

Secularism in Middle Eastern Documentaries:

Filmmakers' Views, Productions, Industrial Challenges,

Limitations and Censorship

Khaldoun Hamad Shami

6527736

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the School of Art, Media, and American Studies

University of East Anglia

July 2022

© This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived therefrom must be in accordance with current UK Copyright Law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.

Abstract

Despite the familiarity of the discussions about secularism in the Middle East, it has yet to be considered for depiction in documentary films. Nevertheless, the treatment of secularism in a documentary film is challenging, not only because it is classified as a genre for the elite of the audience but also because of the problematic nature of the term in the Middle East due to connecting it to atheism, colonialism and westernisation.

This research explores the definition of secularism from the point of view of documentary filmmakers and media professionals in the Middle East. It investigates the approaches used to treat secularism as a controversial issue in the region. And it examines the limitations facing filmmakers. Finally, it shows the strategies used by filmmakers in response to the political implications in their countries and the region in general to overcome the difficulties they face in making, screening, or distributing their works.

Filmmakers in the Middle East are aware of the particularity of their region. Therefore, they prefer to adopt a Middle Eastern model of secularism that is compatible with their society's variety and define it from their personal experiences. This research investigates the discourse and films of many Middle Eastern filmmakers and producers by exploring their willingness to introduce secular values in their production and the approaches they used or prefer to use to tackle

secularism as a controversial issue in the region. The research also discusses the filmmaker's treatment of minorities and militarism as controversial issues related to secularism in the Middle East and how the filmmaker sought secularism as a solution and salvation to overcome the region's problems.

Television channels do not have policies prohibiting producing documentary films treating secularism. However, this type of production is rare and restrained by hidden censorship caused by the power structures of the television format and the majority's values, with Islam's stance on controversial societal issues on top of it. Therefore, this research explored the documentary film's efficiency in addressing secularism if treated in a cinematic style rather than the television channels' production regulated by the journalistic style and the news values.

This research is considered an addition and a foundation stone in the film studies literature as the research on secularism and the treatment of secular values in documentary films in the Middle East is an unprecedented topic. The analysis uses video-recorded face-to-face interviews as a qualitative methodology to add further depth and a severe atmosphere to gather and generate rich data for the research. The research is combined with a documentary film of the interviews conducted for this study. The film shows the methodology used and visually documents the filmmaker's different views and discussions about ideology, religion, sectarianism, authorities, industry limitation and censorship in the region.

Access Condition and Agreement

Each deposit in UEA Digital Repository is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the Data Collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission from the copyright holder, usually the author, for any other use. Exceptions only apply where a deposit may be explicitly provided under a stated licence, such as a Creative Commons licence or Open Government licence.

Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone, unless explicitly stated under a Creative Commons or Open Government license. Unauthorised reproduction, editing or reformatting for resale purposes is explicitly prohibited (except where approved by the copyright holder themselves) and UEA reserves the right to take immediate 'take down' action on behalf of the copyright and/or rights holder if this Access condition of the UEA Digital Repository is breached. Any material in this database has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the material may be published without proper acknowledgement.

Content

Abstract	03
Content	05
Acknowledgement	10
Introduction	12
Chapter one: Literature Review	
1.1 Introduction	21
1.2 Secularism: Concept and Development	22
1.2.1 Secularism definition in literature	24
1.2.2 Secularism in the Middle East	36
1.2.3 Filmmakers' understanding of Secularism as a concept	42
1.3 Discourse Analysis	45
1.4 Foucault: Power notion and discourse analysis	56
1.5 Conclusion	62

Chapter two: Research methodology

2.1 Introduction	64
2.2 Research Questions	65
2.3 Data Collection	66
2.3.1 Research Interviews and Film Analysis	67
2.3.2 Pre-Interviews Phase: Interview Design	68
2.3.3 Interviewees' Selection Process: Sampling and Gaining Access	76
2.3.4 Interview Phase	84
2.3.5 Self-Reflection	89
2.4 Post Interviews Phase: Data Organising and Analysis	93
2.4.1 Data Organising: Documentation and Transcription	93
2.4.2 The Analysis of the data	95
2.5 Conclusion	100

Chapter three: Filmmakers' Definitions and Treatment of Secularism

in Film

3.1 Introduction	103
3.2 Filmmakers' Definition of Secularism	104

3.2.1 Hady Zaccak	107
3.2.2 Jumana Saadeh	114
3.2.3 Myriam El-Hajj	124
3.2.4 Rania Rafei	132
3.3 Filmmakers' Treatment of Secularism in Film	144
3.3.1 Hady Zaccak	144
3.3.2 Jumana Saadeh	158
3.3.3 Myriam El-Hajj	167
3.3.4 Rania Rafei	184
3.4 Treatment of secularism in films of <i>West Beirut</i> and <i>Laicite, Inch'Allah</i>	202
3.4.1 <i>West Beirut</i> (1998) by Ziad Doueiri	204
3.4.2 <i>Laicite, Inch'Allah!</i> (2011) by Nadia El-Fani	209
3.5 Conclusion	215
Chapter Four: Secularism Relation to Minorities and Militarism in Film	
4.1 Introduction	218
4.2 Filmmakers and Minorities Identity in the Middle East	220
4.3 Filmmakers and Militarism in the Middle East	239

4.4 Conclusion	259
Chapter Five: Television Screening Limitation and Self-Censorship	
5.1 Introduction	262
5.2 Industry challenges: Television channels policy, limitation and work with journalists	264
5.2.1 Secularism in documentary films made for television: Case Study	270
5.2.2 Secularism and documentary production for the TV: Producers' views	282
5.2.3 Secularism and documentary production for the TV: Filmmakers views	304
5.3 Self-censorship	311
5.3.1 Family and Society: limitations created by the culture and its effect on the filmmakers' treatments approaches	311
5.3.2 Superficial and Safe description of secularism as a form of censorship: Replacement of secularism term and Audience's Taste	320
5.4 Conclusion	323

Conclusion	329
Filmography	342
Bibliography	344
Interviews	358
Appendices	
Appendix One: The research documentary	360
Appendix Two: Table - Information of the research camera interviews	361
Appendix Three: Table - Information of films in the research	363
Appendix Four: General Research Ethics Committee Letter of Approval	367
Appendix Five: Consent form, Research Information sheet, and Interviewee / Interview Information sheet	368
Appendix Six: Figures - Interviewees / Filmmakers	371
Appendix Seven: Figures – Film Posters	377

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I thank my supervisors, Prof Dr Eylem Atakav and Prof Dr Richard Hand, for their constant support and guidance. I was enormously fortunate to have had their academic supervision and personal support. They have inspired me and developed me intellectually. They have provided me with endless encouragement and have been a haven in critical times. This research would have been impossible without them.

I thank each of my interviewees for their participation in this study. They were generous with their time and knowledge—my colleagues in the film and media industry, for their support.

I am most grateful to Dr Karina Aveyard and Dr Brett Mills, who monitored my doctoral progress and offered advice and support. and to the viva examiners, Dr Geraint D'Arcy, Mr Alex Lewczuk, and Dr Sola Adeyemi, for their valuable comments on the thesis and the research in general.

I thank the academic and admin staff of the School of Arts, Media and American Studies, HUM PGR office, and the Media Suite team at the University of East Anglia (UEA) for their time and follow-ups. I have found many wonderful colleagues and friends there.

I want to thank my friend Mr Waseem Subhi for his support. Mrs Dima Shhada for her efforts in translations and editing. Dr Zahra Khosroshahi, Dr Dean Bowman, and Dr Anna Blagrove for proofreading this thesis.

Most of all, I would like to thank Sophie, Srebrevic' and Shamisky for their love and patience, especially in the last phase of this journey.

This research is dedicated to my father, Hamad As'ad Ghanim, the literature teacher, for his love, kindness and friendly encouragement. And to a thousand-year-old Roman olive tree, named after my grandmother Jameleh, standing between the mountain and the coast in the eastern Mediterranean.

Introduction

A documentary film is defined in the *Dictionary of Film Studies* as: “a practice of filmmaking that deals with actual and factual (and usually contemporary) issues”¹. Documentary films aim to educate, inform, communicate, persuade, raise consciousness, or satisfy the curiosity of the viewer, who is commonly addressed as a citizen of the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas, the German philosopher, theorises that the “public sphere” is a space where citizens can engage in an open and critical discussion about issues that affect society.² The material of a documentary film is usually selected and arranged from what already exists. It involves filming ‘real people’ as themselves in actual locations, using natural light and ambient sound. The dictionary states that filmmaking of this type dates to the earliest years of cinema; however, “the term documentary was not coined until the 1920s, when the founder of the British Documentary Movement, John Grierson, defined it as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’”. Ekaterina Tarnovskaya argues in her thesis that documentary film is “a medium that aims to capture social reality and itself to play

¹ Annette Kuhn & Guy Westwell, *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, Oxford University Press. 2012. eBook Oxford reference, accessed at: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0208>

² Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.

a social role by giving voice to marginalised communities.” She articulates that “films shape our understanding of societies that we live in and affect how we imagine social change.”³

The film is seen to occupy an ambivalent position within Pierre Bourdieu’s model of cultural hierarchy. Although he does not write systematically about cinema, Bourdieu recognised the field of film and how it was differentiated and subject to internal cultural hierarchies or ‘oppositions.’⁴ However, due to its mass appeal nowadays, cinema has been seen as a social threat and needs regulation and censorship⁵ despite its role in education and social progress, as indicated by the ‘father’ of the documentary John Grierson in the late 1920s. Tarnovskaya argues that “films are usually treated as ‘texts’ within humanities departments at universities regarding research, rather than being treated as practices by social science departments.”⁶ She says that “film is considered by the social science

³ Ekaterina Tarnovskaya, *Class, gender and cultural work in British documentary film production: Experiences, subjectivities and policy discourses*. 2021. PhD thesis, University of Essex.

⁴ P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (trans. R. Nice). London: Routledge, 1984. p. 271

⁵ Hill, J. “UK film policy, cultural capital and social exclusion.” *Cultural Trends*. Vol. 13, no. 50, 2004 pp. 29–39.

⁶ Tarnovskaya, *Class, gender and cultural work in British documentary film production: Experiences, subjectivities and policy discourses*.

disciplines an entertainment industry that does not fit in more 'serious' social science research objects such as migration, poverty, surveillance and so on".⁷

Robert J. Flaherty, one of the pioneers of documentary film-making and the forefather of ethnographic film, exerted significant influence through his pioneer documentary of Inuit life, *Nanook of the North* (1922).⁸ Flaherty after this commercially successful feature-length documentary film, he continued the development of the new genre of narrative documentary with his film *Moana* (1926). However, "critics subsequently raised questions about the truthfulness of his documentary method, which also employed dramatic techniques"⁹ and combine documentary subjects with a fiction-film-like narrative and poetic treatment. Flaherty's approach of treating documentaries was recognised worldwide and inspired many filmmakers; however, it was argued that this creativity had blurred the line between truth and fiction. Although John Grierson had defined documentary as the creative treatment of actuality Kerrigan and

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Robert (Joseph) Flaherty, *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Helicon (2018). In Helicon (Ed.). Credo Reference: https://search-credoreference-com.uea.idm.oclc.org/content/entry/heliconhe/flaherty_robert_joseph/0?institutionId=128

⁹ Critics subsequently raised questions about the truthfulness of his documentary method, which also employed dramatic techniques.

McIntyre¹⁰ argue that Grierson never thoroughly explained the meaning of the phrase 'the creative treatment of actuality'. They articulated that explanations and interpretations of the meaning of 'creative' have led to significant discussion from within the area/field of documentary studies, unlike the term's 'treatment' and 'actuality', which the academic explanations of them seem to be easily achieved within the documentary discourse according to Winston¹¹ 1995.

Kerrigan and McIntyre state, "Grierson advocates a holistic approach to the production of a creative documentary work, where choices made by documentarians are shaped by the production context, the medium and the story". Moreover, His writings "exhibit his implicit understanding of the fundamental choices and considerations that a documentary filmmaker engages in when conceiving and realising a documentary."¹²

"My separate claim for the documentary is simply that in its use of the living article, there is also an opportunity to perform creative work. I mean that the choice of the documentary medium is as gravely distinct as the choice of

¹⁰ Susan Kerrigan; Phillip McIntyre. "The 'creative treatment of actuality': Rationalizing and reconceptualizing the notion of creativity for documentary practice", In: *Journal of Media Practice*. Aug 01, 2010 11(2):111-130

¹¹ B. Winston, *Claiming the Real*, British Film Institute. London (1995)

¹² Susan Kerrigan; Phillip McIntyre. "The 'creative treatment of actuality': Rationalizing and reconceptualizing the notion of creativity for documentary practice".

poetry instead of fiction. Dealing with different material, it is, or should be, dealing with it to different aesthetic issues from those of the studio.”¹³

With this in mind, my doctoral research discusses the treatment of secularism as a controversial issue in documentary films in the Middle East by examining the discourse of filmmakers. The film's treatment is the overall effect of how all the Mise En Scene settings along the side of the filmmaker's approach come together in the scene to demonstrate the filmmaker's view for the audience. It is not only the cinematographic techniques used by the filmmaker to cultivate a story, like the framing, the angle, and the camera movement of a shot, as well as the sound and editing used in a film, but it means the filmmaker's processes and choice of tackling the topic in a direct or indirect approach, changing the controversial terms into less confronting and challenging language, and the filmmaker's choice of criticising the authorities.

