Lebanese films offer an alternative vantage point that allows viewers to glimpse at the shape of peace within and between communities. This chapter focuses on depictions of Muslim and Christian coexistence in four films: *Beirut the Encounter* (*Beyrouth el lika*, 1981), *West Beirut* (*Beyrouth Al Gharbiyya*, 1998), *In the Battlefields* (*Maarek hob*, 2004), and *Where Do We Go Now?* (*W halla' la wayn*, 2011). I argue that these works provide densely contrasting and complementary perspectives that contribute to a more profound understanding of this conflicting and peaceful coexistence. The following analyses of each film detail how they provide these perspectives and contribute to this understanding. My focus is mainly on how Muslim and Christians characters are represented and their storylines unfold.

Lebanon is a country with large Muslim and Christian communities that have been entangled in a history of conflicts. Official data is not available, because there has not been a census since 1932. Most of the politicians argue that an official survey of the population could lead to further political crises and social divisions. Be that as it may, even without rigorous figures there are some valuable estimates (see, in particular, US Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2015). About half of the population is Muslim, either Shia or Sunni, with no clear predominance between these two branches of Islam. Around 40% is Christian, mostly Eastern Catholics, either from the larger Maronite Church (or the Syriac Maronite Church of Antioch) or the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, both *sui iuris* particular churches in communion with Rome. Finally, although of less interest to this study, there is also a small but noteworthy group of Druze faithful.

The division between Christians and Muslims has been artificially constructed around real social and political problems with historical roots in a region that was conquered by the Byzantine Empire and then the Ottoman Empire, and later was under a French mandate after World War I. This division has had negative consequences for the possibility of national unity in

Lebanon. Indeed, the fact that high-ranking offices are reserved for members of particular religious groups means that they should defend certain political positions by acting as representatives of a religion. The myth of a Maronite majority becomes evident if we look at the social history of the region. But it was somehow accepted by Muslims in order for Lebanon to achieve stable political institutions in which power was shared across religions (see Fisk 2001, 67), leaving the class structure inherited from French colonialism basically intact. This unwritten national pact that laid the foundation of Lebanon as a multiconfessional state in 1943 was to be tested during the civil war (1975–1990). After the Taif Agreement in 1989, although the privilege of Maronite Christians was abolished, the political system remained based on a balance between the representation of religious communities in Parliament, which is sectarian in essence. The agreement included the end of confessionalism in two steps. The first has been concluded: the division of power between Christians and Muslims would be kept, but balanced. The second would end the division, creating a secular state, keeping religious representatives in an advisory senate when the deputies are no longer elected on a confessional basis. This last step was never taken.

It is perhaps unsurprising that cinema has often reflected this religious pluralism and coexistence in Lebanese society. Some of the films that deal directly with the Lebanese Civil War are exemplary in this regard: *Beirut the Encounter*, *West Beirut*, and *In the Battlefields*. Each film depicts the relations between Muslim and Christian communities in three different decades, reflecting distinct periods of the country's history. The first section of this chapter focuses on *West Beirut* and *In the Battlefields*, two movies that chronicle the division of Beirut during the war into two large sectors: East (Christian) and West (Muslim), with a third small zone in the southern suburbs (Shia Muslim) (see Fisk 2001, XXI). The second section looks at *Beirut the Encounter* whose theme is not the separation between Muslims and Christians but the possibility of communication between them. Finally, the third section analyzes *Where Do We Go Now?*, which tackles sectarian violence between the two religious communities through a tale set in an isolated village, referring more indirectly to the Lebanese Civil War. These four films depict Muslims and Christians living together in the midst of war.

### Stories of a divided city

Najib Hourani follows Samir Khalaf (see 1987, 268) in the claim that the “creation of communally homogenous cantons during the war . . . reinforced a process of ‘re-tribalization’” (Hourani 2008, 292). Religious identities were and remain so connected with social strata and political struggles that, as we have seen, Lebanese parliamentary democracy is confessional. Polls indicate that there is overwhelming popular support, particularly among Shiite Muslims, for the abolition of confessionalism and the sectarian quotas in government (see Muhanna 2010). The territorial integrity of

the country was at risk during the war and the symbol of this division was the bisection of the capital. *West Beirut* and *In the Battlefields* chronicle this separation of Beirut into sectors from different perspectives.

