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P R E S S

Redefining Security in the Middle East: Representation of Security as an Emancipatory Discourse in the *Capernaum* Film

Orta Doğu'da Güvenliği Yeniden Tanımlanmak: Kefernahum Filminde Özgürleştirici Bir Söylem Olarak Güvenliğin Temsili

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ABSTRACT

The Middle East is considered as a marginalized geography and difficult to understand for Western countries due to an orientalist and postcolonial perspective. Today, Lebanon, which offers an important opportunity to understand the Middle East from the political, economic, sociological and security perspectives, is a country facing various problems such as poverty, economic and political instability, ethnic and sectarian conflicts, uncontrolled migration movements and gender inequalities. *Capernaum* is a significant and effective example in terms of reflecting different living conditions and security perceptions in the Lebanon. In this study, how the security is defined through the eyes of the people from the Lebanon and how the perception of threats is shaped by the security issues of Lebanon are examined through the compelling *Capernaum* (2018) film of Lebanese female director and screenwriter Nadine Labaki. In this respect, the qualitative thematic content analysis of the film is carried out and it is revealed how the economic, social and religious problems of the Lebanese individuals evaluated in the context of human security are reflected in the film. As a result of the analysis, *Capernaum* is an exemplary film in terms of addressing the security concerns of Lebanon with a human security and gender perspectives. However, the film cannot address the causes, historical and social origins of these problems adequately, so, this might cause disconnections in the imagination of the audience.

Keywords: Film, Lebanon, postcolonialism, human security, *Capernaum*

ÖZ

Ötekileştirilmiş bir coğrafya olarak kabul edilen Orta Doğu'nun, Batı ülkeleri için oryantalist ve postkolonyal bir bakış açısıyla anlaşılması zordur. Bugün Orta Doğu'yu siyasi, ekonomik, sosyolojik ve güvenlik açılarından anlamak için önemli bir fırsat sunan Lübnan, yoksulluk, ekonomik ve politik istikrarsızlık,

etnik ve mezhep çatışmaları, kontrolsüz göç hareketleri ve cinsiyet eşitsizlikleri gibi çeşitli sorunlarla karşı karşıyadır. *Kefernahum* (2018), Lübnan'daki farklı yaşam koşullarını ve güvenlik algılarını yansıtmak açısından önemli ve etkili bir örnektir. Bu çalışmada, güvenliğin Lübnan halkının gözüyle nasıl tanımlandığı ve onların tehdit algılarının Lübnan'ın güvenlik meseleleri tarafından nasıl şekillendirildiği Lübnanlı kadın yönetmen ve senarist Nadine Labaki'nin ilgi uyandıran filmi *Kefernahum* (2018) üzerinden incelenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, filmin tematik içerik analizi yapılmakta ve Lübnanlı bireylerin ekonomik, sosyal ve dini sorunlarının filme nasıl yansıdığı insan güvenliği bağlamında ele alınmaktadır. Analiz sonucunda *Kefernahum*'un Lübnan'ın güvenlik endişelerini insani güvenlik ve toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifleriyle ele alma konusunda örnek bir film olduğu değerlendirilmektedir. Ancak, filmin bu endişelerin nedenlerini, tarihsel ve sosyal kökenlerini yeterince ele alamaması seyircinin tahayyülünde kopukluklara neden olabilir..

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sinema, Lübnan, postolonyalizm, insani güvenlik, *Kefernahum*

INTRODUCTION

In the historical process, a colonial approach, based on the necessity of managing peoples economically and politically deprived of the ability to manage themselves and to control these threats, has been influential in the Middle East, Africa, and the Far East. In the 1960s, when the Colonialism became unsustainable both economically and politically for Western countries, such colonies began to be recognised as independent states. Although they were considered as free countries in diplomatic terms, the economic, political, cultural and social impacts of the major states were preserved in different ways. This kind of relationship, launched in the form of economic aid or political support in the postcolonial period, is causing significant damages, and conflicts that extend to the civil war in these countries.

In particular after the First World War, while the artificial boundaries drawn in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa as a product of foreign policy of Western countries - such as the United Kingdom - shattered ethnic groups in most of the areas; separated the groups, which were interconnected in the sense of language, culture, and social life, from each other caused internal problems such as conflict and civil war. These postcolonial countries, where political and economic instability is still ongoing, go beyond being perceived as a major threat to Western countries and global security; they display a rather negative picture in terms of critical security approaches that take people and emancipation to the centre. Contemporary security approaches necessitate understanding the security perceptions of people and individuals. In this regard, Lebanon, where cultures as well as ethnic and religious features are intertwined, offers an important opportunity to understand the Middle East from the political, economic, sociological and security perspectives.

The Middle East is a geography that is difficult to understand from the Orientalist point of view. In this sense, the analysis of the works of Middle Eastern artists who have grown up in the Middle East provides valuable data for understanding this geography and its problems. The works of Cinema, regarded as the youngest branch of art, have a great potential for understanding social problems like other works of art. However, in the literature rather than the works of Middle Eastern scholars or artists, the works of scholars or artists who are Western or educated in the West, attract more attention. Nadine Labaki, one of the few directors who was born and completed her education in Lebanon, and her latest film *Capernaum* is a very unique and worthy example in this respect.

This study considers examining the issues of the east, only from the perspective of scholars or artists who are Western or educated in the West, as a problem and examines the representation of Lebanese security issues in the film, which is directed by a Lebanese director who is educated and lives in Lebanon. Labaki as a director and scriptwriter tying to illustrates social, political and cultural uniqueness of the Lebanon and the Middle East in her movies is an important character to examine the security perception of the Lebanese people though her art works.