The research questions are as follows:

- What is the efficiency of using interviews as the research methodology in this field of research to generate the evidence needed for academic analysis?
- How does the documentary film address secularism as a controversial societal issue in the Middle East?
- How different is treating secularism as a controversial societal issue in an independent documentary film from a TV news story?

¹³ J. Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, London: Collins, (1946). p80

- How interested is the filmmaker in presenting controversial societal issues in independent documentary film?
- According to the filmmakers and the media professionals, does this type of films have an effect in raising debates to change the audience orientation toward secularism issues in the Middle East?
- What methods are used by the documentary filmmaker to construct self-censorship in their films?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted interviews with eleven filmmakers and observed three previous interviews available on the media streams. I used discursive analysis to analyse the interviews and film analysis methodology to analyse the films I chose for the research, which are documentary films and films from other genres. The data collected demonstrates a different understanding of secularism in addition to lived experiences of secular practices, resulting in different ways of depicting such a controversial topic in the films. Finally, the thesis expands to show the filmmaker's implementation of the Mise En Scene to create their production.

I have made 52 minutes (00h:51m:50s) documentary¹⁴ of the conducted interviews with the film directors and producers who participated in this research. It presents personal views and discussions about their definition of secularism and how the interviewees depict secularism in their films. The filmmakers and TV producers across the MENA region spoke openly to the camera on ideology, religion,

¹⁴ See Appendix One

authorities, minorities, industrial challenges and censorship. The film also shows scenes of their films or films referred to in the research. The film did not only show the cinematography technique used in setting the interviews, but it also showed the methodology used to collect the research data.

The study aims to show filmmakers' difficulties when tackling such a topic in their films, either in making, screening, or distributing their works. It addresses self and institutional censorship as a main factor considered when making documentary films in the Middle East, especially if the filmmaker is living in the same region. Additionally, the research shows the strategies used by filmmakers in response to the political implications in their countries and the region in general.

My research aims to investigate three main areas: the definition of secularism according to the filmmakers, the treatment of secularism in the documentary films, and the limitations facing filmmakers in the filmmaking industry. The research fits within the socio-political study of academic literature as it discusses secularism as a controversial issue. It aims to contribute to the film and media industry in the Middle East literature on documentary production and filmmakers' approaches by exploring the filmmakers' original accounts.

Although there is a large and growing body of literature on secularism as a concept and theory in both Western and Middle Eastern societies, there is no robust data on the treatment of secularism as a controversial issue in documentary films in the Middle East over the past decades. Moreover, there is an increased amount of research that explores the film industry in this region. To name a few such studies:

Contemporary world cinema: Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia for Shohini Chaudhuri¹⁵, *Filming the modern Middle East: Politics in the cinema of Hollywood and the Arab world* for Lina Khatib¹⁶, and *the aesthetics of moderation in documentaries by North African women* for Stefanie Van de Peer¹⁷.

This thesis begins with a review of relevant literature. Chapter one explores secularism as a concept from the theoretical side and from the filmmakers' practical views. Then I explain the discourse analysis as it is my research methodology along with Michel Foucault's notion of power.

Chapter two describes the method of my work. I present my study's main research questions and discuss the data collection and analysis process. Interview and film analysis methods are employed to examine the filmmakers' discourse in the interviews and the filmmaking process. Finally, I discuss the notion of self-reflection as a factor in the methodology and analysis of this research.

Chapter three provides the filmmaker's understanding and development of secularism. It does that by analysing the filmmaker's discourse in the interviews and the studied films. In forming this understanding, I discuss the interactive power

¹⁵ Chaudhuri Shohini, *Contemporary world cinema: Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005

¹⁶ Lina Khatib, *Filming the modern Middle East: Politics in the cinema of Hollywood and the Arab world*. I.B.Tauris&Co Ltd, 2006

¹⁷ Stefanie E. Van de Peer, *The aesthetics of moderation in documentaries by North African women*. University of Sterling, 2011

relation between the filmmakers and their societies. The chapter expands on the filmmakers' treatment of secularism in their films.

Chapter four discusses the minorities and militarism issues in the Middle East. It explores the filmmakers' views and cinematic interaction with this issue. The filmmakers discussed in this chapter stated belonging to a minority; however, they disagreed with who is considered a minority in Middle Eastern society. The interpretation of the minorities affected the filmmakers' treatment of the issue in their films by protecting their identity, documenting the case, or being unconcerned about it.

Finally, Chapter five discusses the screening limitations facing documentary filmmakers on news and television channels when addressing and treating secularism in the Middle East. I proceed in this chapter with the practices of self-censorship among documentary filmmakers as another limitation.

The main findings of this study are outlined in conclusion, which ends the thesis. Finally, the results are summarised about research questions and followed by recommendations for future research.

Chapter one: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

There is plenty in the existing work that describes and analyses secularism as a concept and ideology within social and political theories. The common ground for conceptual and practical understanding of secularism is the separation of state and institutions from religious authorities and institutions. Filmmakers seek secularism through a different approach, either in their lives or their film productions. They adopt secularism because they seek a neutral position in an open society. They seek autonomy in faith and beliefs, fairness and equality, and pragmatism.¹⁸ Documentary filmmakers understand that their work is different from other film genres in treating controversial issues. This chapter will present the literature and the historical context of secularism as a concept and ideology compared to the filmmakers' understanding derived from the interviews and their films. It will also discuss the discourse analysis literature in addition to Foucault's theories related to power and discourse which will serve as the epistemic tool for this research.

¹⁸ R. Norman, J. Baggini, S. Blackburn, and others. *The Case for Secularism: A Neutral State in an Open Society*. British Humanist Association, 2007

1.2 Secularism Concept and Development

Secularism or worldly, is an initial stand from the legal and the political systems of the state that are formed apart from the religion and the religious beliefs, and apart from adopting an ideology or atheism or using the sacred in its policy and administration. Whereas the civil and the citizenship values in addition to the personal freedoms supersedes in the state. Secularism in the Middle East started from inside the minorities and particularly through Christian politicians and Arab national intellectuals. Secularism is a controversial issue in the Middle East in both form and content and it is vastly associated to atheism and anti-religions, Islam in particular. It is also linked to colonialism, conspiracy and westernisation. However, the professor of philosophy Ahmed Madi denies the relationship of secularism with atheism, as secularism is the superiority of thinking over traditional texts.¹⁹ Secularism is a political philosophy that discusses the states' stance on the religion and the secularisation of the regulation or the society or both of them; however, the secular values in the minds of the individuals²⁰ who believe in it are shaped as a personal identity and daily lifestyle. They define it as freedom, modernism, variety, and an umbrella for all suppressed notions, less fortunate groups and minorities.²¹ Seculars reject the suppressing totalitarian ideology. In addition to rejecting the authority of religion, sectarian, feudal,

¹⁹ Alwerwary, Mahmoud. "Al-Arabyia TV: Interview with Dr Ahmad Madi." www.youtube.com, January 14, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztwLFbM2kBc>. (My Translation).

²⁰ Based on the author's interviews with a group of filmmakers and media professionals in this research.

²¹ See Chapter Three: Filmmakers' Definitions and Treatment of Secularism in Film

military and mainstream media practices that ally against the secular model of the state in the Middle East. Seculars consider themselves a minority in the region.

In the Middle East, two secular models exist among elites and specialised discussions; the French *laïcité*, which is known as a strict model towards religious institutions, and religious individuals' practices in public. And it is present in the region through Turkish secularism. The second model is the Anglo-American, known for the state's neutrality regarding religion and its respect for religious freedoms and practices of groups and individuals. Scholars and elites are affected in their stance and definition of secularism by their countries' colonial past and political influence.

In addition to the European definitions, other perspectives of secularism appear in the Middle East, such as Darwin's secularism, which goes beyond the relationship between state and religion to a “dedivinization project”²²; to remove holiness and divinity from the world and remove individual identity towards naturality. Darwin's secularism does not believe in moral standards and considers power the only reference. In this context, “Partial Secularism” appears as a human ethical model to separate religion and the state.²³

²² Aljazeera. “El Messiri: Human or Darwinian Modernity.” Edited by Abdel Wahab El Messiri. aljazeera.net, October 10, 2009. www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2009/10/10/حداثة-داروينية-أم-حداثة-إنسانية. (My Translation)

²³ Aljazeera. “El-Messiri: Parcial Secularism.” Edited by Abdel Wahab El-Messiri. aljazeera.net, February 8, 2007. www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2007/2/8/بين-العلمانية-الجزئية-والعلمانية. (My Translation)

Filmmakers in the Middle East hold unique and very personal definitions based on their environments and individual needs, leading to a Middle Eastern model of secularism.

The debate on secularism is no longer of interest exclusively to specialists in various disciplines like history, law, philosophy, sociology, etc., but has now for many entered the private sphere concerning their daily lives and routines. Hereafter in this chapter further thought on secularism is indicated, in order to clarify the notion and its content and to examine its practical application in films and especially documentaries. First, I will present a few conceptions of secularism in the literature, then I will present its development in the Middle East considering demographic diversities. Later in this chapter I will use the discourse analysis methodology and Foucault's power notion to discuss the filmmakers' understanding of secularism as a concept and how far this understanding is reflected both in their lives and in their films.

1.2.1 Secularism definition in literature

I argue that distinct conceptions of secularism are proposed by filmmakers, which sometimes entail different, even opposed, consequences to what seems already have been established and universally accepted interpretation. According to Barbier: "The mass of studies devoted to it (dozens of books and hundreds of articles) actually ends up obscuring

the idea, rather than clarifying it.”²⁴ As Secularism is no longer a simple and clear idea that is easy to understand and apply, it is important to ponder the exact nature and propose a precise definition of secularism not only to indicate the practical consequences that follow, but to protect the notion from being weakened, twisted, or hollowed out. ²⁵

There has always been a relation between religions and states and religions and societies. The term secularism has been used in a religious context related to Christianity since its appearance as it meant the man who does not belong to a religion or a church.²⁶ The word Secular means ‘non-religious.’ This means that “secularization is the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance.”²⁷ But, whether secularism is a political or a religious issue, has been a topic of discussion by thinkers around the world. Georges Tarabichi has dedicated a chapter in his book *Hartaqat*, to present his view of this matter. On the other hand, Al Azmeh²⁸ in his book *secularism from a different approach*, 1992 has presented analysis and conclusions about the secular ideology tracing complicated and complex universal historical contexts. Secularism is widely identified as “the separation of the religion and the state”. This definition according to El-Messiri covers

²⁴ Maurice Barbier, “Pour une définition de la laïcité française” *initialement dans la revue Le Débat*, no.134, March-April 20. Translation by Gregory Elliott

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Georges Tarabichi, *Hartaqat: On Democracy, Secularism, Modernism and Arab Resistance*. 2006. Dar Al-Saqi, 2011, p205.