*West Beirut* was the first feature film directed by Ziad Doueiri. It won the François Chalais Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and the International Federation of Film Critics' Award at the Toronto Film Festival along with other prizes in Europe in 1998. Because of these numerous awards and accolades, it was widely distributed and discussed. Its impact may have had something to do with the fact that the main characters are high school children. The devastating reality of war is seen through the sweet and comic point of view of kids growing up with a sense of adventure that is not erased by the terrible context of their lives. Moreover, the film takes a fact into account and uses it as a narrative premise: the split of the Lebanese capital was not, and could not have been, clear-cut. There were some Christians in the West sector and vice versa, particularly in the first months of war. There was also clandestine circulation between sectors. These two elements make this story of two boys and one girl more complex and engaging as a representation of day-to-day life during the armed conflict.

The action is set in 1975. The opening sequence is set in a school in East Beirut. The next day, after a terrorist attack on a bus, the Christians do not let the residents in West Beirut cross over to the other side of town – not even to drop children at school. Every day begins with the Fajr prayer, the dawn Muslim worship that echoes throughout the western part of Beirut. Tarek Noueri (Rami Doueiri) is a Muslim boy who has a Christian, orphaned friend, May (Rola Al Amin). She wears a cross necklace until about the middle of the film. The tension in the West streets is palpable and when the kids come across a Muslim roadblock to the East, Omar (Mohamad Chamas), Tarek's best friend who is upset with May's presence, calling her "Virgin Mary," finally protects her by hiding the Christian symbol that she was publicly displaying. Later, Tarek is able to cross to the other side in the trunk of a car. He takes Omar and May with him for a second visit.

The use of archival footage in the middle of *West Beirut* marks the rift within the film that basically divides it into two parts, just like the city and Lebanese people. The first part takes place mainly in West Beirut and the second part in East Beirut. But false documentary images creep into the film from the start and insert a self-reflective quality into the motion picture. Tarek records daily events with an 8mm camera. Indeed, his filmmaking is the reason why he desperately tries to get to the East side, where the photo store he uses is situated. As Lisa Khatib recalls, what disturbs the apparent peace of ordinary life is an incident that really happened on April 13, 1975: a bus carrying Palestinians was attacked by right-wing Christian militants, resulting in 31 killed and 30 wounded (see 2011, 135). Therefore, the film weaves together fictional and factual elements and visually reflects this combination that does not obliterate or mix the identity of each thread. It may

be read as a kind of image of coexistence and integration that does not entail merging.

The kids end up in a brothel in East Beirut. The female pimp Oum Walid (Leila Karam) makes clear that it is usual for prostitutes to sell their bodies for sex to men of both faiths. But in the current situation, clients begin to fight and bring the war into the house. Walid ends up describing it as hell, as if the uproar and violence belonged outside and should not be brought inside. “Since when does a bed have a religion?,” she asks. Tarek has no answer and slightly shrugs his shoulders. The film shies away from paying attention to the persistent problem of sex trade, human trafficking, and the sexual exploitation of children in Lebanon (see Committee on the Rights of the Child – Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2015), all of them intensified in wartime, although it does mention violence against women. The prostitution house in the Christian side is narratively connected with the amused curiosity of the boys with sex and women, even in the intimate space of his Muslim family – an earlier instance of this is the moment when Tarek secretly observes his voluptuous aunt. Although there are some dramatic scenes, these joyful moments set this film apart from other cinematic representations of the Lebanese Civil War. Khatib recognizes that the films on this war tend to focus on “issues of social fragmentation, sectarian animosities, class divisions, and individual devastation” and that only *West Beirut* and *In the Battlefields* “represent another side to the war, that of the possibility of having fun under difficult conditions” (2008, p. xx).

*In the Battlefields* was directed by Danielle Arbid. This female director had made three shorts and two documentaries, *Alone with War (Seule avec la guerre, 2001)* on post-war Beirut and *On Borders (Aux frontières, 2003)* on Israel’s frontiers with neighboring countries, before completing this first fiction feature film. Even though it is not really an answer to *West Beirut* (see Arbid 2004), *In the Battlefields* is a significant complement to that film for two reasons. First, in this case the main characters are not children but adolescents. Both films concentrate on a time of (re)discovery of the immediate world around characters who are growing up, becoming young persons and adults. Second, the story is set in East Beirut in a Christian household and, as Roy Armes writes, “Muslims are unseen and unknown aliens” (2015, p. 237). The focus of the film on the Christian community contrasts with *West Beirut’s* concentration on Muslims and it is arguably a product of the filmmaker’s own knowledge, who has acknowledged that *In the Battlefields* includes autobiographical elements (see Arbid 2004).