Cinema, of course, does not reflect social reality like a mirror. But it is not completely free from the reality. Cinema films reconstruct the social reality of the period and present this social reality from the perspectives of the film directors' point of view. Therefore, they provide important information for the understanding of the social and political problems of the period they were taken. In this study, how the security is defined through the eyes of the people of the Middle East and Lebanon, and how the perception of threats is shaped will be analysed through *Capernaum* in the light of critical security approaches. In the first part of the article, a short theoretical introduction will be made on the critical approaches and the perception of human security that differentiate from the classical security approaches. In the second part, the economic, political and social situation of Lebanon and the Middle East will be summarized to enable a better understanding of the current issues mentioned in the film. In the third part, how security problems are reflected in the film will be explained by using the thematic content analysis approach.

The Middle East in the Context of Changing Security Perceptions

In historical context, the reference point to define geographic regions as near, middle and far by using directions has been the position of the state itself which generally makes this definition. Similarly, the West-East distinction made by the Roman Empire determined the direction of the culture and the light of civilization located in the centre (Davison, 1960, pp. 665-675). This geographic definition, which takes it as a reference, involves a kind of cultural and social othering. The boundaries of the centre are determined by cultural, religious, historical, economic and social similarities. Therefore, East, from a cartographic point of view, is defined by Europe and North America – in other words the West - in the sense of a cultural understanding (Wallerstein, 1997, pp. 21-39). In this sense, the East is a mystery that must be discovered with its religious, cultural and social differences as well as it is the 'other' that must be kept under the political and economic control.

The borders of the Middle East indicate different geographical regions at different times. The reason for this is that the boundaries have been tried to be determined by different criteria and scientific disciplines according to different interests. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the Middle East is used to refer to a region including North Africa (Bilgin, 2005, p. 114). As cited by Cleveland and Burton (2004, p. xiii), "the term Middle East refers to the region from Egypt in the west through Iran in the east, and from Turkey in the north to the Arabian Peninsula in the south." However, from a greater perspective it is possible to extend the geographical coverage to include Arab North Africa, the Sudan, and Islamic Afghanistan (Zenko, 2018).

From the state-centric realist paradigm, the Middle East has been the scene of different power struggles since it is located on the crossroads of three major religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) and trade routes such as the Silk Road, and the Suez Canal as well as it has the source of oil and its derivatives. Besides being an opportunity for energy resources, the European-centric viewpoint has perceived the Middle East as a threat to the West from the security perspective and has conceived it as a threatening object instead of a subject. In the post-Cold War era, a number of new developments, such as large-scale natural disasters, the spread of epidemics such as AIDS, and genocides as a result of ethnic conflicts, led to questioning of the realist paradigm and brought about a human-centric approach to security (Nuruzzaman, 2013, pp. 52-64). However, this understanding soon caused the return of realist paradigms with the 9/11 attacks.

After the 9/11 attacks, while the image of the Middle East remained energy centred; the countries in which internal turmoil and unstable administrations dominated begun to be seen as threats to international security. The attacks of terrorist organizations based in the Middle East such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Al Shabab caused the Western countries to focus on their own security by ignoring the expectation of the people of the Middle East in terms of security and peace. The Arab Spring, which emerged in 2010 as the general name of the popular uprisings that reached its peak in 2011, affected the countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria directly, and other Middle East countries indirectly. The people's uprisings have brought relative stability in Egypt and Tunisia but have caused a more insecure environment than before in Yemen, Libya and Syria (Hill, & Cavatorta, 2019, pp. 177-181).

According to the UNDP Human Development Report of 1994, human security is defined as a security approach that focuses on people. In this approach, security, which had been described as the absence of conflict in the sense of defending a piece of land against external threats, can be located in a human security frame paying attention to a wider spectrum including general threats from hunger to epidemics and every obstacles and pressure preventing the continuation of everyday life (UNDP, 1994). According to Kaldor (2011, pp. 441-448), human security, which means the security of individuals and the society in which they live, includes not only political but also economic, cultural and social rights. However, this concept of security, which puts the people at the centre, is considered as legitimacy provider for military interventions, as it is in Libya and Kosovo, from a critical point of view. In terms of the UN human security approach, the most recent security problems in the Middle East are formed by different concepts and subjects such as irregular immigration, civil war and chaos, economic crises, drug trafficking and abuse, poverty and employment insufficiency, inability to carry out public services, gender inequality and protection of children. In various countries, these forms of insecurity ultimately turn into a struggle to survive in dramatic living conditions. In this sense, *Capernaum* is a successful film in terms of demonstrating almost all human security concerns in the Middle East through an aesthetic and impressive story.

Socio-Economic and Political Aspects of Lebanon

Lebanon is an Arab country on the shore of the Mediterranean, neighbouring with Syria in the north and east, and with Israel in the south. Due to its demographic

diversity and location, the country faces significant problems such as regional crises, terrorism, violence, Islamism, and the diverse competing influences of both local and Western powers (Rubin, 2009, p. 1). Lebanon, which was under the rule of France during the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, became an independent state in 1943 under the leadership of the Maronite Christians who were close to the French government (Bowering, 2012, p. 314). In 1943, according to the National Pact, 'the president would be a Maronite; the prime minister a Sunni; and the parliamentary speaker a Shi'a' (Harris, 2009, p. 16). The other bureaucratic authorities and the seats in the parliament were shared based on the ratio of six to five domination of Christians to Muslims (Faour, 2007, pp. 909-921). This power sharing was grounded on the results of the 1932 census. This distribution, which was done to prevent internal conflicts, negatively affected the formation of a citizenship consciousness in the long term and caused the conflicts to be kept alive (Erdem, 2018, pp. 21-55). After the census in 1932, although there were censuses that revealed the general population in Lebanon, no discriminatory classification was made to disclose the religious structure. This demographic structure of the country, apart from a separation based on religion, also includes a cultural division between Christianity and Islam, the West and the East (Spyer, 2009, p. 197). From the administrative perspective, Lebanon is divided into six different regions. These administrative regions are North, South, Mount Lebanon, Bekaa, Nebatiye and Beirut. While the Shi'as and the Drauders live in the South, the Maronites live in Mount Lebanon and Beirut, Sunnis are in the North and the Orthodoxy resides in the Bekaa region (Soffer, 1986, pp. 197-205).