²⁷ B. R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A sociological comment*. London: Watts, 1966

²⁸ Aziz Al Azmeh, *Secularism from a different approach*. Beirut: Center for Arab unity studies, 1992.

only one type of secularism, partial secularism, which he confirms exists in almost all humanitarian societies.²⁹

Oxford Dictionary's definitions of secularism fluctuated between the partial and complete approaches without mentioning this precisely. It uses the word secularism to refer to time or life in general which are not synonyms to the concept. While it defines secularism and secularization by eliminating the religious element and replaces it with ethics instead as a belief based on the material for the humans benefits in this life, the French dictionary on the other hand defines the word 'Laique' to mean 'the public except the clergy' and the derived word 'laicism' to mean the elimination of clergies from the state's policies, which were highly interfering before the French revolution. The English term derived from the French origin had taken a sharp and acute form as it was affected by the French experience. 'Al Almanyah' is the Arabic translation of the word secularism which was imported from the western civilization, which consists of a mix of civilizations; the catholic French, the Anglo-Saxon English, the protestant German and the orthodox Russian. As it happened with many other terms transferred to Arabic, each of the previous civilization's personal experiences have been ignored in the developing process of secularism notion.³⁰

Looking into Al 'Azme'h's conception of secularism; he reaches a broad conclusion from the use of the English and French expressions which is that 'secularism' indicates the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of secularism, while the other, 'laicite' intends aspects

²⁹ Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopedia*, Dar Shorouq, 1999, p210. (Translation by researcher)

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp 219-221

connected with the religious institution as a socio-political unit.³¹ This general feature of secularism is valid in Britain where there is an official Church (the Anglican Church) headed by the monarch, as it is also valid in France where a formal constitutional separation exists between state and Church and their respective institutions. The modalities of connection between religion and the world in secular societies are by no means uniform. One can observe that in countries such as France, with a Catholic majority, the secular state, supported by a robust collection of institutions and currents of thought, exists in a society with a not inconsiderable but by no means majoritarian or hegemonic rate of religious conviction, underpinned by strong religious institutions. In countries like the Netherlands and in Britain, lower rates of religious belief are witnessed and observed and a very marked marginalization of religious institutions and ideas. In the United States a civil form of religiosity with marked internal differentiations is found, one distinct from the state and the system of education, but that is at the same time an important and visible component of social life and codes of behaviour.³² Because secularism is a highly complex and varied concept, and it is impossible to discuss it without referring to recourse to concrete histories. Studying secularism in the Middle East region with its varied historical and religious heritage from the point of view of the filmmakers requires searching in their backgrounds and ideologies as well as their environments and societies.

³¹ 'Azīz 'Aẓmah, and David Bond, *Secularism in the Arab World: Contexts, Ideas and Consequences*. Edinburgh University Press, 2019. p. 8

³² *Ibid.* pp 8-9

El-Messiri argues in his book, *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopaedia*, that defining secularism as a term is a problematic issue as it could not be clearly identified in a specific and particular manner. El-Messiri used the deconstruction approach which was originated by Jacques Derrida for understanding the relationship between text and meaning to study secularism as a complex term and assemble a new irreducible definition for it. He suggests that there are two types of secularism: complete and partial and each of these approaches has its scope. Moreover, he suggests that the known definition of secularism as the “separation of church and state” had led to making secularism concept a shallow issue and limited its extent. He articulates that secularism is not just a group of ideas and clear practices, and it is not a static scheme, it is on the contrary, a model consequential matrix filled with potential and structural secular processes.³³ The interaction between the filmmakers and their societies power relations had created their private vision of secularism as they took the public sphere into their private spaces.

In the Arab and western analytical speech, secularism indications are mixed and confused. The partial secularism tends to separate religion from the political worlds. It does not deny the ultimate and absolute beliefs related to ethics, religions and human and does not deny the abstract concepts and the metaphysics beyond. It considers the human as a naturalistic and materialistic entity in the general life only, and inarticulate the other sides of that human. This kind of secularism is also called the “ethical secularism” or the “humanitarian secularism”. While on the other hand, complete secularism has an ideological extent which firmly tries to define the relation of religion with all living aspects.

³³ El-Messiri, *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopedia*. p 209

It either denies it completely or marginalizes it in the best scenario. It considers everything in the world as a moving material and therefore it is proportional. It uses the senses as a source of knowledge and consequently considers physical knowledge as the main source of ethics.³⁴

The separation between religious institutions and state institutions can be seen in complex societies as it is not exclusive to secular societies, as there is not a contradiction between secularism and religion, and they can coexist in the same society. El-Messiri believes this is possible if religious men and priesthood can be kept away from political decision-making institutions. He also believes that many secularism opponents might find themselves accepting this differentiation once they are assured that the ultimate value (ethical, humanitarian, and religious) is the final ruling value of the society and not the economic or state's interests. This partial secularism, which was assigned to the early stages of the western secularism development, had retreated as secularism exceeded the economic, political, and ideological contexts to become a social phenomenon inseparable from the personal life and became part of people's dreams, behaviours, and relations. Therefore, the partial secularism model became weak in interpreting and classifying secularism as a term. As new definitions appeared, it was added to previous definitions of secularism. The definitions had cascaded and accumulated, and the use of the term became vague if not impossible.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid. pp 209

³⁵ Ibid. pp 211

In a tendency to broaden secularism, George J. Holyoake³⁶ had used the term secularism in the middle of the nineteenth century to describe his views of promoting a social order separate from religion, without actively dismissing or criticizing religious belief. Holyoake's definition of secularism was based on his own historical reference which is Europe in the nineteenth century. However, the changes the world had witnessed over the time since then especially in the shape of the governing institutions and the extended powers of the states and the media sectors even into the smallest personal details of the individuals had created a new frame in the societies that made Holyoake's definition limited.³⁷ In the historical context of secularism term appearance in the language, Bernard Lewis said:

The term 'secularism' appears to have been first used in English towards the middle of the nineteenth century, with a primary ideological meaning. As first used it denoted the doctrine that morality should be based on rational consideration regarding human well-being in this world, to the exclusion of consideration relating to the God or afterlife. Later it was used more generally for the belief that public institution especially general education should be secular, not religious.³⁸

³⁶ See: George Jacob Holyoake, *Christianity and secularism. Report of a public discussion between Brewin Grant and George Jacob Holyoake*, Ward, London, 1953

³⁷ El-Messiri, *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopedia*. p 218

³⁸ Bernard Lewis, "Secularism in the Middle East." *Revue De Métaphysique Et De Morale* 100, no. 2 (1995): 151-64. Accessed January 6, 2021. Accessed at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40903409>.

Secularism was first used in western countries when the new nation state started to appear after the thirty-year war in 1648. Its indication was limited to transferring the churches' properties to the political unreligious authorities which means the states authorities generally. Later in France in the eighteenth century it meant the illegitimate confiscations of the church's properties from the Catholic Church's however, to French thinkers and philosophers then it meant the legitimate confiscation of the church's properties for the state's interest.³⁹

The French model of secularism represents the relation between the society and religion on one side and the state on the other. The 1905 French law on the Separation of the Churches and the State had established state secularism in France. It abolished the Concordat of 1801 which placed church under the guardianship of state power and put an end to the system of "recognized religions" by creating a civil state. The French revolution put an end to a monarchy with divine rights. France stopped seeing itself as the "Eldest Daughter of the Church" and established a country protecting human rights and the concept of secularism. The Jules Ferry Laws 1882 established fee mandatory and public education and secular instruction. As schools became separated from the state, the question of secularism has remained closely tied to the sphere of the school. The Constitution of 1958 states: "France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic, guaranteeing that all citizens regardless of their origin, race or religion are treated as equals before the law

³⁹ El-Messiri, *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopedia*. p 217

and respecting all religious beliefs". All religions were returned to the private sector and established state secularism in the public sphere.⁴⁰

Tarabichi argues that secularism literature in France was in hibernation for the three decades following the constitution of 1958 until the fundamentalism movement reached France in the eighties of the twentieth century and Islam became the second biggest religion.⁴¹ Subsequently, countless writers and specialists in Islamic studies wrote about Islam and secularism in the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century like Maurice Barbier in his book '*la laïcité*'⁴² which responded to the presence of a significant Muslim community issue in France and the reopened debate about secularism, and presented a different theory of secularism and modern politics to overcome the fundamentalism movement issue of all religions which refused to consider secularism as a belief or an ideology that totally rejects religions rather than the state neutrality in religious matters and in the same time freeing the state from religious authority. Barbier suggests a complete separation between the state and the civil society, between the public sphere and the private domain. He implies that the modern state is different from the society, and it is not concerned with individual's interests but the collective interest, whereas the civil society is. This separation distinguishes the human as an individual within the state and the citizen

⁴⁰ "Secularism and religious freedom". Government France. Accessed on 9 of January 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/en/secularism-and-religious-freedom#:~:text=The%20Law%20of%201905&text=It%20abolished%20the%20Concordat%20of,the%20freedom%20to%20practice%20religion>.

⁴¹ Tarabichi, *Hartaqat: On Democracy, Secularism, Modernism and Arab Resistance*. p206-207

⁴² Maurice Barbier, *la laïcité*, l'Harmattan, Paris, 1995. (My Translation)

within the civil society. Hereto religions are components of the civil society, and secularism is a political issue.⁴³

Tarabichi suggests that there are three approaches between the religion and the state: the first is the tight relation where religion has the supreme ruling authority in the state, theocracy (i.e. Vatican City, Saudi Arabia and Iran) or sectarianism (i.e. Lebanon). The second is the separation between religion and the state (secularism), and the third is the atheist state approach which the state here refuses all the religions and fights against them (i.e. China). The separation between the state and religion implies that the state is completely independent from any religion's authority, and all religions are equally free before the state. This ideal situation is infeasible as the society is the shared scope between the state and the religion. However, secular states (i.e. France), partially secular states (i.e. Italy), and non-secular state (i.e. The UK) guarantee for individuals of their citizens the right to believe.⁴⁴

Tarabichi agrees with Barbier by considering secularism a political issue which concerns the state not the religion, so the state has the choice to impose it. Consequently, religion will resist and reject to be confined and stranded by secularism and therefore it will oppose secularism which competes with it to rule the state. Here comes the modern states role to exclude religion from the state and keep it within the civil societal frame as it happened in France with the Catholic Church. The situation is the opposite in Islamic

⁴³ Tarabichi, *Hartaqat: On Democracy, Secularism, Modernism and Arab Resistance*, p210-213

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* pp 208-209

countries, it is not Islam that opposes secularism, it is the state that refuses, as it still relies on religion to verify its legitimacy because it cannot exist without a religion.⁴⁵

The differences between Islam and Christianity are argued to be the reason beyond accepting or rejecting secularism. Lewis considers the separation issue between the state and religion a purely Christian problem and not relevant to Muslim societies, he says:

Secularism in the Christian world was an attempt to resolve the long and destructive struggle of church and state. Separation, adopted in the American and French Revolutions and elsewhere after that, was designed to prevent two things: the use of religion by the state to reinforce and extend its authority; and the use of the state power by the clergy to impose their doctrines and rules on others. This is a problem long seen as purely Christian, not relevant to Muslims or for that matter to Jews, for whom a similar problem has arisen in Israel. Looking at the contemporary Middle East, both Muslim and Jewish, one must ask whether this is still true -- or whether Muslims and Jews may perhaps have caught a Christian disease and might therefore consider a Christian remedy.⁴⁶

On the other hand, Tarabichi seeks Islamic societies to use the Christian experience to overcome the political issues in Middle Eastern countries, and the fundamentalism issue specifically. He explains that the fundamentalism ideology is refusing the civil society's concept today as they have refused secularism before because fundamentalism is a merging

⁴⁵ Ibid. pp 210-213

⁴⁶ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*. Harper Perennial, 2003.

ideology rather than a separating one, as every totalitarianism ideology, this one too, mixes political, societal, and religious matters as it is unaware of the separation of powers approach and this is why it is against democracy which is based on pluralism and independent sovereignty.⁴⁷ He argues that Christianity had resisted secularism over two centuries more than Islam, but it is not the religious concern to accept or decline secularism as it is a political issue that concerns the state not the society. As Christianity was able to shrink to its spiritual scope, on the contrary Islam has unarguable social scope; therefore a secular state will allow the existence of a civil society where Islam can impose its social and cultural values without interfering in the states policies. This may be seen as limiting and diminution of Islam by stripping away the political feature of it, but, on the contrary, it is a chance to stop using Islam to serve the political purposes and retain its spirit as a religion. The modern state does not need religion to exist, as there is a separation between the state and the society which forms a private domain and public sphere. Third world countries cannot be fully identified as modern states as it still mixes the private domain and public sphere and their interests, “therefore, it can be said since the modern state is not formed yet there, and all that exist is individuals, groups and sects interests which lead to corruption and bribery.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Tarabichi, *Hartaqat: On Democracy, Secularism, Modernism and Arab Resistance*, p215

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp 210-213.

1.2.2 Secularism in the Middle East

It is argued that the term secularism appeared in Yemen early in the fifth century in a Christian theological context where Arab Christianity existed. The word “Laicite” was derived from the original word in Greek “Laikos” or the Latin “Laicus”. The original word means belonging to the public and not as argued by Arabic speaker ‘science’.⁴⁹ Barbier says: “Secularism is no longer a simple and clear idea, easy to understand and apply. It has become a fluid, flexible notion, whose content can be extended, and which can be variously interpreted.”⁵⁰ Arab intellectuals have interpreted the term secularism differently and take diverse stands from it. While Mahmoud Ameen Al Alem does not see a contradiction between secularism and religion, and it is an approach that reflects the human’s dual vision (soul and material) and his aspire to overcome the living straggles with this duality, Fouad Zakariya has described secularism as a call to separate the religion from the politics and believes humanitarian values over the materialized society. Nonetheless, Muhammad Al Jabiri, for example, considers secularism as a foreign term and part of western civilization. Bearing in mind the definition ‘separation the church from the state’, he says that Islam is not a church and so it cannot be separated from the state.⁵¹ He requests that this term be

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp 216-217.