Arbid’s film begins in a closed space, an apartment, and it is quieter and slower than *West Beirut*. The story revolves around the relationship between Lina (Marianne Feghali), a young girl in a Christian family, and her aunt’s maid from Syria, Siham (Rawia Elchab). Lina’s father is addicted to gambling and this has become a major family and financial problem. A priest is called to talk to him. He is told to swear before God and his daughter that he is going to stop gambling. He later commits suicide. This first scene



reveals that Christian clergymen are authority figures with influence in the life of this family of believers. This is quite different from the daily presence of regular Muslim prayers in *West Beirut*, which is at the same time more public and seems less personal.

Siham, the housemaid, is a crucial character. She connects two worlds in conflict: the family and the country, inside and outside the apartment. In fact, the two are paralleled from the beginning. Siham is maltreated while serving the family during lunch in one of the first scenes that “contains significant details that reveal Arbid’s insider critique of a particular class and way of life” (2010, p. 26), as Rebecca Dyer notes. The film exposes the entrenched “master-servant power dynamic” (Dyer 2010, 25) in Lina’s milieu. After Siham is abused, Lina storms from the table and pulls the table cloth ruining the meal for the entire family. Moments later, there is a bombing and the aggressive behavior in the apartment is mirrored by violent explosions. Be that as it may, Lina’s family tries to maintain an indoor facade that seems to be intended to cut any connections with the crumbling world outside. It is through Siham that Lina is able to get away from the animosity within her family only to see the ongoing war within her country up close. Aseel Sawalha insightfully observes that although the film is not interested in the root causes of the city battles, it allows the viewers to register “the heavy effects of the war through images of deserted streets along with the sounds of bombs” (Sawalha 2014, 111). In sum, there is more than one battlefield, as the title makes clear, and tension and conflict rule at home and in the street.

A discussion in the terrace expresses the violence of speech reflecting the bloodshed in this zone controlled by the Christian Phalange militia. One of the boys says that the week before, they burnt foreigners and tore their hearts out calling them “sons-of-bitches.” “If I’d seen them, I’d have fucked and scalped their sisters,” he adds. “I’d have fucked their fathers and mothers,” says Siham’s boyfriend, Marwan (Takla Chamoun). Another boy then says to him in a jocose tone: “Before screwing the family, pass me that joint.” Humor deactivates the atrocity of the acts described in a scene where the incessant sound of gunshots is heard in the background. The film is successful in exposing the fragility of the Lebanese nation and the tension between a national identity and an Arab pan-national identity in the civil war, which explains how it expanded to involve other countries in the region. These two identity frameworks are often ascribed to Christian and Muslim perspectives, but *In the Battlefields* makes it clear that it is not so clear-cut (see Salibi 1976, 2009). The film has the merit of considering religion alongside other aspects, such as nationality and class.

One striking element that begs for analysis is the ending, in particular the outcome of the girls’ relationship. The 18-year-old Siham seems to attract the 12-year-old Lina to her world and away from her family’s. The little girl feels forgotten by her kin and ultimately by her older friend. Yet in the end, Lina reveals Siham’s plan to elope with a Muslim fighter. This betrayal can be interpreted as a way to assert control over the foreigner’s life, preventing

Siham from gaining the very freedom that Lina lacks by keeping her friend close even against her will. In that sense, by participating in the first's adventures, the latter is negotiating her own sexual, social, and class identity (see Mostafa 2014, 279–288). The maid helps her employer's niece to grow up, for instance, teaching her how to kiss. There is a moment when Lina says in low voice that her and Siham are the same, but the narrative belies this fantasy. They come from different worlds and after many incidents, so they remain. Connected with this, there is another feature. In contrast with *West Beirut, In the Battlefields* does not use archival footage, but it does have documentary elements throughout, especially in the final sequence of images. The marks of war – debris, shattered buildings, and bullet and shell holes – that we glimpse in other moments of the film in the form of a road-block, for example, come to the foreground after Lina and Siham's fight, chase, and separation on the street, when the latter is picked up by a car. Almost 15 years after the armed conflict, the wounds produced by the war were still visible. All Arbid had to do was to record them. The characters' tragic break echoes the disintegrated urban landscape and evokes the split and the frontier between Christians and Muslims in Beirut.