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the immigration of the Muslims living in this region of Lebanon could be seen as the first event to deteriorate the demographic balance (Bowering, 2012, p. 314). The impact of the civil war between 1975-1990 and the migration of the Sunni and Shiite Muslims from neighbouring countries to the country - despite the migrations of Maronite Christians from the country - have changed this population distribution. Due to the lack of census specifying the distribution, the exact number cannot be mentioned. The Taif National Reconciliation Accord signed in 1989, which ended the Civil War, reduced the power of the State Presidency, held by the Maronites, and brought the principle of equality in the sharing of seats and public positions in the Parliament to rebalance the influence of demographic distribution (Faour, 2007, pp. 909-921). In the 1975-1990 Civil War, the increasing number and impact of the armed Palestinians in the country, the unjust distribution of prosperity and economic wealth, and international interventions

had a great impact on the instability of the country as well as the uneven power-sharing between Christian and Maronites (Haddad, 2009, pp. 398-416). Beyond these reasons, ongoing conflicts of the country have been as a result of contested foreign interests patronizing factions and supplying arms and ammunitions to the armed groups (Badran, 2009, p. 35).

According to Soffer (1986, pp. 197-205), the demographic distribution of Muslims and Christians was balanced by the time, but the most increase in the country has occurred in the Shiite population. This has led to more claims by Shiites in terms of representation and participation in the government, and to further tensions of the past in the country's politics (Cleveland, & Burton, 2004, p. 384). The instability created by this demographic structure with deep religious differences in the country is also seen in the economic area. The fact that the Lebanese ports that are the point of sale for the Middle East oil and the developing services and banking sector brought the country's economic situation to a very good level in the 1970s. The unequal distribution of this economic wealth had a potential to create conflicts. The majority of the country's economic activities have been in the hands of the Maronites, and Muslims constitute the poorest sections of the society. However, the 1975-1990 civil war between Muslims and Christians undermined the country's infrastructure and economy; and reduced the country's income by almost half. Similarly, the political killings and the interventions of Israel and Syria in the country also had negative effects on the economy. The economic and infrastructural improvement, "aiming at rapidly rehabilitating and enhancing the country's severely damaged infrastructure in preparation for private sector–led growth over the medium term" (Rapheli, 2009, p. 113) that started with Prime Minister Hariri, a wealthy businessman backed by Saudi Arabia, has been hampered by the Syrian crisis in 2011 and the influx of large-scale refugees (Rizkallah, 2017, pp. 2058-2076; Hansen, 2014, pp.19-37).

In addition to the sensitivity of Lebanon's demography, its location in a region between Israel and Palestine has caused it to be directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict and this conflict has deeply affected the country's economic, political and social life. Due to the Six-Day War in 1967, there was a large influx of Palestinians. As a result of the Treaty of Cairo signed by the Lebanese Government in 1969, which allowed the Palestinians the right to freedom of movement, work and armed struggle against Israel, the country was transformed into a base for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) of Yasser Arafat (Siklawi, 2010, pp. 601-603). The first foreign intervention in the

Country was carried out in 1976 by Syria, who was concerned about this relationship with the PLO. Israel carried out one of its largest intervention in 1982, and as a result of this intervention, the PLO had to move from the country to Tunisia, while Syrian troops were also withdrawn from the country (Cleveland & Burton, 2004, p. 388). This movement of Israel further accelerated the emergence of ethnic and sectarian radical resistance structures such as the Amal (Lebanese Resistance Brigade) and Hezbollah (the Party of God) Movements, in the country (Traboulsi, 2012, p. 229). Israel's bombings in South Lebanon affected many Shiites as well as Palestinians living in this region. As a result of the internal migration, the city of Beirut was surrounded by a poor and so furious class that lived in the slums (Cleveland, & Burton, 2004, p. 388). This situation, also seen in the film, has been an important factor that facilitates groups such as Amal and Hezbollah to support them.

In the period of reconstruction policies initiated by Prime Minister Hariri after the Civil War, the two influential external forces in the country were also Syria and Israel. Despite the withdrawal of Israel from the country in 2000, the killing of three Israeli soldiers and taking two prisoners as a result of a Hezbollah attack on July 12, 2006 escalated tensions. In the 34-daily retaliation against Israel, which lasted until August 14, 2006, 1.191 Lebanese and nearly 119 Israeli soldiers and 43 Israeli civilians lost their lives, many Lebanese citizens had to emigrate, and major infrastructure facilities of the country were damaged (Tür, 2007, pp. 109-122). The cost of this short war was very high for Lebanon.

Syria also tried to maintain its presence in the country. However, on February 14, 2005, the fact that it was held responsible for the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri caused the protests known as the Cedar Revolution by escalating the anti-Syrian opposition, which led to the withdrawal of Syria from the country in mid-2005 (Cleveland, & Burton, 2004, pp. 548-550). Following this withdrawal, Lebanon witnessed bombings, assassinations and assassination attempts in 2005-2008 (Hermez, 2017, p. 39). During this period, the political life of the country was divided into two main camps as the pro-Syrian "March 8 Coalition" of Hezbollah and Amal, and the anti-Syrian "March 14 Coalition", led by the Future (Mustakbel) Movement and Saad Hariri as the leader, which follows pro-Western policy. Although the rivalry between Maroni and Sunni was still continuing in the country, the Maronites and Muslims were mixed in these two camps. In other words, Christians are also split between these two political fractions (Farha, 2009, p. 89). These two camps in the politics of

Lebanon are also directly influenced by World politics. While Hezbollah is supported by Iran and Syria, the Future Movement is supported by Western countries, especially the US and Saudi Arabia (Hubbard, & Saad, 2018).