⁵⁰ Barbier, “Pour une définition de la laïcité française”.

⁵¹ El-Messiri, *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopedia*. p 222

deleted from the Arab intellect circulated dictionaries and forbid it as it does not reflect the subjective Arab needs.⁵²

Aziz Al A'zmeh presents all aspects of secularism in his writings (the complete, the partial and the oscillating). He describes secularism as the relative independence of civil society from the authority of the majority's religion (beliefs and practices). It also means the equality of the citizens before the law despite their religions, beliefs, sectarianism, or ethnicity. He uses the phrase 'secularism political face' to refer to separating the religion from politics and uses the phrase 'secularism institutional face' to refer to the religious institution as a private forum. Both these phrases are within the partial definition of secularism; however, he later uses the phrase 'secularism epistemological face', which eliminates all the metaphysical forms and leads to complete secularism.⁵³

To understand debates on secularism in the Middle East in the twentieth century, it is important to examine the global political and intellectual history of the region and the dominant beliefs along with the political social economic regimes that underpinned them in the wake of the Second World War.⁵⁴

The convergence of postmodern with pre-modern in rejection of modernity was most powerful in the Global South where modernism became increasingly lambasted as an

⁵² Tarabichi, *Hartaqat: On Democracy, Secularism, Modernism and Arab Resistance*. p206

⁵³ Tarabichi, *Hartaqat: On Democracy, Secularism, Modernism and Arab Resistance*. p 226-227

⁵⁴ Gilbert Achcar, foreword to Al Azmeh, *secularism from a different approach*. Beirut: Center for Arab unity studies, 1992.

ideology made in the Global North, and with equal zeal weather detractors were upholders of some brand of “post-colonial” views or upholders of archaic traditional values. This convergence took a very acute form in the Arab world where it centered on the issue of religion. The shift from Nasserist to the Saudi era during the 1970s led to wide ranging offensive against secularism, which had been from the start a key target of the Saudi sponsored and US-backed attack against “Arab Socialism” and Communism. Unlike other parts of the world, the main anti-Communist ideology deployed by the United States in the Arab world during the cold war had not been liberalism, but indeed Islam – Particularly its fundamentalist interpretation.⁵⁵

Although, there is no medial point between secularism and secularism hostility where democracy and rationalism is located as these practices are inseparable from secularism, secularism hostility in the Arab world is based on considering its concepts as an outer value of the Muslim’s society’s nature.⁵⁶ Secularism in the Arab world was confused with two other terms ‘modernise’ and ‘westernise’ which aim to replace the traditional standards with the rational materialized standards in the western model, therefore, the term secular was thought to be synonym to ‘atheist’, or ‘antireligious’ or ‘pornographic’.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Al Taher Labeeb, foreword to Al Azmeh, *secularism from a different approach*, 1992 (from kitab fe jareda) issue no. 121, date 3 sept 2008.

⁵⁷ El-Messiri, *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopedia*. p 221

This claim which is not in context with the actual historical reality is a proof of the ignorance of the chronological global political and intellectual history.⁵⁸

El-Messiri argues that secularism is not a preplanned intellectual, political and social process that society's secularity can be measured by.⁵⁹ It is also not a part of a conspiracy transferred to the Arab world from the west, targeting Islamic societies particularly. However, although secular thoughts and practices are not the complete representation of secularism ideology, they are of high importance to the public in accepting secular values, especially if they are carried by considerable institutions like the state.⁶⁰ El-Messiri goes on to argue that "Secularism is a fruit of several intersected processes; part of it is obvious and apparent and the other is structural and potential." These processes which include all life aspects; private and public are carried by the state's institutions or by private institutions or other institutions like the religious institutions.⁶¹ He argues that secularism has developed over time to include all life aspects not only the political and economic worlds, as the nation state in the early stages of secularism ideology had been a partial state which cannot be characterized with totalitarianism.⁶²

⁵⁸ Al Taher Labeeb, foreword to Al Azmeh, *secularism from a different approach*.

⁵⁹ El-Messiri, *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopedia*. P 221

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp 212

⁶¹ *Ibid.* pp 212

⁶² *Ibid.* pp 213

Christianity did not fade away when secularist ideology started to appear, because it had imported absolute Christian beliefs and superficially secularized it to become humanitarian absolutes and kept them within its system despite its philosophically irrelevance to it. It created a dual reference where it is considered a religion or a humanitarian system. Christianity hereby provided western society with a metaphysical frame to manage its own social life with a vision of an incompletely substantial universe. “Therefore, western human was able to live his general life under the complete secularism approach while he dreams, loves, hates, marry, and dies within the humanitarian Christianity frame which is the partial secularism.” This ability to accept the duplicity between Christianity and secularism had changed in the nineties of the twentieth century as states interference as well as the media in public lives had increased and reached the philosophies, the ontology, and eventually the people’s daily behaviour. A new philosophy opposing society and people appeared, like the structural and the post modernism which erased what was left of Christianity’s values in the societies.⁶³

The difference between complete secularism and partial secularism according to El-Messiri is a difference in the historical levels of the same model as of episodes in the same sequential matrix. Therefore, secularism’s history is different in west than it is in the third world countries; moreover, it is different from one country to another. However, using this approach to study secularism provides the scholar with a remarkable interpretation of this ideology. I.e. the English society in the middle of the eighteenth century and the English society in the end of the twentieth century, as both of them are secular but the differences

⁶³ Ibid. pp 214

are extreme as the first adopted the partial secularism approach, while complete secularism is dominant in the second and individuals are subject to substantial potential references. I.e. the Egyptian society in the early fifties and in the late nineties.⁶⁴

El-Messeri argues that the transfer from partial secularism to complete secularism is a historical social process. On the other hand, individuals remain in the partial secularism phase and would not most of the time adopt the approach prevailed in their society in complete as humans are selective in nature, and they have the free will and the high sense of ethics. Therefore, they can live their given lives using more than one reference in the same time even contradicted ones.⁶⁵

The previous analysis of secularism by El-Messiri makes the idea of a separation between religions and the state a completely forgotten one, as if it were no longer of any value. His tendency to explain secularism enlarged secularism notion, and significantly highlighted its journey from the epistemological to the ontological path.

Nevertheless, after the difficulties encountered with secularism concept, the new sub term 'Post secularism' comes up to increase the current confusion and uncertainty. Post secularism is a term coined by John McClure.⁶⁶ It is used to indicate a renewed interest in

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp 215

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp 216

⁶⁶ John A. McClure, "Postmodern/Post-Secular: Contemporary Fiction and Spirituality.", *Modern Fiction Studies* 41 (1): 1995 p141–63

religion as a social, political and cultural force.⁶⁷ Post-secularism means that the existing model of secularism is not effective anymore and has reached a dead-end but there is not another model to replace it yet. It is argued that secularism had not fulfilled its promises neither to the first world countries as racism and crime increased nor to the third world countries where secularism had made an alliance with fascism and military forces.⁶⁸

1.2.3 Filmmakers' understanding of Secularism as a concept.

People interpret secularism as they see fit, according to their situation, needs or desires. They differ in the way in which it should be applied in certain concrete situations.⁶⁹ People have developed varied levels of understanding of secularism based on their consciousness of the surrounding atmosphere which creates different personal experiences. Filmmakers in each society reflects their thought and practices of secularism in their production.

Part of those filmmakers interviewed, who consider themselves seculars, articulate that secularism they adopt is a personal state presenting freedoms and privacy, and aim to end society's interference and censorship on individuals and evaluating them based on their

⁶⁷ McClure, John A.. "Post-Secular Culture: The Return of Religion in Contemporary Theory and Literature.". *CrossCurrents* 47 (3): 1997 p 332–47.

⁶⁸ El-Messiri, *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopedia*. P 229

⁶⁹ Barbier "Pour une définition de la laïcité française".

choices. Secularism in this case is rejecting the society's values and the family's rules. While I see secularism in France as an application to the total secularism approach, which terminates the choices of the individuals, I believe secularism is a wider umbrella which allows individuals to choose and pursue their own paths and ideas. Identities and nostalgia are part of private life and individuals' choices and states no matter what political regimes they apply should not interfere with them. The partial secularism which is concerned with individual's personal life has become a social phenomenon, which is part of the people's aspirations, behaviors, and relations and it exceeds the economic, political, and ideological contexts.

The filmmakers in these interviews show how they have removed secularism from its solid square by rethinking and reconsidering it. The presentation of secularism in their films is not just a reaction to sectarianism or religious control of the public and political life in their countries; moreover, it reflects their personal experience. They are not just upraising the restrictions and standards and seeking freedom. Their presentation of secularism in their production, when their identity is present, is mature and complex.

As personal experience is considered part of articulating secularism as a terminology in this research, it is also considered a practical application of secularism in the film as in real life. The filmmakers presented a special case in presenting the intersection between the identity represented by the family, religion and sect, and the individual's life and the practice of secularism. This could be considered a limitation for the filmmaker as it could be seen as a unique feature in their films.

The difference is undoubtedly noticeable between filmmakers from Lebanon and Tunisia articulating 'secularism' compared to filmmakers from other countries in the Middle East that have not experienced secularism. In Tunisia, a secular system was applied by Burqeba, who terminated the Islamic regulations like the inheritance laws and formed a secular society over all cities in Tunisia. In Lebanon, the case is different due to the sectarian system. Secularism in Lebanon is different from the French secular model. Although Lebanon was mandated by France, and the French lifestyle is adopted in education, culture, the accent, and even in youth's plans and dreams. However, when you speak to seculars in Lebanon, not all of them want to apply the French approach to secularism, but they do emphasise on their culture and identity, which they cannot abandon. They want to maintain a good relationship with their culture and society as well as with their identities. So, they seek a different approach to secularism, different from the French model. They refuse a culture that transfers their city into another political radical or Islamic radical city. Secularism as a term is controversial in England and France, and this is also the case in Lebanon, where seculars do not agree on one definition and application of secularism.

1.3 Discourse Analysis

As I am adopting a discourse analysis methodology in my research, I will herein go into a deeper look at this research methodology. According to the Oxford Dictionary, “Discourse” means a written or a spoken communication or debate about a certain topic. And “discourse analysis means: “a method of analysing the structure of texts or utterances longer than one sentence, taking into accounts both their linguistic content and their sociolinguistic context”. Phillips and Jorgensen argue that the Discourse analysis is not concerned with finding the ‘real’ meaning but with exploring patterns in what has been said or written to identify the different social consequences of different discursive representations of reality.⁷⁰ Assuming that the language is an abstract system, we understand the meaning in a language by giving words a certain meaning as a part of a system; however, this system has a style which is always changeable; moreover, it is affected and constructed by many factors and is “historically and culturally situated”⁷¹.

Individuals choose different ways to talk about certain realities which is due to a different understanding of the event that can produce different understandings of these events and consequently will lead to different social actions.⁷² The meaning of the reality is

⁷⁰ L. Phillips, and M. W. Jorgensen *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage, 2002. p21.

⁷¹ T. Locke, *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum. 2004. p11

⁷² Pounds, Gabrina. 2018. “Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool in the Humanities.” In-Person. Presented at the UEA’ Research Training Seminar.

expressed in variety of modes like pictures, movies, music, language, etc. These practices of communication not only are affected by the society, but, rather leave an effect on it as well. Phillips and Jorgensen say: "Our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them".⁷³ This was clearly observed by how filmmakers understand secularism and accordingly how they implement this understanding in their films.

Discourse uses linguistic and semiotic means in three essential functions; to represent reality, to express the text's creator attitude and stance towards an issue or an event, and to hold itself together and provide cohesion and coherence. These three functions are performed simultaneously and constantly.⁷⁴ In the representation of the reality we tell and explain who is doing what to whom, where, when and how using nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, etc. to represent participants and entities, the processes and the circumstances. The discourse function here is purely referential. On the other hand, the discourse has an interpersonal function when expressing the text's creator attitude and stance towards an issue or an event and towards the text reader or the audience. The expression of the attitude is performed through an evaluation of the words which reflect emotions, (un)certainity, an obligation or even a mood. The last function of the discourse is

⁷³ Phillips, L. and M. W. Jorgensen *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

the textual function as it provides lexical and grammatical cohesion and coherence within the text or the speech itself.⁷⁵

The method of analysis in this research is discourse analysis as it is a research tool used in many humanitarian studies due to its high efficiency in tracing and producing data from the text or the speech. In Literature for example the supplementary critical analysis of literary texts provides the researcher with additional information as in the representation, the writer reader relationship, and compositional features. While in Media and Journalism it shows the subjectivity, the ideological representation is used in reporting voices. Discourse analysis is applicable in political and social studies as well and it is used to show representation, interaction and structure in political speeches, election literature, debates interviews, political broadcast and press conferences. Not ignoring its importance in studying History by analysing the rhetorical features of the historical discourse. Foucault's approach of studying History for example depends on examining the past in order to illuminate a present-day problematic by using textual analysis techniques.⁷⁶ There is also another approach used in the historical discourse analysis that takes a diachronic perspective into account, including oral narratives and interviews.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Y. Park, 'Constructing immigrants. A historical discourse analysis of the representations of Immigrants in US Social Work, 1882–1952' *Journal of Social Work*, 2006. 6(2): 169–203.