### Conversations across the boundary

The real dividing line between Muslims and Christians in Beirut and the connection between the two sectors is at the center of *Beirut the Encounter*, directed by Borhane Alaouié. The film opens with the information that the action takes place in Beirut in “a day in the year 1977.” The first images present a city with piles of garbage on the street to the sound of hovering flies and damaged buildings as well as lifting and moving debris, much like the last images from *In the Battlefields*. These visual and aural elements express “the inhospitality of Beirut toward the displaced” (Khatib 2011, 134). Within the group of films analyzed here, this is the closest in time to the actual events because it was produced in 1981. As we have seen, *West Beirut* takes place mainly in the western side and the few scenes in the eastern side never give an account of daily life, since they take place indoors. *In the Battlefields* provides such an account, but the other sector is completely absent. *Beirut the Encounter* is, therefore, about the city as a whole and the possibility of conversations across its (provisional) boundary, quite distinct from the partial portraits provided by Doueiri's and Arbid's films. For this reason, Alaouié's work is able to depict the different degrees of destruction of each zone and present “a sharp contrast between the chaos of West Beirut and the leafy streets of Achrafieh” (Khatib 2008, 73). We could add the poor blocks of apartments of West Beirut and the rich houses of East Beirut, showing class differences that have associated Muslims with ordinary citizenship and Christians with the social elite. Historically, this difference has been generally connected with social stratification and inequality. Christians had more access than Muslims to education and other basic goods.

Although daily Muslim prayers are not as present as in *West Beirut*, the film opens with the Fajr prayer said by Mustafa, Haidar's (Haithem El Amine) brother. Haidar, a teacher, is the main Muslim character in the film. He got up earlier to contemplate the waste that infest the streets and the bullet holes that mar the buildings. While Mustafa is praying, he salutes him, and the fair inference seems to be that he is not a pious Muslim like his brother. They argue over political activity, because Mustafa is helping distribute magazines calling for unification and peace and this reminds Haidar about his own activism in the past. Mustafa's wife, Zamzam, participates in the discussion agreeing with one and the other. All three have come from a small town, taken over by fighting militias, to Beirut and try to keep a low profile.

As Terri Ginsberg and Chris Lippard remark, there is no graphic violence in the film, but "the backdrop of war shows a society paralyzed by the material signs of disjuncture (sporadic electricity, water, and phone connections, as well as roadblocks and traffic jams)" (2010, p. 53). When phone lines are momentarily operational, Haidar takes the opportunity to call his close friend Zeina (Nadine Acoury), a Catholic student who is on the other side of the city. They try to get together, but her wait for him is futile. It is not possible to predict the time it takes to circulate between sectors. He gets caught in traffic and they never meet face to face. Alternately, they talk on the phone and then record long messages to each other that the other never hears.

Haidar and Zeina have different views of the conflict, but agree that it should stop. They agree to meet at the airport before Zeina leaves for the United States, so that they can say goodbye and exchange their tapes. Haidar arrives early at the airport fearing he might once again be stuck in traffic. He comes across a man who prey on gullible refugees and decides to leave and throw his tape away. It is not clear why he comes to this resolution. His last words after a talk with a guard, Khalil Mourad, a former student of his who helps an old man eager to join his family abroad, are enigmatic. He admits his confusion and does not know what to think anymore. "Looks like the whole world is changing. Maybe I'll see you again. I'll stop for a cup of tea," he says. Zeina is devastated when she realizes Haidar is not waiting for her. Their recorded words addressed to each other will remain unheard. Yet the film ends with an irreversible separation between them and a fleeting promise of reunion between Haidar and Khalil. So what is conveyed is not so much the impossibility of communication, but the way in which cinema can set up conversations between disconnected people. It is the film that creates the meeting between Haidar and Zeina for the audience, not only switching between them but also between other characters and stories, such as Mustafa and Zamzam's.