Another important factor affecting the political, economic and social structure in Lebanon is the Syrian civil war that started in 2011. Due to this war, more than one million refugees have brought important problems. On the other hand, Hezbollah took part in this civil war with Bashar Assad with its armed elements. This situation has already strengthened the characterization of Hezbollah as an armed illegal organization, which has already drawn the West's reaction due to the Iranian influence and the presence of the armed wing. For example, the US accepts Hezbollah as a terrorist organization with all its elements and imposes heavy economic sanctions. In February 2019, the United Kingdom adopted the Movement as a terrorist organization that threatened the stability of the Middle East (Barrington, 2019). On the other hand, members of the European Union, especially Germany, call only Hezbollah's armed wing as a terrorist organization.

Lebanon, as a country founded on religious, sectarian and ethnic differences, has been the scene of economic and political struggles of these groups in the historical process. These struggles are not only the internal affairs of the country but are also directly influenced by the Middle East policies of international actors. Political groups in the country carry out policies in line with the interests of international actors who support them. These civil wars in the country cause an everyday life in which people do not feel safe in social, economic and political terms. The country is also confronted with threats such as refugee influxes and attacks that have occurred due to ongoing civil wars and turmoil in the region covering Africa and the Middle East. The Arab-Israeli tension and the activities of the armed groups bring about physical threats such as explosion and air bombardment in everyday life. On the other hand, enormous imbalance and poor management in economic problems and income distribution are other important factors that create fear and insecurity on people. Although Lebanon has a relatively educated population; as a result of these negativities, important problems such as lack of education, early marriages, gender inequality, drug use are also on the security agenda of the country. This situation of Lebanon makes a great contribution to the understanding of the socio-economic and political troubles of the entire Middle East. From a local point of view, *Capernaum* is able to mention all of these human security problems with convincing and uncomplicated fiction.

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

Aim

Today, due to the developments in the field of globalization, communication and transportation, the domestic turmoil in a country can affect the developed country, which is miles away, in terms of security through both capital and human mobility. In this sense, the Middle East has become an effective geography in global politics and security issues more than ever before. Therefore, there is a need for a better understanding of the wider region, including the Middle East and even its geographically neighbours, in terms of sociological, religious, denominational, geographic and demographic features. The multi-religious, multi-language and multi-ethnic social and political structure of Lebanon makes the country a prototype of the Middle East. Moreover, until the Civil War that started in the 1970s, Lebanon was one of the most developed countries of the Middle East with this structure. The capital city Beirut became known as the "Paris of the East," attracting Arab money and causes, intellectuals and opportunists, artists, intelligence agencies and revolutionaries. Beirut became the democratic liberal capital of the Middle East, while other Arab cites were constrained by socialist and Communist trends. Beirut, with its Swiss model of banking secrecy and extensive banking sector, was regarded as a safe haven for wealthy Arabs, especially Syrians and Egyptians. The city was the business centre of the Arab world but also an intersection of international interest in the region as well as a centre for the Soviet and U.S. struggle for the Cold War supremacy (Haytayan, 2006, p. 87). With all these features, Lebanon is an important start to get to know the Middle East better.

The aim of this study is to provide a contribution to the efforts for a better understanding of the social fabric and security concerns of the Lebanon. The analysis of the Lebanon's human security concerns and social problems through the journey of a twelve-year-old child narrated by a local artist provides significant contributions to the field. Thus, the studies aim to answer this question, in the film *Capernaum*, which security issues and social problems of the Lebanon in general and of Lebanon in particular are represented, and how are these issues represented?

Methodology

The concept of human security, which focuses on the individual security problems that people face in their daily lives, differs from the classical security approaches and

argues that the concept of security includes political, economic, cultural and social spheres of individuals' life. Although this approach seems quite humane at first glance, it provides a legitimate ground for the powerful states to interfere in the internal affairs of others and even to conduct military operations against them, and this leads to deeper problems especially in underdeveloped or developing countries. Lebanon is an important example in this sense.

Artworks give important clues in understanding the history and problems of a country. Thus, the cinema, which is the youngest art branch, has significant potential. In this study, security issues of Lebanon, increasing exponentially after the Syrian crisis in 2011, are examined through the compelling *Capernaum* (2018) film of Lebanese female director and screenwriter Nadine Labaki. In this respect, the qualitative content analysis of the film is carried out and it is revealed how the economic, social and religious problems of the Lebanese individuals evaluated in the context of human security are reflected in the film.

The Middle East is considered as a marginalized and abstruse for Western countries having an orientalist perspective. In this sense, *Capernaum* is a significant example in terms of reflecting different living conditions and security perceptions in the Middle East. At that point, another important issue that must be underlined is that Labaki is a rare feature filmmaker of her generation not to be educated abroad (Armes, 2015, p. 21). In this regard, the representation idea of the Stuart Hall can be interpreted as a theoretical tool to understand the importance of the Labaki's contribution. According to Hall (1982, p. 60), representation is "the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of an already existing meaning". There is a certain difference between the reality and the meaning created by the author. The reason for this difference is the cultural and ideological standpoint of the author. As well as the author, the meaning can be changeable for the audience due to the difference of their cultural and ideological backgrounds. From the perspective of this paper, due to the native position of Labaki, it can be considered that her narrative may be the closest form of representation to the reality. At least, for the Western audience who see the movie and its discourse through their cultural and ideological framework, her native narrative can offer a genuine explanation.