⁷⁷ R. Wodak, R. de Cillia, M. Reisigl and K. Liebhart, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (A. Hirsch and R. Mitten, translation.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1999

As discourse analysis has been an influential approach to research⁷⁸ since the 1980s, Tarnovskaya⁷⁹ argues that despite its overlapping definitions, it moreover takes different forms. She says: “According to Fairclough (1992), there are two main approaches to discourse analysis that are developed by linguistics (for instance, Fowler, Pecheux, Sinclair, Coulthard, and Labov) and by social theory (for instance, Foucault, Gramsci, Althusser, Habermas, and Giddens)”. According to the Foucauldian studies of media and culture, discourse reflects social reality.⁸⁰

The analysis of the discourse depends mainly on two methodologies: the qualitative and the quantitative aspects. The qualitative aspect depends on analysing the discourse sample using categories and subcategories depending on the discourse type, the level of delicacy, and specific variations. On the other hand, the quantitative aspect depends on coding by categories and counting occurrences and frequencies. Usually this is performed by using specific software.⁸¹ For the purpose of this research, I will be using a qualitative approach analysing the discourse of the interviewed filmmakers. This will include discourses

⁷⁸ D. Deacon, M. Pickering, P. Golding & G. Murdock, *Researching Communications: A practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder Arnold. 2007

⁷⁹ Tarnovskaya, Ekaterina. *Class, gender and cultural work in British documentary film production: Experiences, subjectivities and policy discourses*.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ M. Wetherell, S. Taylor and S. J. Yates *Discourse as Data*. London: Sage. 2001

D. Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data* 3rd ed. (Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction). London: Sage. 2006

S. et al. Titscher, *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage. 2000

in previous interviews available in the media and discourses of the characters in the chosen documentary films.

By scrutinizing the relation between language and human conduct we find that English language philosophers' attention has been on more abstract matters and their approach is designed to illuminate questions of meaning and truth. However, those who are interested in analysing socio-political relations had moved logically and practically from analysing the language to analysing human relations. This perspective is realized in Michel Foucault's work.⁸²

One of the political analyses that emerged from linguistic analysis is presented by John Austin's book "Plea for Excuses."⁸³ Austin's attention is mainly on the language-oriented question, "why do certain kinds of actions take certain kinds of adverbs?" He points out that "to examine excuses is to examine cases where there has been some abnormality or failure: and so often, the abnormal will throw light on the normal...". He argues that discursive practices are political practices and analysing the use of "excuses" provides a partial mapping of the political culture that resides potentially in the society's system of signification and actualised in speech.

Foucault's systematic study of various discursive practices primarily was focused on the statements that compromise practices of various disciplines, professions, and

⁸² Michael J. Shapiro, "language and political understanding , the politics of discursive practice", *Yale University Press*: New Haven and London 1981. pp. 127-129

⁸³ John Austin, "Plea for Excuses" *philosophical papers* (London: Oxford University Press,) pp. 180, 189, 204

administrative agencies. Although, Foucault's purpose was not understanding political relations⁸⁴, he stated in his book *Archeology of Knowledge*: "it seems to me that one might also carry out an analysis of the same type on political knowledge. One would try to show whether the political behavior of a society, a group, or a class is not shot through with a describable discursive practice."⁸⁵ Foucault treats discourses as "monuments," and not something to be deciphered in order to determine what lies behind. These monuments very description provides an understanding of the relations and objects that are constituted in the discourse. ⁸⁶

Between Hermeneutical schools of thought that emphasize the understanding of symbolic systems and the structuralism methodology in explaining human association, Foucault's archeological method of interpreting human conduct is much closer to the structuralism which deals with speech or texts as the surface events that have meaning as a result of a deeper structure. For him there is no place for the investigator's self-understanding in an analysis. However, his archeological metaphor dissociates him from an important aspect of structuralist orientation. He argues that the rules which give speech or conduct meaning are on the surface rather than lying beneath it. These rules are responsible for the objects and events that are produced by discursive practices, and provide boundaries that determine who can speak about what. ⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Michael J. Shapiro, "language and political understanding the polices of discursive practice", pp 131.

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault , *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York:Pantheon,1972), pp. 194

⁸⁶ Michael J. Shapiro, "language and political understanding the polices of discursive practice". pp 132

⁸⁷ Ibid. pp 132-135

By analysing the production culture in filmmaking, we might be able to measure its effect on the production material and the self-reflexivity from the production workers on the media they create. However, taking into consideration that the background of the team working on the production of the independent documentary films is a very small one, and the director is most probably the producer, the camera person, the gaffer, and the editor, or at least has the final say in regards to every step in making his/her film, this makes the effect of the team on the final product quite limited if not exiting, unlike in other genres.

In addition, analysing the news production culture might be of a great benefit to this research. News requires different approach than in documentary films which can highlight the factors and elements various aspects and dimensions of secularism. A change in the language used in the news editing rooms is noticed when using the word "Attack" instead of "Accident" when referring to shark and human incidents on certain beaches. By applying discourse analysis here, it shows that it is a reflection of capitalism which transferred the habitats of these animals into human resorts and instead of considering the human the aggressor, it made him the victim not only to gain the audience's empathy but also to increase viewing which is another effect of the capitalism.

John Thornton Cardwell argues in his book *production culture* that we can learn a lot by looking at the production culture. He says: "Although in this book I examine both style and marketing dimensions, I also argue that traditional reflexivity needs to be understood

as forms of local cultural negotiations and expression as well, for the lived production communities that create films [...]”⁸⁸

Tod Gitlin restates Arnold Becker, the CBS’s vice – president for television research: “I’m not interested in culture, I am not interested in pro-social values. I have only one interest. That’s whether people watch the program. That’s my definition of good, that’s my definition of bad.”⁸⁹ Making an independent documentary film and having it broadcasted on the television without the channel and networks interference is something rare. Tod Gitlin states in his book *Inside Prime Time* that it is not conspiracy theory or that networks are trying to indoctrinate the helpless masses rather than just generating an ideology by trying to read popular sentiment and tailoring their schedules towards “what they think the cardboard people they’ve conjured up wants to see and hear”.⁹⁰ This notion is applicable in Middle Eastern television channels and their policies towards the production and screening of documentary films to audiences. Therefore, documentary filmmakers develop self-discipline strategies to comply with channels policies and eventually satisfy the audience by using the television news values.

In the discussion of the differences required for Broadcast television and independent film, Habermas the German philosopher in his book *The Structural*

⁸⁸ John Thornton Cardwell, *Production Culture*, Duke University Press: Durham and London 2008. pp 2

⁸⁹ Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983. pp 31

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* pp 203

Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society⁹¹, 1962 added an important contribution to modern understanding of democracy by developing the concept of the "public sphere" over time since the renaissance in western Europe and traces the transition from the liberal bourgeois public sphere to the modern mass society of the social welfare state. Todd Gitlin stated that Habermas's dissertation on the rise of the public sphere" had transformed media studies into a hard-headed discipline.⁹²

Habermas theorises that the "public sphere" is a space where citizens can engage in open and critical discussion about issues that affect society. Furthermore, he believed that the media plays a crucial role in the formation and functioning of the public sphere, as it provides a platform for disseminating information and diverse perspectives. Habermas says:

“In the comparison with the press of the liberal era, the mass media have on the one hand attained an incomparably greater range and effectiveness – the sphere of the public realm itself has expanded correspondingly. On the other hand they have been moved over further out of this sphere of commodity exchange. The more their effectiveness in terms of publicity increased, the more they became accessible to the pressure of certain private interests, whether individuals or collective. Whereas formerly the press was able to limit itself to the transmission and

⁹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.

⁹² Todd Gitlin "Jurgen Habermas". *Time Magazine*. (April 26, 2004). Archived from the original on March 6, 2008. Retrieved 2023-02-01 accessed at: https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1970858_1970909_1971707,00.html

amplification of the rational-critical debate of private people assembled into a public, now conversely this debate gets shaped by the mass media to begin with. In the course of the shift from a journalism of private men of letters to the public services of the mass media, the sphere of the public was altered by the influx of private interests that received privileged exposure in it – although they were by no means *eo ipso* representative of the interests of private people as the public.”⁹³

Moreover, Habermas also argued that the media could be influenced by commercial and political interests, leading to a distortion of the public sphere and a reduction in the diversity of perspectives represented. Therefore, according to Habermas, media need to be independent, impartial, and accountable to ensure the health and vitality of the public sphere.⁹⁴

The exclusivity of the bourgeois public sphere which excluded many important groups in the society made Habermas create the term the unfinished project of modernity as there is much more has to be done in the realm of modernity before thinking about the possibility of a postmodern world. Calloun states:

⁹³ Jürgen Habermas (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*. pp 188-189

⁹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research, *Communication Theory*, Volume 16, Issue 4, November 2006, Pages 411–426

“The early bourgeois public spheres were composed of narrow segments of the European population, mainly educated, propertied men, and they conducted a discourse not only exclusive of others but prejudicial to the interests of those excluded. Yet the transformations of the public sphere that Habermas describes turn largely on its continual expansion to include more and more participants.”⁹⁵

Calloun argues that the world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only as the public sphere has become more an arena for advertising and creating occasions for consumers than a setting for rational critical debate. In this regard he says:

“The latter sections of *Structural Transformation* directly foreshadow Habermas’s arguments in *Legitimation Crisis* (1975). The public sphere becomes a setting for states and corporate actors to develop legitimacy not by responding appropriately to an independent and critical public but by seeking to instill in social actors’ motivations that conform to the needs of the overall system dominated by those states and corporate actors.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the public sphere*. MIT 1992. P3

⁹⁶ Ibid

1.4 Foucault: Power notion and Discourse Analysis

I am considering Foucault's approach to power to study and analyse the societies in the Middle East and its effect on the documentary filmmakers and their media enterprises when approaching controversial issue like secularism for treatment in their films. Power for Foucault is what makes us what we are, and it is 'everywhere', and 'comes from everywhere'. It is diffused and embodied in discourse and knowledge.⁹⁷ "Power is a kind of 'meta power' or 'regime of truth' that pervades society." Considering each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth, therefore it shall have its own types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true. "These 'general politics' and 'regimes of truth' are the result of scientific discourse and institutions and are reinforced and redefined constantly through the education system, the media, and the flux of political and economic ideologies."^{98 99}

Foucault recognizes that power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces people to do things against their wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive

⁹⁷ Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison*. London, Penguin. 1991

⁹⁸ Paul Rabinow, (editor) *The Foucault Reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought*, London, Penguin. 1991

⁹⁹ Powercube. *Foucault: power is everywhere*. Accessed at: <https://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/foucault-power-is-everywhere/>

and positive force in society.¹⁰⁰ This was the inspiration for Hayward's focus on power as limitations "that enable and constrain possibilities for action, and on people's relative capacities to know and shape these boundaries."¹⁰¹

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.¹⁰²

Foucault's approach to power transcends politics and sees it as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomenon. He is pointing to the ways that "norms can be so embedded as to be beyond our perception – causing us to discipline ourselves without any willful coercion from others." Therefore, it is suggested that revolutions if it is classified as a "state-centric power struggles, shall not always lead to a change in the social order." This is noticed in Rania Rafei's film details which is discussed later in the analysis chapter.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ John Gaventa, *Power after Lukes: a review of the literature*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. 2003

¹⁰¹ Clarissa Rile Hayward, 'De-Facing Power', *Polity* (1998) 31(1).