### **A lonely, peaceful place**

*Where Do We Go Now?* portrays a divided country through an undivided, but tense, multireligious community. In the lot of four films scrutinized in



this study, it presents the more developed and balanced depiction of Muslims and Christians. Consequently, it warrants a detailed narrative and stylistic analysis. The narrative takes place in an imagined village that is surrounded by land mines. There is a bridge, but it needs to be rebuilt. Muslims and Christians live together in this remote place, where it is difficult to get a radio signal. It is a community made of two groups. The closeness of the women from both groups contrasts with the unstated conflict that gradually grows between the men. The film opens with a succession of shots of empty streets, ravaged landscapes, and also of a church and mosque side by side. Through this sequence of images, we hear the actress and director Nadine Labaki saying:

The story I tell here is for all who want to hear. A tale of those who fast, a tale of those who pray. A tale of a lonely town, mines scattered all around. Caught up in a war, split to its very core. Two clans with broken hearts under a burning sun. Their hands stained with blood in the name of a cross or a crescent. From this lonely place, which has chosen peace, whose history is spun of barbed wire and guns. It's a long tale of women dressed in black. No glittering stars, no dazzling flowers. Their ash-blackened eyes. Women driven by destiny to demonstrate bravery.

After this voice-over, we see a group of women on their way to the graveyard where their late husbands and sons are buried. They do a kind of sad dance that expresses their losses: their hands tap their chests and they walk in a pendular movement, swinging from side to side. This "lonely place" has "chosen peace," and this peace is fragile as we can see in key moments. One such moment is the gathering of the villagers to watch television. As with the radio, the signal is weak and irregular. The priest and the imam are present, they symbolize the communal "unity and coexistence," as the Mayor recalls. The film being transmitted is not appropriate for children, so they change to the news. Most of the people look fixedly at the screen, until the women start arguing with the men so as to distract them. It is an attempt among many to protect the community from the influence of the ongoing conflict outside. Women muffle the sound of the radio news and burn newspapers whenever the shadow of violence is about to invade the tranquility of their life together.

In spite of these efforts, violence does break out between men. A Christian boy, Roukoz (Ali Haidar), is trying to get a loudspeaker and falls from the ladder inside the church. He hangs on to the cross and ends up breaking it. The priest later says that the church is crumbling so that the Christians do not think Muslims desecrated the cross. Still, retaliation ensues: the next morning, the sound from the speakers are not those of Muslim prayers but of chickens clucking and sheep bleating. Someone had opened the door to the mosque and the animals are inside wrecking the carpets and trashing a place of Islamic worship. Muslim prayers had been mixed with the sounds of

animals in previous moments. Religious observance is imbued in daily life. But this is felt as a sacrilegious offense because it violates the sacred space of the mosque. The imam and the priest before him act as “*du‘āt salām haqiqiyyīn*” (“true advocates for peace”) (see Sinno 2017, 634). He argues that the Christians should not be blamed but is unsuccessful. In response, one Muslim breaks a statue of the Virgin Mary with a stick. Muslim women help to collect the pieces and later put them back together. Nadine Sinno comments that, contrary to men, women “primarily engage in the acts of repair and restoration” (2017, p. 622) in the film.

It only gets worse as Muslims taint the holy water and a Christian attacks a Muslim boy in crutches. Sinno claims that *Where Do We Go Now?* “demonstrates that while religion itself may be holy, there is nothing natural, predestined, or sacred about people’s religious identities and their enactments of these identities” (2017, p. 636). Women decide to act collectively. Yvonne (Yvonne Maalouf), the Mayor’s wife, pretends that she has visions of Mary and most of the people listen to her, either Christian or Muslim. Despite differences between Islam and Christianity in regard to how she is seen, Mary or Maryam is an important figure for both religions. She is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur’an, which explicitly identifies her as the greatest of all women (3:42). The 19th sura of the Qur’an is dedicated to her, the mother of Isa (Jesus). Mary is also a lady of sorrow who mourns for her son, which is why these women who grieve for the men they lost feel so close to her. In one scene, Amale (the Christian played by Labaki) cradles her young son in a pose that evokes representations of Mary and her child. It is not surprising that the film is dedicated to their own mothers.