In this study, thematic analysis was used as an approach that allows to reveal which themes the discourse is mostly developed around (Dursun, 2001, p. 203). Thematic

content analysis is a type of analysis based on the synthesis of a study in a field by creating themes and templates from a critical perspective (Çalık, Ünal, Coştu, & Karataş, 2008). The content can be any documents and communication artefacts such as newspaper news or articles as well as television news, TV series, films, radio programs, and cinema films. It is an approach mainly used for analysing written and visual data. In this approach, a deductive path is followed. The researcher primarily develops categories related to the research topic. It involves handling qualitative researches in a certain area with a qualitative understanding and revealing the similarities and differences comparatively (Çalık, & Sözübir, 2014, p. 34). Thematic analysis was used in this study to see which themes and templates are presented in the related scenes. In this regard, how the film *Capernaum* reflects the security problems perceived by the people of Lebanon have been examined in this study. During the Analysis, conversations between various characters and what these conversations pointed to are also focused on the meanings produced by the cinema because it is a visual art. What problems were excluded and what problems were built by being taken to the camera frame, and the meanings that certain indicators pointed to in this build process are revealed.

FINDINGS

Representation of Security as an Emancipation Discourse in the *Capernaum* Film

As in almost all areas of the social sciences and art, a Western-centred approach to security studies is often used. This tendency is seen either explicitly or indirectly in both the west-centric and classical approach as well as in critical approaches. From the perspective of critical approaches, the East is still treated as if it needs the economic and military resources of the West in order to get rid of the underdevelopment and poverty as well as the environment of violence and conflict, which is largely due to the neo-colonial and neoliberal approaches of the West. In this sense, the opportunities offered by the West in terms of security and development are prone to create dependencies rather than emancipation (Barkawi, & Laffey, 2006, pp. 329–352). This can be changed by supporting local efforts to understand the East and giving more attention to them. Thus, *Capernaum* should be considered as a very meaningful effort. It is a valuable effort to try to make sense of the security problems of Lebanon, which is one of the most important countries of the Middle East, from the perspective of a Lebanese intellectual woman director.

Nadine Labaki is a rare director of Lebanon and the Middle East, who began her career without any education in Western countries. Labaki, who was born in Beirut in 1974, studied visual arts at the Saint-Joseph University of Beirut. Her career began with *11 Rue Pasteur* (1997), the award-winning short film, which she took during her university years (Armes, 2015). She shot clips for commercials and well-known Middle Eastern singers (Hottell, & Pallister, 2011, p. 73). Her first feature film *Caramel* was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2007 and at many prestigious festivals, including the Toronto Film Festival (Fernández, 2014, p. 77). After that film, Labaki directed another film named as *Where Do We Go Now?* in 2011, and she also starred in it. This film won the award at the Toronto Film Festival. *Capernaum* is the last film of Labaki in 2018. *Capernaum* was rewarded with the Cannes Film Festival Jury Special Award and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

As the third film of Labaki, *Capernaum* tells the story of Zain, a twelve-year-old child sentenced to five years on charges of injury, who sues his father Selim (Fadi Kamel Youssef) and his mother Souad (Kawthar Al Haddad) for the reason that they brought him into the world and caused all the trouble he faced. By appearing as the lawyer of Zain, Labaki positions herself as an advocate of women, children and all people who have experienced these events in Lebanon. In this sense, instead of being behind the screen as both the screenwriter and the director, Labaki expresses her feelings, thoughts and beliefs as a character who speaks from within the story. *Capernaum* carries the story of Zain, a 12-year-old boy who is brave and able to survive in the streets, on the screen. Zain runs away from his home as a reaction to the irresponsible parents forcing his younger sister to marry at a child's age. Zain looks for a way to survive, at a funfair where normal children are taken to have fun. In this search, he meets the Ethiopian refugee Rahil (Yordanos Shiferaw) and her little baby Yonas (Boluwatife Treasure Bankole). While Rahil takes Zain under her wing, Zain also helps her by looking after Yonas. However, this dramatic atmosphere becomes even more difficult when Rahil is detained for staying illegally in the country. Without knowing the results, Zain, thinking that the baby will be taken care of, is forced to give Yonas to a person named Aspro (Alaa Chouchniye) who is engaged in human trafficking. This human trafficker says that he can take Zain to Europe if he brings his ID documents. When Zain returns home for the documents, he learns that his sister, Sahar, died with a haemorrhage as a result of her pregnancy. Then, he is sentenced to five years in prison for injuring the man with whom his sister was forced to marry. While he serves his sentence, he connects to a television program from the prison and states that he is complaining about his parents who are

responsible for all his experiences by giving birth to him. With the help of the female lawyer (Nadine Labaki) who is aware of the program, he carries his complaint to the court. In reality, the acceptance of this appeal by a court does not seem a realistic approach. However, Labaki fictionalises this trial as a virtual court in the mind of the audience. Thus, while she represents herself as a lawyer of children and women of the Middle East, she aims at the hearts and minds of the audience, especially the Western audience. In this regard, she tries to build a native narrative which claims implicitly that it is the most realistic perspective of the real situation in the country.

Meaning of Security at the Grassroots Level

In the film, the story of Zain reveals almost all security problems faced by people in Lebanon and the Middle East, especially women and children. The main security issues can be listed as child abuse, child labour, child bride, gender inequality, illegal immigrants, illegally employed refugees / immigrants, drug abuse and smuggling, the concept of boundaries and the absurdity of these artificial barriers in the age of globalization, the fact that there is a need of a document to prove the existence and identity of the people, racial discrimination, marginalization and fear of the other. These are the well-known human security issues and social problems of 'the Third World' countries that can be seen in official reports of international organizations (Nuruzzaman, 2013). The director uses the general plan shots frequently from the beginning of the film to project miserable and heart-breaking situations of the back streets of Beirut with the old, poor, unorganized neighbourhood and cracked buildings, as a prototype of Lebanon and the Middle East. Especially, in these shots made from the upper angle, the weakness of the country and the people living here and the desperation and helplessness they faced are reflected effectively. These technical usages enable the narrative to be more effective than the official reports to build the representation of the situation in the country. The film depicts the Middle East as a chaotic geography where many security threats and social problems coexist and where human tragedies occur. It already takes its name from this chaotic landscape. *Capernaum*, which means chaos in French, is also mentioned in the Bible as a place that is cursed by Jesus. The director gives such a name to the film and establishes a historical continuity of the relationship between the present situation of Lebanon and the place mentioned in the Bible. In this regard she builds a strong link between the virtual narrative and historical reality of the region in terms of social and political life.