¹⁰² M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison*. pp 194

¹⁰³ Powercube. *Foucault: power is everywhere*. Accessed at: <https://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/foucault-power-is-everywhere/>

The notion of power is argued to be the most important work of Foucault because it forms the basis of the analysis of discourse.¹⁰⁴ Jenny Pinkus argues that Foucault had “developed the concept of the 'discursive field' as part of his attempt to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power”.¹⁰⁵

Penny Powers has summarized the description of the notion of power from the text *The History of Sexuality, Volume One, Introduction (1978)* of Michael Foucault in her article “The Philosophical Foundations of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis”. She articulates that power is understood as “a network of interacting forces that are goal-driven, and relational. It creates tension between, within and among individuals or groups.” She adds that “Power is a process that operates in continuous struggles and confrontations that change, strengthen, or reverse the polarity of the force relations between power and resistance.” She considers the key point about “Foucault’s approach to power is that it transcends politics and sees power as an everyday, socialized and embodied phenomenon.”

Powers states that Foucault points out that norms are so embedded in ways that are beyond individuals’ perception causing them to discipline themselves without any willful coercion from others. Filmmakers practice this kind of self-censorship when choosing their films and documentary producers when signing contracts for channels. In the interviews they did not recognize this limitation imposed upon them immediately and

¹⁰⁴ Penny Powers, “The Philosophical Foundations of Foucaultian Discourse Analysis” in; *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines* 1(2): 18-34.PDF (2007) pp.28

¹⁰⁵ Jenny Pinkus, “Foucault”. Massey University. Aug 1996 Accessed at: <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/theory/foucault.htm>. Accessed: 2 Mar 2022

denied it early when asked about it, however, they articulated it clearly later that they already been disciplined to work within the channels criteria without the need to be told or what to take into consideration. Rawan Al Damin said in her interview that the channel allowed her to air her films directly without revising her work and monitor it which shows a high level of self-censorship embedded in her perception.

To Foucault power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and 'truth':

Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true.' Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.'¹⁰⁶

Foucault's theory tries to unravel power in the discourse by considering power and knowledge to be joined together. Hutcheon¹⁰⁷ sees discourse as an instrument of power and an effect of power at the same time, which makes power a tool for the social

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books. 1977 .P27

¹⁰⁷ L. Hutcheon, *Discourse, power, ideology: Humanism and postmodernism*. New York: Routledge. 1991.

construction of reality according to a widely accepted view. However, Foucault asserts that “discourse can transmit, produce, and reinforce power, but at the same time discourse can undermine and expose power, rendering it unstable and possible to thwart.” He considers discursive practices to be embodied, lived by a subject.¹⁰⁸ For example, the discourse of secularism inadvertently informs, influences, and shapes the general understanding of the concept as a separation between the state and religion to the point where people in societies in the Middle East precisely will act out and behave according to what has been labelled as rejection of religion, materializing the meaning of life and an invitation to atheism and degradation.

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it [...] We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart.¹⁰⁹

John Gaventa summarizes this notion of Foucault as follows:

¹⁰⁸ Victor Pitsoe, Moeketsi Letseka, *Foucault's Discourse and Power: Implications for Instructionist Classroom Management*. Open Journal of Philosophy 2013. Vol.3, No.1, 23-28 Published Online February 2013 in SciRes (<http://www.scirp.org/journal/ojpp>)

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, London, Penguin. 1998. P100

“Foucault believed in possibilities for action and resistance. His ideas about action were, concerned with the capacities to recognize and question socialized norms and constraints. Therefore, power and resistance can be sited within the discourse, with scope to ‘evade, subvert or contest strategies of power.”¹¹⁰

Chris Weedon states that discourses to *Foucault* are:

Ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. ¹¹¹

For Foucault (1972), discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority. They embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations; and are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. In addition,

¹¹⁰ John Gaventa, *Power after Lukes: a review of the literature*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2003.

¹¹¹ Chris Weedon, *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell. 1987. P 105-108

discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention".^{112 113}

1.5 Conclusion

There is a large and growing body of literature on secularism as a concept and theory in both western and Arab societies, the discourses of the filmmakers and media professionals in the held interviews were able to demonstrate their beliefs and lived experiences with secularism which revealed that filmmakers had develop their own special definitions of secularism. As Arendt (Arendt, 1998) argues, storytelling is a political action that provides access to public space and allows to build participative society. The filmmakers not only build their beliefs on what they receive from the society, but also add to it which creates an interactive society. Their skills of creating and telling a story allows them to access the public sphere and leave a mark on it. Foucault states: "Discourse can be

¹¹² M. Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon. 1972. pp49

¹¹³ Victor Pitsoe, Moeketsi Letseka, *Foucault's Discourse and Power: Implications for Instructionist Classroom Management*.

both an instrument and an effect of power.”¹¹⁴ The filmmakers discourse power attributes to the situations in their societies.¹¹⁵

The filmmakers in the interviews were forming their answers through a storytelling technique depending on their experiences rather than stating theoretical information especially when the question was about their understanding of secularism. Their confidence and courage to bring such an ideology as secularism from the public sphere to their personal square was an unexpected strategy of treating secularism in the documentary film. Despite believing in the power of individuals on the public sphere, I was expecting filmmakers to define secularism as a stance from the state, however, their definitions were derived from a personal dimension. It was simple but meaningful.

¹¹⁴ M. Foucault, *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Ham- monsworth: Penguin. 1978. pp 101

¹¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. pp 93

Chapter two: Research methodology

2.1 Introduction

Documentary as a genre was considered to study secularism because documentary film is yet considered to be controversial medium in the Middle East. Understanding what documentary film is remains challenging and hard to accept or interact with. Despite having less popularity among audiences compared to other genres, documentary film has the elite audience of the intellectuals who understand its nature. Documentary film does not only present their makers views, but it also presents alternative point of views about any proposed topic and rises the quality of the debate about it.

This research investigates how filmmakers and media professionals were able to demonstrate their beliefs and realities within their films by analyzing their discourses. Their lived experiences with secularism reveal special definitions of secularism regardless of their ideological, professional, or social background. It is clear that the personal and the private space intersects with their understanding of secularism and the definition they provide for it. This chapter will present the research questions raised in this thesis and discuss the process and methodology of the data collection and analysis.

2.2 Research questions

The research aims to analyze the narrative on secularism articulated by the documentary filmmakers and media professionals in the Middle East of their understanding and treatment of this controversial issue. It explores the different scope the documentary film provides as a genre for its makers compared to the mainstream media. The research relates to how the filmmakers understanding of secularism is constructed upon their personal and lived experiences. One of the central focuses of this research is the self-censorship reflected in the filmmakers approach in treating secularism as a controversial issue in the Middle East. Presenting the different understandings of secularism as a concept by the filmmakers explains the dissimilar treatments of it in their films which proves that documentary filmmakers have a wider, deeper, and much bolder chance than other genres to reflect the reality going beyond a superficial treatment of the issue.

The research aims to answer these following questions:

- What is the efficiency of using interviews as the research methodology in this field of research to generate the evidence needed for academic analysis?
- How does the documentary film address secularism as a controversial societal issue in the Middle East?
- How different is treating secularism as a controversial societal issue in independent documentary film from TV news story?
- How much is the filmmaker interested in presenting controversial societal issues in independent documentary film?

- Does this type of film effect how these debates change the audience orientation toward secularism issues in the Middle East according to the filmmakers and the media professionals?
- What are the methods used by the documentary filmmaker to construct self-censorship on their films?

2.3 Data collection

I intend to collect the data for the purpose of this research from three resources: Academic interviews held by myself, former interviews available on media streams and documentary films produced by the filmmakers in the Middle East. I intend to set up academic interviews with filmmakers, and media professionals from several countries in the Middle East and provide analysis of these interviews. The interview-based approach used in this research shall be beneficial in collecting rich data inasmuch the rich account of the interviewee's experiences, knowledge, ideas, and impressions which will be considered and documented. While exploring the filmmakers' interviews and the ways they articulate their experiences and productions, I will employ discourse analysis to examine the themes and patterns in their language, and I will also use critical film analysis to reflect on their understanding of secularism and the process in which they apply secularism in their films. As I am depending on the content analysis of the films and the interviews; I believe the Foucauldian discourse analysis approach is a successful method in studying humanitarian

sciences, communications, and media studies, since it gives a great chance to provide better understanding of its subject.

2.3.1 Research Interviews and films analysis

The research questions will be explored through the analysis of the interviews held by the researcher and former interviews available in news websites and on TV channels as well as the analysis of the documentary films produced by independent filmmakers in the Middle East. The content of these films will be studied deeply to examine how they present and scrutinize controversial societal issues through a visual documentary in terms of semiotics, narrative structure, cultural context, and mise-en-scene. I will use film analysis methodology, and I will focus on the director's methods, i.e. the camera angles, the script and scenario analysis, and the used expressions and terminologies. I will investigate how filmmakers intend to present secularism issues compared to TV News stories presenting similar issues, considering the filmmaker's background and personality's influence in their production.

Interviews should be designed to generate rich data for the researcher; however, it is not guaranteed to produce rich data and meaningful insights. Therefore, the researcher must generate a deeply contextual, nuanced and authentic narrative of participants' outer and inner worlds, their experiences and how they interpret them by designing the interview. Therefore, the process of this methodology has chronological order: the Pre-

Interview Phase of preparing and designing the interview, the Interview Phase; the execution of the interviews, their techniques, language and documentation, and finally the Post-Interview Phase of editing, translating and analyzing the interviews. (Schultze and Avital, 2011)

2.3.2 The Pre-Interviews Phase: Interview Design

“The purpose of qualitative, interview-based research is to describe and clarify people's experiential life “as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of and accomplished by human beings.”¹¹⁶ Interviews are one of the qualitative methodological tools used in research especially when traditional methodological approaches do not generate the evidence needed for academic analysis. Interviews can be either journalistic or academic. Alison Burke and Paul Innes (2007) argue that Journalistic form of interviews is considered a problematic source of data because they are restricted by a need for mutual support that arises as a consequence of the symbiotic relationship in the interview process between publications and productions, and interviewers and practitioners from the other side. Considering the shortfalls in the journalist interviews, academic interviews should be then

¹¹⁶ T. A. Schwandt, *Qualitative inquiry: A dictionary of terms* . second ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001

the more thorough form as they are freed from need to promote a production and could appear more scholarly and de-personalised.¹¹⁷

Interviews as a qualitative method in research face critique considering the power relations between the interviewer and the interviewees. Burke and Innes argue that: “the academic interview operates according to a different set of priorities. The academic is also perceived to be of an 'Elite', with an insider's access to the privileged realms in which meanings are produced and articulated”¹¹⁸. I agree that interviews are not to be considered purely free from pragmatic purposes; however, these purposes in an academic interview are to be associated with academic interests and controlled by research ethics. Moreover, the selected interviewees sample in my research have a respectable amount of power based on their backgrounds and experiences which is not easy to be dominated by the interviewer.

In the process of conducting the interviews, generating the best data from the participant was always my main concern bearing in mind the interviewers' power over the interviewee. However, the relaxed attitude of the interviewees before the camera and the spontaneous transactions between their roles as directors or producers and being just an interviewee (for instance, asking me about the sound, the camera frame, the recording,

¹¹⁷ Alison Burke, Paul Innes, “Interviews as a Methodology for Performance Research: Academic Interviews - an Invitation for Discussion”, *Classical Receptions in Late Twentieth Century Drama and Poetry in English Essays on Documenting and Researching Modern Productions of Greek Drama: The Sources*, 2007. url: <http://www2.open.ac.uk/ClassicalStudies/GreekPlays/essays/burkeacademic.htm>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid

etc.) was evidence that the problem of the power or the fear of the camera were not to be considered obstacles to the researcher to generate the aimed data.

In journalistic interviews, the interviewer is an opponent to the interviewee. The interviewer aims to generate the data from the interviewee at any price which creates a challenging atmosphere. The interviewer has a clear role in the interview, his opinion of the topic is presented and usually he or she are seen in the camera's frame as in the television interviews. The academic interview is entirely different although the tools are the same: People, location, camera, lighting, sound, mic, recording, storage equipment. However, the interviewee is the protagonist of the interview and the only one present in the camera's frame. He or she are not obliged to a certain format to answer the proposed questions as in the news and journalistic interviews which usually are not shared in advanced with interviewees as in the academic interviews. They express themselves freely and use the way they desire to understand and answer the questions. They can skip the asked question, or answer part of it. I believe that the interviewer has a responsibility in the academic interview to make the interviewee feel comfortable enough to ensure that the interview does not feel or function like an investigation as their role here is to be a facilitator to serve the interview goals.

In my interviews with the filmmakers, it was important to start the interview by introducing myself, the research and the interview's academic purposes. In addition to rereading the consent form to the interviewees which they have already seen and signed, and in the context of resources protection ethos I liked to add a note every time that the interviewees have the right to withdraw from the interview and that I am ready to exclude

the interview from my research if the filmmaker (the interviewee) wish so regardless of the consent form which states that the researcher is allowed to use the interview material after it is done without going back to the interviewee. This is to add another layer of comfort and trust between the interviewer and the interviewee to provide a positive environment to the interview and to limit my power.