Takla (Claude Baz Moussawbaa) discovers that her teenage son, Nassim (Kevin Abboud), has been killed by gunfire while traveling with Roukoz to get supplies for the village. The mother keeps this secret from her older son, Issam (Sasseen Kawzally), because of fear of retaliation. They hide the body and then she storms into the church, throws dirt at the statue of Our Lady and says: “Come down from there. Are you not a mother? You take people’s children without asking? What right do you have to take him from me? What were you doing?” “Give him back to me,” she begs. This is another example of how the sacred is treated as familiar and also how this familiarity is not blasphemous but pious. Her personal pain is interwoven with larger worries. Takla, and the imam and the priest, anticipates a battle in the village once Nassim’s tragic demise is known.

The women bake sweet cakes with hashish and sing together with the help of a group of Ukrainian dancers who were hired to distract the men. While they eat and drink and laugh out loud, the women hide their guns. There is a previous musical sequence in which Amale and Rabih (Julian Farhat), a Muslim, sing to each other in her imagination. Evocative voice-over and creative musical sequences are used to expose wounds and reveal dreams; wounds and dreams that bridge the gap between Muslims and Christians. *Where Do We Go Now?* is a carefully symmetrical fable that

expresses Labaki's utopian aspirations, which is strikingly different from the other three films that were filmed in real locations around Beirut. It was a very personal project for the director because she felt that the risk of conflict had not fade away. In fact, the film was "inspired by the May 2008 events in Lebanon where people took to the streets with weapons again" and she and her friends were "frustrated by the absurdity of the situation" (Labaki 2011).

Confronted with the likelihood of a more violent clash between the two religious groups, the Muslim and Christian women finally decide to switch attires and apparently to change religion. Sarah Lennon Galavan contends that this is the climax of the film. She writes that "[t]he message the women send their husbands through this sartorial switch is a powerful one: attack one of us and you attack us all" (2016). It is perhaps more than that: when Muslim women become Christian and vice-versa, they make the men see that they are hurting themselves and their loved ones, not the "other," the "enemy." According to Labaki, the idea of the "fear of the other" is instilled by education and upbringing (2011). An additional aspect worth mentioning is the way *Where Do We Go Now?* avoids, and indeed contradicts, the propagated image of Muslim women as anti-modern and more traditional in Lebanon. The women in the film are able to switch places so easily because they are culturally very similar, even though they profess different religions. In truth, Christian women seem more puritan than Muslim women: Afaf (Layla Hakim), a Muslim, makes sexual jokes and is the mastermind behind the scandalous plan to hire dancers to distract men from fighting. Sinno reads this choice as strategic in Labaki's politics of representation, since it complicates expectations about "practicing Muslims who are often judged against their supposedly more 'open-minded' and sexually liberated Christian compatriots" (2017, p. 632).

In the end, men and women, Muslims and Christians, they all go to bury Nassim and Labaki's voice returns:

My story is now ending for all those who were listening. Of a town where peace was found while fighting continued all around. Of men who slept so deep and woke to find new peace. Of women still in black, who fought with flowers and prayers instead of guns and flares. And to protect their sons destiny then drove them to find a new way.

The men carry the casket in sorrow and at peace with themselves and each other, and then stop, turning to the right and to the left. "Where do we go now?," they ask. This unanswered question reveals the uncertain future of the country, but it also has a particular context in the film. The fact that it is raised means that the sectarianism translated into space on opposite sides of the cemetery has been put into question and for the first time the cemetery (and the village) is viewed as one, even though the two religions bury their dead in different ways. Coexistence means existing side by side with

differences that are not erased, or even merely tolerated, but acknowledged and respected.

### **Conclusion: filming war, screening peace**

These four films do not ignore the complexities and difficulties of violent social conflict, particularly the fanaticism and dehumanization it fosters. But they also avoid the facile representation of Lebanon as a country that is inexorably torn apart between two religious groups. They show two worlds as one, depicting how Muslims and Christians live and die together in the midst of war. There are other cinematic works that touch on the subject discussed in this chapter, most notably *The Explosion (Al-Infijar, 1982)*, directed by Rafic Hajjar, but they lack the same kind of connection with the reality of the civil war. *The Explosion* tells the love story between a Muslim and a Christian in Beirut during the war, but it does not include the partition of the city in the depiction.