The main theme of the film is child abuse and a childhood that is not lived as it deserves. Zain has no ID documents; thus, he does not exist in a legal sense. Through this issue, the film interrogates the value and existence of human beings in the Middle East. An individual to ask for basic rights has to prove her/his existence with a piece of paper given by the state authority. Long-term and high-intensity conflicts, large-scale human mobility across borders, widespread and serious human rights violations, humanitarian needs and non-compliance with the law of war are also important topics in the agenda of international initiatives for the protection of children (Bilo, & Machado, 2018). Many of these issues are addressed in the film. Zain is just one of the children who have to live on the streets in any country in the Middle East. Consequently, the child, who was brought to the court with his hands in handcuffs due to the economic, political and social structure of the region, represents all the children of the Middle East.

In other words, Zain wants justice in the court for all children who are exposed to these security threats without any choice. The allegations that Zain said aloud in the courtroom generally underline the problems that many children living in these areas cannot raise and are ignored. As seen in the film, children who play with wooden guns in their hands and children wandering for hours to sell something on the streets can laugh without even realizing the misery of the conditions they live in. The background of these scenes are the messy and ruined streets and neighbourhoods of the Beirut in which the refugees of the internal conflicts and the Syrian civil war (Cleveland, & Burton, 2004, p. 388). Therefore, life for children in this region causes early maturation and even maturation without experiencing childhood. That is why, at the amusement park where normal children go for fun, Zain seeks to survive rather than simply having fun.

When viewed by Western audience that feel secure economically, politically and socially, the film reveals the truths, which they may have difficulty in realizing, in a very disturbing and striking manner. The issue of getting girls to be married at a young age is revealed with all the nakedness from different angles. It is a pragmatist and inhuman motive for the mother and father to marry their daughters to Assad (Nour el Husseini), who is also their landlord and relatively rich, in exchange for money. Selim (Fadi Kamel Youssef) justifies the situation in the court with these words;

> To get her out of her misery. She's dead with us, your Honor. She barely has a bed to sleep in. She hardly eats or drinks, barely showers... Never watches TV. I thought, "Marry her off. At least she'll have a bed." A real bed. With a blanket. She'll eat.

It can be seen that they try to legitimize this marriage as a good opportunity for their daughter to have better living conditions and to protect their honour in an unsafe environment. What happened to Zain's sister, Sahar, is considered as a widespread and deep security issue to many women who have been forced to live in harsh conditions in refugee camps and countries where conflict and internal turmoil caused humanitarian tragedies.

Gender and Migration Perspectives of Security

An important example of the fear and security concerns posed by conflict, civil war, immigration and economic difficulty on women is the case of Ethiopian refugee Rahil and her baby. During her journey to get a good education and to achieve good living conditions, Rahil lives a life that turns into a struggle for survival with her little baby. She lives in a shanty shack in the slums of the city, trying to stay in the country with IDs and work permits provided by illegal means. Rahil conveys to the audience the despair of many refugee women who think that she does not have any rights in this difficult situation and that there is no official or civilian organization that can help her. Labaki points out a reality that despite the global humanitarian efforts, people of this region feel themselves alone.

Another striking fact that Labaki tries to explain through Rahil is that neo-liberal economic policies and capitalism lead societies to conspicuous consumption and that individuals can pursue social status despite poverty and civil war. In one scene of the film, Rahil must be transferred to another employer to remain in the country. In this scene, Harout (Joseph Jimbazian) pretending the employer of Rahil says he will get a Filipino servant because having a Filipino servant is more prestigious in society. Beyond the commodification of the female body and labour, it has become a symbol of status in a similar manner to the logic of 'the Leisure Class of Veblen'; it is striking that even human labour has become a part of global consumption. Although the commodification of labour has been discussed in the market since the late 1800s with the development of trade union rights and the increase of class consciousness; the new situation is that the commodification of labour is increasingly changing by even crossing the line of the precarious work, and that identity, external appearance and behaviours are also a part of consumption by becoming a sold product in the market. The identity of the Filipino servant is an object of consumption, which has a reputation and a recipient in Lebanon. This shows that modern slavery continues in different forms. From a Western

perspective, it is difficult to understand and explain this process which is unusual in a modern society. At this point, the Labaki's standpoint as a local narrator comes into prominence.

Syrian Refugees as a Problem and as a Cause

Another important issue in the film is the situation of Syrian refugees. This issue is also mentioned through the fantasy of going to Sweden, that belongs to a Syrian girl named Maysoun, who is 10-12 years old and trying to earn her living by selling something on the street. After Maysoun arrives in Lebanon as a refugee in order to survive the civil war, Maysoun's dream of smuggling into Sweden with the expectation of better living conditions reflects the imagination of many people who have to live under dramatic conditions in MENA countries. This situation indicates that immigration is no longer human mobility from one country to another; it also underlines the fact that it has become a continuum (Graham & Poku, 2000). Maysoun states that;

> [She will go] To Sweden. There's a neighborhood full of Syrians there. No one asks what are you [sic.] doing here. No one messes with you. I'll have my own room, no one comes in without knocking. I choose who can come in and who can't. Kids there, they die only from natural causes.

