Representation of Lebanese Women's Identity
in *Capernaum* Film

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Abstract

The film *Capernaum*, directed by Nadine Labaki, offers a poignant portrayal of Lebanese women's identity and delves into the complexities of gender, culture, and society. The study aims to critically analyze the depiction of Lebanese women's identity through a qualitative study, examining cinematic elements, character identities, and narrative structure. The film's portrayal of female characters, Souad, Sahar, and Rahil, highlights societal expectations and cultural contexts that shape women's identities. These characters are shaped by societal expectations and cultural and social contexts, including gender-based violence and traditional gender roles. The study employs textual analysis to investigate the representation of Lebanese women's identity and patriarchal culture in the film. Moreover, the findings reveal that women's identity concepts in *Capernaum* are characterized by the need to meet beauty standards, dependency on men, obedience to men, and adherence to traditional gender roles. The film also portrays the struggles of women in patriarchal society, including feelings of powerlessness, insecurity, and low self-esteem. The study contributes to academic knowledge by providing a nuanced understanding of Lebanese women's identity and its representation in the film *Capernaum*, enriching the analysis of film studies, and offering insights into the societal expectations and cultural contexts that shape women's identities.

Keywords: film analysis, identity, representation, patriarchal culture

Introduction

Deciphering the narrative structure aids in revealing the intricacies of Lebanese women's identities in the movie. Employing a textual approach offers a methodical and comprehensive examination of the film's components, which is directly in line with the study goals. In order to address the representation of Lebanese women's identities in *Capernaum's* film, a constructionist approach is required. The film *Capernaum* explores the identities of Lebanese women in patriarchal cultures, and this domain of cinematic storytelling goes beyond simple amusement to serve as a bridge the main issue. This research goes beyond the screen to examine the inner workings of Asian civilizations by analyzing the complex lives of women who simultaneously create and consume cultural norms.

The portrayal of Lebanese women in the film Capernaum within patriarchal cultures and their identity. It aims to analyze how these women's identities are shaped by patriarchal

societies and feminist perspectives. The study aims to understand the struggles, aspirations, and resilience of Lebanese women and contribute to broader societal discussions. The present paper aims to strengthen the voices it represents in addition to analyzing the celluloid narrative. Through an analysis of the intricacies of Asian women's lives in patriarchal societies, this research seeks to pave the way for empowerment and stimulate scholarly conversation as well as social change. Furthermore, this thesis explores the experiences of Lebanese women in patriarchal cultures, focusing on their identity as women. It uses literature and film to raise awareness and propose solutions. The research is not just academic but also a catalyst for policy changes and social initiatives, highlighting the importance of intersectionality and societal transformation in understanding Asian women's experiences.

Stuart Hall (1997) emphasizes the importance of analyzing the representation of identity in films through various cinematic elements, such as setting, lighting, camera placement, sound, costume, make-up, point of view, and color. He also highlights the role of narrative structure in conveying meanings and understanding audience interpretation. Hall's constructionist approach also examines themes like gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as code categories like stereotypes or archetypes. In keeping with Hall's circuit, the quantity and positions of female characters in Capernaum provide a particular framework for comprehending Lebanese women's identities within the story by highlighting the influence of cultural representations on other perceptions. This viewpoint highlights the necessity of a nuanced analysis in the research to reveal the intricate layers of representation and dispel any preconceived notions, offering a fuller comprehension of the complexities of Lebanese women's identities in the film industry (Svold, 2014). This field of study examines how visual narratives in cinema contribute to the construction and reinforcement of gender norms. It involves analyzing how films both reflect and influence societal attitudes towards femininity. Researchers use theoretical frameworks like representation theory to critically evaluate cinematic texts and understand how they shape and reinforce gender norms (Yeseibo, 2018).