The first three films analyzed are fictions, but they document the war. The last one, Labaki's film, even though it takes place in an imagined place and includes fantasy elements, it does tackle the aspect of separation and conflict that are not only dramatic but also contextual to Lebanon. Each of them puts forward a depiction of Muslims and Christians living simultaneously separated and connected during the civil war. *West Beirut* and *In the Battlefields* capture the war more directly. *Beirut the Encounter* and *Where Do We Go Now?* do it more indirectly and keep it off-screen, especially the latter. Each film presents dramatic conflicts influenced by the ongoing war, but also the possibility of peaceful coexistence between the two religious communities in divided Beirut and in an isolated village pulled apart by hate. So we can say that they film war as well as screen peace. War is not looked upon as inescapable or peace as effortless. In the context of this study, it is worth calling attention to the fact that these Lebanese films explore the intricacies and hardships of living through war and building peace together.

### **References**

- Arbid, Danielle. 2004. "Domestic Battlefields: Danielle Arbid on 'Maarek Hob'." Interview by A. Jaafar, *Bidoun*, Vol. 2. <http://archive.bidoun.org/magazine/02-we-are-old/domestic-battlefields-danielle-arbid-on-maarek-hob-by-ali-jaafar>. Accessed 15 June 2017.
- Armes, Roy. 2015. *New Voices in Arab Cinema*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Committee on the Rights of the Child – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2015. *Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Lebanon 2005–2014*. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/LBN/4-5&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/LBN/4-5&Lang=en). Accessed 20 January 2018.

- Dyer, Rebecca. 2010. "Representations of the Migrant Domestic Worker in Hoda Barakat's 'Harith Al-Miya' and Danielle Arbid's 'Maarek Hob'." *College Literature* 37, no. 1: 11–37. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.0.0101>. Accessed 25 June 2017.
- Fisk, Robert. 2001. *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Galavan, Sarah L. 2016. "Flipping the Script: Nadine Labaki's 'Where Do We Go Now?'" *Cleo: A Journal of Film and Feminism* 4, no. 2. <http://cleojournal.com/2016/08/18/flipping-the-script-nadine-labakis-where-do-we-go-now>. Accessed 13 July 2017.
- Ginsberg, Terri and Chris Lippard. 2010. *Historical Dictionary of Middle Eastern Cinema*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press.
- Hourani, Najib. 2008. "The Militiaman Icon: Cinema, Memory, and the Lebanese Civil." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8, no. 2: 287–307.
- Khalaf, Samir. 1987. *Lebanon's Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Khatib, Lina. 2008. *Lebanese Cinema: Imagining the Civil War and Beyond*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Khatib, Lina. 2011. "Lebanese Cinema and the Representation of War." In *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence*, edited by J. Guglerp, 134–145. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Labaki, Nadine. 2011. "Interview with Nadine Labaki – Director of 'Where Do We Go Now?'" Interviewed by M. Silverstein, *IndieWire*, September 13, 2011. [www.indiewire.com/2011/09/interview-with-nadine-labaki-director-of-where-do-we-go-now-212088](http://www.indiewire.com/2011/09/interview-with-nadine-labaki-director-of-where-do-we-go-now-212088). Accessed 11 July 2017.
- Mostafa, Dalia S. 2014. "The Child Torn Between War and the Adult World: 'In the Battlefields'." In *Arab Feminisms: Gender and Equality in the Middle East*, edited by Jean S. Makdisi, Noha Bayoumi, and Rafif Rida Sidawi, 279–288. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Muhanna, Elias. 2010. "Abolishing Confessionalism in Lebanon: A Poll by Information International." *Qifa Nabki*, February 23, 2010. <https://qifanabki.com/2010/02/23/abolishing-confessionalism-in-lebanon-a-poll-by-information-international>. Accessed 12 June 2017.
- Salibi, Kamal. 1976. *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958–1976*. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books.
- Salibi, Kamal. 2009. *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Sawalha, Aseel. 2014. "After Amnesia: Memory and War in Two Lebanese Films." *Visual Anthropology* 27, nos. 1–2: 105–116.
- Sinno, Nadine. 2017. "'May the War Be Remembered but Not Repeated': Engendering Peace in Nadine Labaki's 'Where Do We Go Now?'" *College Literature* 44, no. 4: 615–643. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2017.0036>. Accessed 25 June 2017.
- United States Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. 2015. "Lebanon 2015 International Religious Freedom Report." *International Religious Freedom Report for 2015*. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/256489.pdf>. Accessed 15 January 2018.