With these words, Labaki illustrates the reality of being a child in the Middle East and their expectations. For a child living in the Middle East, daily routine – even the cause of death – of an ordinary child in the West seems as a miracle. The story of Maysoun is very important for understanding the criminal networks that exploit people's despair and the human tragedies that direct them to these networks. On the other hand, when Zain asks Maysoun about the food aid she replies that he is not a Syrian refugee, he is Lebanese. That's why he cannot get food aid. Therefore, the fact that Zain received food aid by acting as a Syrian asylum seeker is also an important contradiction. While there are families with children who live on low income and have bad conditions in the country, the disturbance and conflict environment created by the arrival of the Syrian refugees in the society has been discussed in an interesting way. Labaki illustrates the different aspect of the refuge crisis due to the Syrian civil war breaking out in 2011 (Hansen, 2014, pp.19-37). This tragic situation is a common scene for the other countries accepting refugees from Syria.

Reality of the Everyday People

Another important feature of the film is that actors and actresses are not professionals and they have similar life experiences in real life as they exhibit in the film (Aridi, 2018). Zain Al Rafeea, although acting as a Lebanese boy, is the child of a family who had to emigrate due to civil war in Dara, Syria. He is a refugee child who has no chance of getting a good education or even sleeping in bed for one night. In the role of his sister, Sahar (Cedra Izam) is the daughter of a Syrian refugee family in a similar way to Zain. Rahil (Yordanos Shiferaw) is also a refugee woman in her thirties, born in Asmara, the capital of Ethiopia, in real life. She lost her mother and father at a young age and started living on the streets. Just like her two sisters, she started working as a cleaning lady in Beirut. However, she escaped because of the attitude of the employer and continued to live in Lebanon illegally. Yordanos was taken into custody as she was illegally found in the country during the filming and was allowed to continue filming with the help of Nadine Labaki and Khaled Mouzanar. Yonas (Boluwatife Treasure Bankole) is a refugee child born in Beirut as the daughter of a Nigerian father and a Kenyan mother who came to Lebanon as cleaners. It is also an interesting detail that the baby girl portrays the role of a boy in the film. Treasure was also left alone and looked after by the set team because her parents were detained due to the lack of their papers. The actor and the actress who play Zain's parents are modest amateurs who have similar lives. The actor who portrays the role of the judge in the Film is a person named Elias Khoury, a Lebanese retired judge in real life.

It is also important that Labaki gathers in the courtroom all those people who have an effect on Zain's experience or witness it. It seems to be a stage designed as a chance for everyone to express themselves, especially Zain. The characters who are not seen in society are given the opportunity to defend and express themselves. The mother and father accused by Zain assert that what they have to do is a result of living conditions or faith rather than their own mistakes. The father of Zain, Selim, expresses this issue with these words;

> We're floor mats, anyone can sue us!
> …
>
> Think I'm happy my son stabbed someone? Ever think that maybe all this is not our fault? I was born and raised this way. Why blame me? If I had the choice, I'd be a better man than all of you!

The court scene appears as an important opportunity for the audience to see the different aspects of the story. In other words, there is an emphasis on the fact that nothing can be as it appears and there are different perceptions and interpretations. These scenes try to explain how easy it is to judge people, but it is also very difficult to understand them. Therefore, in the court, Zain blames not only his parents but also the ruthless conditions of life and the system that put them into this (Aridi, 2018). In the broader sense, the problem of Zain - and thus the problem of Labaki - is the policies and system imposed by the West, which are shaped on the basis of post-colonialism and neo-liberal economic interests that lead to the chaotic situation of the Middle East. Therefore, this scene shows that reality has an effect on a larger area and time than the frame.

Despite all the negativity exhibited in the film, in the last instance, Zain's being able to obtain an identity and Rahil's being able to reach his son are seen as an optimistic end of the film. However, the chaotic situation in which the Middle East is located is too serious to reach the happy ending as easily as the end of the film. In this sense, the end of Labaki is a wish to reach a happy ending for Lebanon as well as the Middle East.

Contradictory Details

In addition, there are some small but effective details in the film. For example, Western missionaries come to custody where Zain and Rahil are kept, and they sing songs. This effort does not have any positive effect, and it is only the rhetoric of entertainment. This scene refers to the efforts of the West in the Middle East. Instead of dealing with the real problems and the solutions in the region, all efforts in the Middle East are restricted with the Western-centric aims and as superficial policies cannot go beyond the discourse. At the beginning of the film, children playing with wooden weapons made by themselves in the settlements that were devastated by war and poverty is an effective example to illustrate the contradictory and chaotic environment experienced by Middle Eastern societies. These children escaped from the civil war in their countries, and witnessed the brutality of the war; however, the only game they can play, or they prefer is the war game. Therefore, weapons and death became the routine of the Middle East, even for children. Thus, Labaki attributes a different meaning to a game that can be an ordinary thing for a group of children living in a Western society. But, in this scene war games signify the despair of Labaki and the region.

Besides the intensely dramatic and gloomy images, there are a few fun images enriching the film. For example, when Zain escapes from the house, he meets an old man in a fake spider-man costume. Harout, the old man with his worn outfit and his old age, is in stark contrast to the superhero who became the consuming material of the West. Even the superheroes of the East are poor and powerless due to economic, social and political conditions. In addition, when Zain and Yonas are left alone, Zain's efforts to look after the baby can be interpreted as quite funny scenes. At the first glance, it could be funny to see Zain walking in the streets with Yonas in a pot fitted on a skateboard taken from the playing children by force, but it is tragic or even tragicomic. This image is so striking that the poster of the film also includes this visual. The fact that he feeds the baby with sugar and ice cubes, the difficulty in feeding the baby, and even selling the mixtures he prepares from Tramadol on the streets is what her mother had to do due to poverty. Thus, these issues can be interpreted as learned helplessness of the Middle East.

The presence of the state, including law enforcement agencies, is not noticeable except for the court and the prison. It is possible for Zain to be heard in the quest for justice through a television program. With such a plot, Labaki emphasizes the weaknesses of Lebanon's security forces as well as the state, while also placing the media, as the fourth force, in a position to voice the economically weak sections of society. Embedding of such intense social, economic and security-centred issue in the story of a child's short life causes the film to be criticized for its over-agitation and exploitation of poverty and human tragedy (Seghaier, 2018, pp. 229-235). However, Labaki's response is that what is happening in the film consists of those in the real world; and there are even worse situations such as child rape and abuse, but they do not reflect this to the screen, and those who bring this criticism should try to understand the real world by coming out of the café shops they sit in (Aridi, 2018).