Interviews should be designed in a way to generate rich data for the researcher; however, it is not guaranteed to produce rich data and meaningful insights. Therefore, the researcher must generate deeply contextual, nuanced and authentic narrative of participants' outer and inner worlds, and their experiences and how they interpret them by well designing the interview.¹¹⁹ I have taken this point into consideration in the interviews I held with the filmmakers as I intended to choose their natural environments for the location of the interview: their countries and cities, and their offices or homes where possible. I also asked them to speak with their own languages and dialects and do not mind the use of multi languages when answering the research questions. I have avoided the journalistic interview approach which guides the interviewees, putting pressure on them with the aims to escalate the response tune. Instead, I have used open-ended questions which provides the interviewees with the time they desire to think of the proposed question and answer it. I intended in the interviews to give the participants a space of time before asking the next question to allow them to add if they want to. I used to remind the

¹¹⁹ Ulrike Schultze, and Michel Avital, "Designing Interviews to Generate Rich Data for Information Systems Research," *Information and Organization* 21, no. 1 (January 2011): 1–16, url: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2010.11.001>.

interviewees with previous interviews or with a previous cinematic production of their own by mentioning a scene or a character and relate it to the research's questions proposed in an attempt to generate the acquired data related to the research, and also allowed them to ask about the researcher and the research topic to build a form of trust between the researcher and the participants which shall facilitate the smooth running of the interviews and the quality of the data generated.

The Interview questions for media professionals and filmmakers are:

1. What does Secularism mean to you?
2. As a filmmaker, how do you choose to address/ treat secularism in the Middle East in your production? Do you prefer to avoid it?
3. Do you think independent filmmakers have more freedom when addressing secularism?
4. What are the limitations of screening documentary films that address secularism on TV channels in the Middle East?
5. Do you think documentary film is able to discuss secular values/cases in a different way than TV news stories?

I aimed in my questions to cover three main areas: the definition of secularism according to the filmmakers, the treatment of secularism in the documentary film, and the limitations facing filmmakers in the filmmaking industry. The first question seeks to know the personal definition of secularism according to the interviewee. Secularism as a research subject is considered challenging for several considerations, and it is one of the most

problematic issues in the Middle East region.¹²⁰ After presenting and discussing a number of secularism-related concepts in the Middle East introduced and discussed by specialists, researchers, and thinkers who are concerned about political affairs and social development in the region¹²¹, I sought the importance of asking the filmmakers and the media professional about their personal opinions and beliefs about secularism, before moving into how they adopt and present secular issues in their films and production. Therefore, when I designed the interviews, the first question the interviewees were asked was about their definition of secularism. This question provides an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of the process of which they apply secularism in their films, which is the essence of the questions that then follow.

The next three questions rotate around the filmmakers' presentation and treatment of secularism in documentary film, their freedom in choosing such a topic, and the limitations of screening an independent documentary film addressing secularism on a television channel in Middle East. Nonetheless, in order to better understand the difference between documentary film and the news story in representing secularism, and how secularism issues are dealt with in the visual media "the television" by either news editors or television channels' journalists, the last question in the interview explores this matter in addition to the limitation facing TV news producers and journalists in covering secularism or any cases related to it. The aim of the last two questions is to provide insights into the particularities of the documentary film made by a filmmaker especially when presenting a

¹²⁰ Azzam Tamini, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*. C. Hurst & Co. Publishers 2000, p190

¹²¹ See Chapter One: literature review on secularism.

controversial issue like secularism compared to the TV news journalist approach and limitations.

There are a variety of ways to conduct qualitative interviews, which include: structured interviews, unstructured or semi-structured interviews and group interviews.¹²² A structured interview has a complete script which is prepared previously, and improvisation has no room. This type is often used in surveys where the interviews are not necessarily conducted by the researcher. On the contrary, in unstructured or semi-structured interviews, the script is not complete, and improvisation is necessary as the researcher may have prepared only the questions in advance, and mostly in this case the researcher is the interviewer. Group interviews can either be structured or unstructured where two or more people are interviewed at once by one or more interviewers¹²³, however, this type of interviews was not used in this research as it does not serve the purpose of the study.

In my research I applied the unstructured or semi-structured interview type which is frequently applied in different qualitative research. Despite of the criticisms to it inasmuch to its efficacy in generating rich data in the subject of my research I find that it

¹²² Andrea Fontana, and James H. Frey, *From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text* Handbook of qualitative research. In Handbook of qualitative research edited by Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 645-672. 2nd ed. London: Sage publication (2000).

¹²³ Myers and Newman, Myers, Michael D. and Newman, Michael. *The Qualitative Interview in IS Research: Examining the Craft*, Information and Organization 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 2–26, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2006.11.001>.

provides a wide room for variation in responses especially with the open-ended questions which are used in this research.

There are two reasons for the undirected open-ended questions used in the interviews in my research; the first is what distinguishes this method of allowing the unlimited thinking and the greater breadth provided for conversations and discussions. This allows the interviewees to use their personal language and expressions and articulate their experiences and generously tell their personal and professional views toward the research subject. The second reason is the background of the selected interviewees and the limited number of interviews held. The existing experience and the minimum knowledge in media in the interviewees as media professionals provide higher quality interaction with the proposed questions in the interview. Both, the employees of media institutions like production companies or TV channels, and the filmmaker, producers and directors had given open-ended responses to the open-ended questions according to their specialty and profession, which granted the research with productive and supportive data. Moreover, the limited number of interviews along with the open-ended questions makes the interpretation and the analysis of the given responses an applicable and successful mission.

2.3.3 Interviewee Selection Process: Sampling and Gaining access.

Interviews aim at describing and clarifying human experience as it appears in people's lives. Therefore, the selection of interview participants requires purposive and iterative strategies.¹²⁴ The interviews in my research are divided into two categories; the first one is the academic interviews held by the me, and the second is former interviews available on media streams. These two categories consist of independent filmmakers, documentary film directors who work with television channels, and film and TV producers. The qualitative interview is a negotiated achievement formed by the social and cultural context of the interview. Many qualitative researchers differentiate between participant observation and in-depth (or ethnographic) interviewing; however, it is argued¹²⁵ that the two go hand in hand.¹²⁶ Therefore, methodologies used for the analysis of the interviews were the Foucauldian discourse analysis combined with the ethnographic observation methodology.

¹²⁴ Donald E. Polkinghorne, "Language and Meaning: Data Collection in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, no. 2 (2005): 137.

¹²⁵ John Lofland, and Lyn H Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings : A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Belmont, Calif. : Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1984.

¹²⁶ Fontana, "From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text."

In Stefanie Van Peers' study in 2011¹²⁷ about Arab female documentary filmmakers, she had chosen five directors from only four different countries in the Arab Region. This was based on her methodology as her research subject was feminism primarily. She considered the five directors as human beings in general and females in particular. Although, my research subject is at variance with hers; as I intend to explore the filmmakers' views and stance on secularisms, I agree with her on selecting this sample of the filmmakers according to this geographical distribution. However, increasing the interviewee numbers shall extend the scope of the interviews in order to enrich the collected data which eventually shall serve my research purposes.

The qualitative approach adopted in this research makes reaching filmmakers and media professionals and the expansion in recognizing their views and stances my main research source. Therefore, I took the geographical distribution of the interviewees into consideration when I came to the selection process. I considered Middle Eastern countries which speak Arabic as a main language and included the following countries: Qatar and the United Arab Emirates UAE from the Gulf area, Tunisia from North Africa, and Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan from the Levant area. The interviews took place in three locations: Beirut the Lebanese capital, Amman the Jordanian capital, and London the capital of the United Kingdom.

I collected eleven interviews with documentary filmmakers and media professionals¹²⁸ in the period between February 2018 to August 2019, in addition to using

¹²⁷ Van de Peer, *Negotiating Dissidence. the Pioneering Women of Arab Documentary*.

¹²⁸ See Appendix Two

another three news and TV interviews of filmmakers (Directors and producers) from Lebanon, Tunisia, and Palestine provided on the media stream. I also observed and analysed ten main films produced in Qatar, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan and UAE for the data collection purposes for this research¹²⁹. I have avoided to conduct any interviews in dangerous and unfriendly countries for academics and research studies. According to the news and researchers' recommendations, academics had been harassed and arrested and ruled for death in some countries in the Middle East region, in addition to the provocations against them by public figures and ministers especially if they are citizens of these countries and studying abroad. This issue had affected the proposed geographical map of the interviews. It has also been the reason behind reconsidering one of the filmmakers in the gulf area to do the interview to avoid being subject to any problems in the future.

In addition to the geographical distribution and the working field of the interviewees, the ideology and the background of the interviewees is considered significant and a decisive factor in the selection process. This factor had forced itself due to the problematic nature of "Secularism" as a subject of research, and due to the conducted attitude towards it in the Middle East, which generally exists in the people who works in media and filmmaking.

Considering the filmmaker account is neutral towards controversial issues this shall lead to a superficial and unsuccessful treatment of the issue in the film. Consequently, the interviewees' stance on the ideological and political matters is considered a vital and key factor in the selection process. The filmmaking industry, in particular, seems to be a field

¹²⁹ See Appendix Three

which has a majority of open-minded workers. However, with the openness years in the media after the creation of the satellite television channels and private media production companies (after the second Gulf war - Baghdad 1991), documentary filmmaking industry in the Middle East in particular has considered hiring staff and production companies from different and opposing ideologies. However, it became noticeable during the sampling phase the effect of channels on their employees regarding the ideologies they adopt or allowed to articulate about and share with the public specially if it is against the ideology adopted by the channels they work for.

I have not faced any difficulties contacting, coordinating, and setting up the interviews with the filmmakers and the media professionals taking my academic and journalistic background into consideration. I have chosen to contact twenty filmmakers from the Middle East for conducting interviews after the preparation phase. Two of them declined my request. The first due to prior travel arrangement he had, and the other without justification. One of the documentary film producers hesitated to proceed with the interview after I started to set up the camera in her home. She requested to not to use the video material for any visual presentation despite her prior approval provided through the correspondence between us, which clearly mentioned that the interviews will be recorded and documented by a video camera. As I am concerned to protect my interviewees' privacy and in order to provide a trustworthy environment, I reassured her that I will not use the visual images recorded in the research by adding a phrase stating this in the clearance form, and I blurred the camera lens before starting the interview. This has facilitated the smooth running of the interview on the personal, social and professional.

Notwithstanding, the feedback I have received from the filmmakers for conducting an academic interview for research purposed about secularism in documentary film in the Middle East were generally positive and varied between strongly interested in taking part and stated that this topic was not approached before despite its importance and others who saw that secularism has not been treated particularly as a theme in the documentary film in the Middle East but it was present in the directors visions and films in the region. Gaining access to the film sector was not difficult considering my professional background in journalism and as a professor in media studies. In addition to having personal contact details of some of the documentary filmmakers and journalists I chose for the interviews as I had either a personal or professional relation with them, it was not hard to secure the contact details of other filmmakers who have been suggested to me by professionals in the field when I was discussing my research subject.

I Initially contacted fifty professionals and workers in the television and filmmaker industry via email and twitter to ask about films discussing secularism documentary film in the Middle East for my research. However, I can group the responses in three categories: Five people replied with films titles, the majority said that they did not know or watched any, and third group were not certain about the question's nature about secularism in the films. The Egyptian director and the manager of "Hot Spot" company for documentary film production; As'aad Taha replied to my email saying: "I am sorry! I am not an academic person, and I don't classify the film's subjects this way. I am also not familiar with any documentary film to treat this "story"." I understood Taha's use of the word "story" in his answer as a filmmaker that people's and places' stories are central in his thinking about the film and how to transfer these stories into images to reach the audience. Hot Spot

Production company was the executive producer of Rami Kodeih's film *Seculars in Lebanon*^{130 131} which was produced for Al Jazeera channel, however, Taha did not remember the film in an indication that mentioning secularism in the film title then was not a problematic issue in production.

As I have received several responses declining watching films treating secularism in a documentary film, I considered at the beginning to simplify the term "Secularism" as it might be necessary along with rephrasing the question. However, the simplification of the subject matter herein might be considered for cosmetic use; and it can be considered a "superficial treatment"¹³² in the filmmaking industry. Therefore, I declined to respond to the majority of the audience's need of the "superficial treatment", and kept the term "secularism" stated clearly in my questions and conversations with the filmmakers considering that the academic context supposedly to be the furthest from the "superficial treatment". I used the term "Secularism" confidentiality with the filmmakers who were concerned and willing to do the interview as I assumed they have their stance from the controversial issues regardless of this stance's depth and steadiness of their views. I gave the filmmakers the complete freedom to start defining secularism according to their

¹³⁰ *Seculars in Lebanon*. Directed by Rami Kodeih. Al Jazeera, 2011.