Olia and Sabbagh's research (2023) explores traditional gender roles in modern popular culture, specifically Manny Rodriguez's film The *Fluffy* Movie. Their study fills a gap in current research by focusing on Lebanese women in patriarchal cultures, methodologies, and cultural contexts, making each work unique and valuable. Behera's study (2015) on Sex and the City explores gender roles, female protagonists, agency, relationships, self-identity, and the intersectionality of race, class, and sexuality in patriarchal cultures.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze the narrative and cinematic elements in the film *Capernaum* to understand how Lebanese women's identity is constructed through various visual and audio components. The elements examined include setting, costume, makeup, camera placement, point of view, lighting, color, and sound. The methods use the film *Capernaum* as the primary source, and the secondary source uses other previous studies and references on the internet. Moreover, qualitative methodologies are employed to examine the film's impact by analyzing a range of online materials, including articles, news pieces, and visual content. The choice of these resources is intended to draw connections between the film's narrative of patriarchal norms in society and adhering to the principles of qualitative research. This investigation emphasizes linguistic analysis over numerical data, aiming to comprehend the essence of the subject matter. The qualitative methodology probes into the attributes, representations, contextual backdrop, and varied viewpoints related to the subject at hand, as advocated by Bryman (2008). To examine the portrayal of Lebanese

women's identity and patriarchal culture in movies, this research employs textual analysis as a qualitative method. This approach entails a thorough scrutiny of textual content within films, encompassing subtitles, to identify recurring motifs, themes, and interrelations within each film and across various films, as outlined by Rajkumar (2023).

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The Capernaum film explores women's identities through cinematic elements, plots, and code categories. Stuart Hall's constructionist approach highlights the importance of considering these elements in analyzing the film's representation of female identity. This approach aligns with Bell Hooks' feminist perspective, which seeks to challenge power dynamics and reinforce patriarchal norms. Cinematic elements, such as setting, lighting, camera placement, sound, and color, are used to challenge stereotypes and convey characters' emotions. Cinematic techniques, such as framing, angle, camera movement, sound, and editing, are crucial in filmmaking, serving specific purposes and affecting the audience's perception and emotional responses.

According to Trihastutie (2023), film components serve as technical tools to give the audience a narrative, visual, and auditory experience. Point of view, lighting, color, sound, scenery, costume and makeup, and editing are some of these components. Each of these components is a rhetorical device used to indicate what is included in the frame (scene) and help express meaning in the program. This statement supports the researcher's study, which focuses on film techniques to construct the meaning of the film. For instance, while sound design can increase a scene's emotional effect, lighting design can establish a tone or ambiance. In film, editing plays an equally important role in structuring the narrative and developing a coherent plot.

The setting in this film is mostly Lebanon Immigration Detention. The Lebanon Immigration Detention (picture 1) shows a setting mostly full of women, including teenagers, pregnant women, older women, middle-aged women, etc. Also, the setting (picture 1) shows the expression of women: sad, stressful, fearful, lost, and looking like a living corpse. This could mean they got foul treatment and were not getting enough food. The choice of Lebanon Immigration Detention as the dominant setting allows the audience to empathize with Rahil, an Ethiopian woman who is a mother, and understand the difficulties she faces in being separated from her child if she is found to have one. The setting also serves to showcase the emotional and psychological struggles of women who have been living in Lebanon for a long time, highlighting their plight and the challenges they face in their daily lives. By choosing this setting, Nadine Labaki aims to raise awareness about the issues faced by immigrants, particularly women, in Lebanon and to evoke a sense of empathy and understanding among viewers.

Picture. 1 Capernaum
Lebanon Immigration Detention
(00:50)
Source: Netflix

After watching the film Capernaum, the researcher concludes that the film's characters wear casual costumes and natural make-up to give an image of their mood and personality. This choice is intentional on the part of the filmmakers to create a realistic and relatable portrayal of the characters, particularly Souad (picture 2), who is shown wearing a pink t-shirt and natural make-up. The casual dress code is meant to convey a sense of simplicity, relaxation, and comfort, indicating that the characters do not prioritize their appearance over their activities. In the case of Souad (picture 2), her casual attire and natural make-up are used to depict her as a housewife who is preoccupied with taking care of her many children without her husband's help. The tired and sad expression on her face further emphasizes her emotional state, suggesting that she is overwhelmed and stressed. The use of casual costumes and natural make-up helps to create a more authentic and relatable portrayal of the characters, allowing the audience to empathize with their struggles and understand their personalities better.