Narrative Structure of the Film

One of the most important features of the film is that the film has a classic narrative structure. The classical narrative structure is based on the concepts of mimesis and catharsis within the framework of Aristotle's dramatic understanding. While imitation and reproduction of the real life are produced by mimesis, the opportunity of purification from their soul is provided for the audience through catharsis (Bağır, 2018, p. 37). According to Aristotle, the duty of art is to purify the soul from the passions; this is done by stimulating the feelings of fear and pity in the audience (Aristoteles, 2017, p. 44).

Capernaum is a film that allows catharsis in terms of both the plot and its characters, and the camera angles and editing techniques used. Because of the long close-up shots used frequently, the characters and plot that sympathize with the audience because of the dramatic events they make, facilitate the identification of the audience. The fact that the film is a critic of the subject, which is expected to be critical in terms of its subject and aims to make the viewer think instead of relaxation, puts a narrative structure into the service of what s/he criticizes. At the end of the film, everything connects to the happy ending, causing the audience to relax.

Labaki is successful in reflecting the many security problems and social problems of both Lebanon and the Middle East to the film and using the elements of the classical narrative structure in a competent way and attracted the audience into the film. However, relations with Israel, one of the chronic problems of Lebanon, ignored the political problems among the Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims and never mentioned them throughout the film. While the socio-economic situation of the country is clearly reflected on the white screen, it never stopped to think about the reasons for this and did not direct the audience to think about them.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Within the scope of the critical security and human security approaches developed after the Cold War, beyond the political and economic threat perceptions of states, there should be a focus on the concerns of individuals and societies. In a geographic region where ethnic, religious and sectarian differences are of great importance, these issues create fragile fault lines and can easily turn into internal disturbances and conflicts. In the historical process, Lebanon also has a profile of a country in which the instability has become chronic due to the problem of economic and political power sharing among religious groups and the Arab-Israeli conflict. At a time when relatively prosperity began to manifest itself, the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War and the influx of refugees increased the sensitivities in the country in terms of economy and security.

The film of *Capernaum* is very important to illustrate the human security concerns and social problems of the Middle East from the perspective of a Lebanese director and a screenwriter through the story told by the players who live a very similar life with the film. While it is expected that putting so much trouble and concerns in a life story of a 12-year-old boy would damage the reality perception of the audience, the use of

comedy and reality elements properly prevents the creation of a great disturbance. This feature of the film enables Labaki to make the social problems and human security issues of Lebanon and the Middle East visible from gender perspective. However, it is not expected that the film addresses all the issues from many perspectives. It is natural that she excludes some important issues and different perspectives. For instance, in the film, security concerns, economic, social and political problems are mentioned, but there is not enough information about the causes, historical and social origins, so, this causes a possibility of creating disconnections in the imagination of the audience, who characterize Lebanon and the Middle East as the other (Wallerstein, 1997). In the centre of the film, there is a childhood, which cannot be lived as deserved, and gender issues are also mentioned as the main theme. The Western culture and hegemony, continuing its domination until 1943, have intervened the country's internal affairs through the power elites and rich ruling class created by the West in the post-independence period. The Arab-Israeli problem over the Palestinian issue and the Hezbollah-Israel conflict has led to the formation of camps that include domestic groups. On the one hand, Israel and its supporters, Western countries, and Iran and Syria, on the other, have influenced the country's internal politics. However, these issues cannot be noticed much in the film.

Capernaum is a significant film in terms of providing an answer and an alternative to the efforts of understanding or forming the Middle East through Western paradigms. Thus, this film, as an exemplary in terms of addressing the security concerns of Lebanon with a human security and gender perspectives, is an initiative that needs to be supported. In this context, as cited in the first part of the article according to UNDP Human Development Report (1994) and Kaldor (2011) human security is a wide frame including general threats from hunger to epidemics and every obstacles and pressure preventing the continuation of everyday life; and *Capernaum* illustrates these threats by using the stunning effects of the cinema. It is clear that watching the human suffering in Lebanon through the eyes of real characters and a native director is more effective than reading from the official reports. Although Labaki and the other characters are not experts on security issues and the politics of the Middle East, it is very important to understand the security perception the people through the native narratives according to human security approach.

However, the fact that the film has a classical narrative structure does not seem to be compatible with the problems that it takes due to the mentioned deficiencies. The

narrative structure, which aims at relieving the audience with a sense of pity and intimidation, rather than making them think, distanced the film from its aim of being critical. *Capernaum*, which enables the audience to form an interaction with the story with the help of plotline, heroes and the camera techniques relieves the audience through happy endings solving all events at the end of the film instead of making them think. While the film, with its intense dramatic elements, makes the audience feel relieved by awakening a sense of pity for all refugee/immigrant children and women living in Lebanon and the Middle East, it causes them not to consider the reasons especially post-colonialism and orientalism. However, this narrative structure, which aims at relieving rather than making one think, enables the film to be awarded in Cannes Film Festival, watched more and to raise awareness in the public through catharsis (Bağır, 2018, p. 37).

This study is one of the first studies to try to read local security problems through the original filmmakers of that country. It is considered that works of art, especially literature and cinema, are important sources in understanding the value judgments, fears, expectations and thoughts of a region and society. Thus, this study will be an important example in terms of focusing on humanitarian problems and security perceptions. It is clear that such artworks are very important for all social studies aiming at understanding the perspectives of local people living in geographies such as the Middle East, Africa and Asia. In this sense, it is of great importance to carry out similar studies in all fields of social sciences which are claimed to be western centred.

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