Picture. 2 Capernaum

Casual Outfit and natural make up
Source: Netflix

Capernaum is a film using the 3rd point of view, which mostly uses medium-long shots. The medium-long shot (picture 3) shows Souad's gesture and facial expression, which can be assumed to be infuriated. The medium-long shot also shows the object's formal character interactions with other characters in one frame. A hip-level shot is used to show the actions of the characters in the frame, and you can clearly see the reactions given by the other characters surrounding the formal object character, namely Souad. In general, the researcher concludes that Souad's identity as a woman can be seen in Picture 3, where the data shows the reaction of the male character, which is Souad's husband, when there was a flood in their house. Only Souad cleaned the house with the help of their children. Meanwhile, the presence of Souad's husband, Selim, just sat cross-legged casually and smoked his cigarette without helping at all. From this statement, it can be concluded that there are different roles between women and men. Men are symbolized as alphas who dominate and regulate the environment, while women live to take care of and obey the alpha.

Picture. 3 Capernaum
Medium Long Shot
Camera Range: Wide Shot
Camera Angle: Hip Level Shot
Camera Point of View: Over-the-hip shot
(12:59)
Source: Netflix

Capernaum is a film using the 3rd point of view, which usually allows the audience to see the action unfold without being limited to the thoughts or feelings of a single character. Capernaum is classified as a third-person omniscient point of view since it presents multiple characters' points of view. The film used the third point of view because the filmmaker intended to make the audience feel the emotions conveyed by the character and become involved in the character's life or become the character presented in the film. Regarding his younger sister Sahar's impending forced marriage when she is still underage, Zain's perspective is depicted in picture 4. "I would bet my arm that you are trading these chickens for Sahar, Zain even remarked. This exchange demonstrates Zain's belief that a woman may

be purchased and sold for anything, including livestock or chickens. In addition, picture 4 shows the identity of Lebanese women who have married men who will be made into servants or women who have no rights to their own lives.

Picture. 4 Capernaum
Third Person Point of View
(23:40)
Source: Netflix

Picture 5 uses key lighting to highlight the character's face, creating a visually engaging scene that captures the audience's attention and enhances the storytelling experience. The key light's color, strength, and angle significantly impact the atmosphere and tone of the scene. Mastering key lighting techniques is crucial for crafting visually engaging scenes that capture the audience's attention and enhance the storytelling experience. Proper lighting positioning in theater productions and concerts can direct the audience's attention to specific focal points, creating an immersive experience. The lighting and recording position in Picture 5 depicts Rahil as a burdened female figure in Lebanon, highlighting her depressed, weary, and sorrowful face

Picture. 5 Capernaum
Key Lightning

(56:24)
Source: Netflix

Cinematic colors are used in film and video production to create visually appealing and emotionally engaging visual experiences. They are carefully selected and manipulated through color grading to enhance mood, atmosphere, and emotional impact. In picture 6, the filmmaker uses teal and orange colors to create a cinematic look, enhancing shadows and highlights. This color combination is particularly effective in scenes aiming for drama or tension. In Figure 6, the director provides coloring in a cinematic view, focusing on Rahil, an independent woman raising her child alone, and his family, Yonas and Zain.

Picture. 6 Capernaum
Teal and Orange Color
(59:55)
Source: Netflix

Sound in cinematic elements, including dialogue, music, and sound effects, significantly impacts the viewer's experience and emotional resonance. Dialogue conveys character development and plot progression, while music underscores mood and pacing. Sound effects add texture and realism, heightening tension or providing context to on-screen events. The Capernaum film's music, produced by Khaled Mouzanar, evokes sorrow, apprehension, and resilience in the face of adversity. Background noises, such as crying women in jail, evoke despair, vulnerability, and anguish. Background sound sets the mood, contributes to realism, and serves a narrative function, reinforcing themes and character development. The music in Capernaum primarily describes the emotional treatment of female characters.

In conclusion, Capernaum masterfully employs scenes and cinematic elements to convey the struggle that happened to Lebanese women. The use of cinematic techniques, such as detailed settings and unflinching portrayals of hardship, immerses the audience in the world of the characters, making their struggles palpable and relatable. The cinematic elements, which often employ a matter-of-fact tone, add to the sense of realism, while the performances of the actresses like Souad, Rahil, and Sahar bring depth and emotion to the story. Through its cinematic language, Capernaum not only presents a commentary on societal issues but also offers a nuanced exploration of the female experience, highlighting the importance of understanding and connection in the face of adversity.

The film Capernaum features significant female characters who play crucial roles in shaping the narrative and exploring themes of feminism, identity, and gender. Rahil, an Ethiopian migrant worker, provides shelter and care to Zain, highlighting the struggles faced by undocumented immigrants. Sahar, Zain's sister, is a victim of child marriage, emphasizing the devastating consequences of this practice. Souad, Zain's mother, is portrayed as a woman overwhelmed by poverty and the demands of caring for many children, exploring themes of maternal failure and resilience. The film's narrative is woven together by the struggles and identities of these female characters, which are skillfully captured through cinematography and direction. The film's immersive perspective and use of handheld camera work and close-up shots allow audiences to empathize with the characters' journey on a visceral level, inviting empathy and introspection about the themes of resilience, dignity, and the quest for a better life.

To present the findings of the salient ideas and code categories from the scenes, this study adapted the table model from Trihastutie (2023). The table will show the salient ideas and code categories in the Capernaum film.

Scenes Correspond to Women Identity)	Description	Salient Ideas Correspond to Women Identity	Code Categories
 Capernaum (12:59) Source: Netflix	In this scene, the house was flooding, and Souad, the representative of women in the film, was busy cleaning and taking care of the children. She was overwhelmed with chores, but her husband was doing nothing to help. Instead, he was relaxing in a chair, smoking, and not lifting a finger to assist her. This stark contrast between Souad's hard work and her husband's lack of effort highlighted the gender imbalance and the unfair distribution of responsibilities in their household.	Women's work categorized as a child bearer, taking care of the children, helping and take care their husband, cleaning the house, etc.	Sexist Exploitation
 Capernaum (29:44) Source: Netflix	The scene is very intense because the female character, Sahar, is subjected to physical violence during an argument with her parents. She is forced to marry someone she does not want to. This scene highlights the gender discrimination and domination of one gender.	Women does not have power, control, or authority to make her own life decision.	Oppression

Capernaum (24:50) Source: Netflix	Sahar is having a meeting to discussed her wedding with their parents in this moment. Sahar only fourteen years old, she applied full makeup like an adult to impress her future husband, who was an adult. This scene demonstrated how women live up to the stereotype that women should be attractive, which is set by men.	Women are expected to conform to societal beauty standards, prioritizing their physical appearance over their personal identity and autonomy.	Sexism
Capernaum (23:40) Source: Netflix	In this scene, Sahar was given other items that were part of the marriage contract in exchange for a chicken. This scene may indicate that women had no worth at all because the patriarchal culture treated them like commodities to be bought and sold.	Women is worthless and represent as commodities.	Sexist Exploitation
Capernaum (31:46) Source: Netflix	In this scene, the father of Sahar defends himself in response to a question about why he forced her daughter to marry an adult man while she was still a child. "I thought marry her off at least she'll have a bed," the father replied. According to Sahar's father, women cannot exist or endure without men.	Women categorized as inferior than men	Sexism

Capernaum (51:40) Source: Netflix	In this scene, Rahil expressed her concerns about the regulations aimed at addressing the issue of illegal immigrant women who had children. She felt that these regulations created a sense of fear, worry, and pressure, as she believed there was no adequate protection for illegal immigrant women.	Women feel unsafe.	Oppression
Capernaum (53:49) Source: Netflix	From this scene, the man mentioned that Rahil was fighting as a single mother and her children should have whole parents. Rahil is a representation of a single mother who is viewed as a failed mother by society or patriarchal culture.	Divorced women labeled as failure mother or wife.	Sexism
Capernaum (58:00) Source: Netflix	In this scenario, Rahil met with baby's father to asked help but the man refused the request and asked her to leave immediately. Rahil only able to obey the man because she just a woman.	Women must obey the man.	Sexist exploitation
Capernaum (1:07:06) Source: Netflix	In this scene, the girl's strategy for selling goods involves offering prayers that focus on men, such as wishing single women to find a "good man" and married women for their husbands to be "healthy and rich." This approach highlights the societal emphasis on men and their well-being, which can be seen as a reflection of patriarchal culture.	Women are secondary than men while men are prioritized and highlighted than women	Sexism

Capernaum (1:49:44) Source: Netflix	In this scene, Souad as Sahar's mother announced her pregnant to Zain with a context replace her girl who died because of adolescent pregnancy. The girl's soul did not mean anything to the family that live in principle of patriarchy.	Women are undervalued.	Sexism

Table 1. Salient Idea and Code Category in *Capernaum*

The above table illustrates how feminist viewpoints are present throughout the entire Capernaum movie, from start to finish. Three forms of feminist perspectives exist: sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. Five acts of sexism, two sexist acts of exploitation, and oppression that were depicted in the movie scene were identified from the above table. According to Hooks (2000), sexism is prevalent in Capernaum films and manifests itself in the form of gender-based violence, discrimination, and stereotypes. Moreover, the impact of sexism on the identities of female characters such as Souad, Sahar, and Rahil is demonstrated.

Capernaum is a feminist film set in Lebanon, where sexism, exploitation, and oppression are deeply ingrained. The film follows three female characters, Sahar, Souad, and Rahil, who challenge patriarchal society's sexism, sexist exploitation, and obsession. The film explores the challenges women face in society, urging viewers to recognize and challenge gender discrimination. Lebanon's patriarchal culture emphasizes physical appearance and objectification, limiting women's opportunities and potential. The film portrays female characters shaped by social expectations and cultural context, highlighting the systemic issues that hinder women's progress.

Discussion

Women's identity is a complex concept influenced by societal expectations and feminist perspectives. Bastari (2023) suggests that women's attitudes towards gender group membership are shaped by two largely orthogonal dimensions: identification with women and identification with feminists. Hall (1997) emphasizes that identity is constructed through representation, with subjects representing something in a larger context and objects representing objects. The *Capernaum* film, from a feminist perspective, represents three female characters, highlighting their experiences and perspectives. Hooks (2000) advocates for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to women's identity, acknowledging the interlocking webs of oppression and the need to address multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. The research shows that female characters in *Capernaum,* such as Sahar, Souad, and Rahil, face discrimination, stereotypes, and patriarchal power, which contribute to their struggles. This research aims to create a more comprehensive and effective movement for women's liberation.

Conclusion

The film *Capernaum* delves into the construction of women's identities, focusing on characters like Souad, Sahar, and Rahil. Through various cinematic elements, prominent female figures, and narrative structures, the movie presents a gendered and feminist perspective. It sheds light on societal norms and cultural contexts shaping women's sense of self, exploring themes like self-doubt, anxiety, vulnerability, and despair. Ultimately, the characters of Souad, Sahar, and Rahil embody the impact of societal expectations, cultural norms, and gender-related challenges such as violence and traditional roles.

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