¹³¹ This film will be discussed in Chapter Five of this research when discussing the limitation facing documentary film production for television channels.

¹³² This term was used by several filmmaker when talking about the limitations and the censorship. Please see chapter five of this research.

personal understanding without any frames or limitations which gave the desired outcome and showed a variation in the definition.¹³³

I have contacted several documentary filmmakers and producers in satellite and television channels, and the correspondence took wide timeframe compared to the independent filmmakers. Three of them were directors and producers from Al Jazeera Channel, and Al Jazeera Documentary Channel which is considered by the filmmakers the biggest producer for the documentary films in the Middle East, and two directors from Al Arabi Television in London, and the German Duchvelli Arabic channel in Berlin Germany. Although the filmmakers showed an initial interest in participating in the interviews, they all required to seek an approval from the institutions they work for which made the correspondence process take a longer time. Over months of follow up I was not able to secure a decisive answer from the high management of those channels, neither with an approval or a rejection which seemed unprofessional and forced me to stop the follow up and move on with my research. I have replaced this category of the participants with former documentary producers and managers in these channels and filmmakers who had worked before on films produced by television channels. The Palestinian filmmaker Rawan Damin who worked as a documentary production manager in Al Jazeera channel stated:

Directors and employees of television channels hesitate to do this kind of interviews, moreover, they are uncomfortable to have a conversation about a controversial issue as it might affect their work negatively. They are afraid to lose

¹³³ Please see Chapter Three: secularism to the filmmakers

their jobs and privileges. Television directors do not need a permission to participate in an interview about secularism in the documentary film. And assuming there is any policies in this regards, the employee (Director) shall inform its management in person to secure the permission if he or she is sincerely interested.¹³⁴

I chose my research interviewees sample from the left of the political spectrum as well as the right and Included filmmakers with liberal and leftist backgrounds, as well as filmmakers from conservative societies. I was keen to include participants from different environments, sects, and genders, as well as those who believe they belong to minority groups in the region. This is because secularism is prescribed as the solution for the Middle East's sectarian and religious problems as well as a solution for the minority's issues, also because secularism suggests equality before the law in relation to gender issues, especially in the civil status matters. Limiting the sample based on the filmmakers' ideology alone in the sampling would have only shown their political stances of either being with or against secularism while including other criteria like gender and societal environment provides wider discussions about secularism meaning and its practices in the filmmakers' lives. This variation in the sample had provided the research with rich data about the filmmakers' reflexivity on their productions and treatment of secularism in the film based on their experiences and views toward secularism.

¹³⁴ Damen. Rawan. Interview with the author

2.3.4. The interview Phase.

Considering the social scene in which the interviews took place, like the physical setting and the general framing of the situation, the individual interviewee constituted in terms of identity, impression management and politics, and the double-edged nature of language, its use and effect in the interview, this leads to critically interpret specific interview situations and accounts, thus complementing a more instrumental view of the research method.¹³⁵

I conducted the interviews in person as I am depending on the discourse analysis as a methodology for analysing the interviews, therefore, I needed to ensure the interviewees full engagement with the interviews' questions, furthermore the analysis phase of the interviews' environment and the body language of the interviewees requires the researchers personal presence to maximize the outcome data of the interviews. I held the interviews at various locations such as workplaces, the interviewees' offices, homes, production companies, public café and my place. These places were chosen according to each country's circumstances and were agreed on with the filmmakers in advance. I intended to use Skype with two interviewees due to the budget limitation and travel restrictions during the covid pandemic, however, the first interview over Skype did not meet the required standards of the interviews I was aiming for and was not successful to provide the research data needed as the open-ended questions took the conversation onto a

¹³⁵ Schultze and Avital, "Designing Interviews to Generate Rich Data for Information Systems Research".

different track. Therefore, I decided not to include it in the research and cancelled the second interview as well considering the Skype or any distance interviewing method shall not serve my research purposes as a qualitative method tool for data collection. The interviews length with the producers were shorter in general as seventy minutes on average. While directors and filmmakers' interviews varied in length between ninety minutes and one hundred and forty minutes. I contacted the interviewees about forty to sixty days before the set dates and required them to sign a consent form after sharing with them the university's approval along with a sheet containing information about the research questions. I also obtained their written permission to record the interview. I confirmed the interviews appointments time and location within few days of the set dates by email and resent the interview questions to create a relaxed and trustworthy environment and to guarantee the filmmakers take the interviews seriously.

Before starting the interviews, I shared with the filmmaker the consent form¹³⁶ they signed, the research questions in both languages (English and Arabic), and an information sheet¹³⁷ about the research along with an A4 sheet¹³⁸ that states the interviews' date, location, and the interviewee's name which I ask the filmmaker to hold before my camera to document the interview's details¹³⁹. The interviews aimed to cover the research questions; however, I have used the same questions with all my interviewees. I had to change the order of questions sometimes according to fluency of the interviewee when

¹³⁶ See Appendix Five

¹³⁷ See Appendix Five and Appendix Four

¹³⁸ See Appendix Five

¹³⁹ See Appendix One

answering certain questions or in moving between topics. The opening question always has been what secularism means to the filmmaker or the media professional. The following question was about how the filmmaker chooses to address and treat secularism in their films. Subsequent questions were about the documentary film compared to the TV news story when discussing secular values and cases and whether independent filmmakers have more freedom in addressing and treating secularism in their films than TV channels' employees and contractors. The last question of the interviews was about the limitations facing documentary filmmakers in making and showing their films to the audience. The interviewees provided fascinating narrative about their filmmaking experiences and the challenges they faced. They felt confident sharing personal details of their lives and gave examples from their societies without hesitation.

The interaction between the researcher and the interviewees was kept to the minimum and the responsive interviewing approach which suggested by (Rubin & Rubin, 2005)¹⁴⁰ was hardly used in my interviews to reduce the researchers influence on the interviewees and leave them a wide space for thinking and answering without guidance to guarantee that the interviewees opinions are not led towards a certain direction. I listened to the interviewees carefully and followed their narrative and views.

I chose face-to-face filming of the interviews to be the main method to document the conducted interviews as long as this was possible either due to the feasibility of traveling to access the natural places of the interviewee, the possibility to secure an appointment,

¹⁴⁰ Rubin H & Rubin I *Qualitative Interviewing: The art of hearing data*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. 2005

and the existence of safe environment for scholars to conduct their research¹⁴¹. I chose the video recording for documenting the face-to-face interviews for several reasons:

1. Face-to-face interviews add value to the interview answers and assures its relevancy to the proposed question, the camera adds importance and seriousness atmosphere to the interview setting which generates better responses and keeps the interviewee aware to keep his answer within the frame of the question and not take it elsewhere. The open-ended questions allowed me to broaden the questions' scope and discussions when needed to better feature the views introduced by the interviewee.
2. Since the subject matter of the research is secularism in documentary film in the Middle East and the interviewees are filmmakers and journalists in the visual media, this has given the video recorded interviews more consistency and professionalism to the context of the research. As the camera is part of the daily lives of the filmmakers and media professionals, I did not need to do the usual ice breaking and the camera introduction phase due to the reconciled relation between the guest and the camera. Therefore, this has not been a limitation in my study; on the contrary,

¹⁴¹ e.g.: The abduction, torture and murder incident in Egypt of Giulio Regeni, the Italian PhD researcher in Cambridge University in 2016. And Durham University researcher, Matthew Hedges, who was detained during a PhD research trip in UAE. Please see: Stille, Alexander, "Who Murdered Giulio Regeni". *The Guardian*, October 4, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/04/egypt-murder-giulio-regeni> , and see: Parveen, Nazia and Wintour, Patrick, "Matthew Hedges: British academic accused of spying jailed for life in UAE". *The Guardian*, November 21, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/21/british-academic-matthew-hedges-accused-of-spying-jailed-for-life-in-uae>

it added a more serious touch to the interview to what camera presence has an effect in the media professionals' minds.

3. The use of filming provides the researcher with richer data than the provided in voice recordings or in writing on pre-prepared forms or through email. The video recorder interviews had granted the researcher extra information observed through the used wording and the body language in addition to the words, sentences, and expressions.

2.3.5 Self-reflective

My positions as a doctoral researcher investigating secularism in middle eastern documentaries is discussed in this section. At the beginning of the field work I contacted professionals and workers in the television and film industry by email and twitter to ask about films discussing secularism documentary film in the Middle east for my research. In the designing phase of the questions, and due to the number of negative responses from the filmmakers about watching or working on film that treats secularism issue, I considered to rephrase the questions and simplify it. However, I declined after a thorough consideration not to respond to the need of the “superficial treatment” of the term and kept “secularism” stated clearly in my questions and conversations with the filmmakers considering that the academic context supposedly to be the furthest from the “superficial treatment”.

The research interest was affected by my assumption that secularism is a stance from the state. I was expecting more theoretical answers from the filmmakers especially when defining secularism by including the public sphere in their private domain. However, I had to reshape the research structure after the interview phase as it played an immanent role in reshaping the chapter topics and order. Chapter four for instance which discusses secularism and its relationship with minority groups and military regime in the Middle East was expanded during the research analysis phase and based on the answers of a few filmmakers who articulated these issues either during the interviews or in their film’s

narrative. In addition, my professional experience in the documentary film production management prepared me to expect the news values from journalist who work as directors and producers in the documentary film industry.¹⁴²

I have not faced any difficulties contacting the filmmakers and the media professionals taking my academic and journalistic background into consideration. However, obtaining some of filmmakers' approvals to do the interviews was a matter of an issue especially the employees of television channels. The preparation phase of the interviews revealed high level of bureaucratic procedures within the renowned media institutions as well as high concerns by the filmmakers to take part in interviews or academic research that discusses their work and production within these institutions.

I agree that interviews are not to be considered purely free from pragmatic purposes; however, to produce rich data and meaningful insights, the interviews should be controlled and monitored by research ethics. However, the research I undertook was approved by the humanities ethics committee at my institution. Interviews aim at describing and clarifying human experience as it appears in people's lives. Therefore, the researcher must generate deeply contextual, nuanced and authentic narrative of participants' outer and inner worlds, and their experiences and how they interpret them by well designing the interview. However, the interaction between me and the interviewees was kept to the minimum and used only to clarify a point and not to show any agreement and disagreement gestures with the interviewees' views. I was keen to guarantee that the

¹⁴² This topic is discussed in Chapter Five.

interviewees opinions are not guided or led towards a certain direction. I listened to the interviewees carefully and followed their narrative and views.

Although the research conducted for this thesis is in English, the communication language for the interviews mainly relied on Arabic and English. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, but the interviewees used English and French sentences, expressions and terms in their speech based on their countries, cultures, and education. I preferred to listen to filmmakers speaking in their dialects to avoid any limitation to their wording and this is to retain their spontaneity and fluency which may support their views. Being fluent myself with dialects of the conducted interviews and able to understand the spoken dialogue appropriately was an advantage added to the research as it enabled me to take the analysis of the interviews into more meaningful depth. Moreover, my background as a filmmaker and producer who worked in the Middle East region and with different television channels and media institutions, helped me form the research and the interview questions to generate the acquired data. I was not only able to understand the narrative of the interviews, but I was able also to understand specific used cultural codes; terms, body language, jokes, political signals, etc. On the other hand, transcription and translation was a challenging phase of the research. Transferring the filmmaker's emotions, interactions with the context of the interview along with the spirit of their narratives from the rich dialects used in the Middle East into English as a second language for me took a lot of time and effort to be faithful to the original scripts.

I have avoided the journalistic approach in the interviews which guides the interviewees, which put pressure on interviewees. I used open-ended questions which

provides the interviewees with the time they desire to think of the proposed question and answer it to facilitate the smooth running of the interviews and the quality of the data generated. I had to remind the interviewees sometimes that this interview is recorder when I felt that they started talking about their private lives or criticizing the government and regime of their countries or mentioning an opposing stance from it as this information might hurt the interviewee especially in the countries known with suppressive actions against journalists and filmmakers. Only one interviewee reconsidered his statement criticizing the government's censorship on screening one of his films, as he might try to resell it to national or local televisions in the future. This is in the process of protecting my resources as no benefit will be added to the research in case the interviewee was hurt.

2.4 Post-Interview Phase: Data Organising and Data Analysis

In this section I will discuss how I recorded and analyzed the gathered data after transferring it into transcript and translated it in preparation for the subsequent analysis using the relevance of Foucauldian analytical approach.

2.4.1 Data Organising: Documentation and Transcription

At the beginning of the interviews, I used an information sheet about the research in both languages (English and Arabic) that states the interviews' date, location, and the interviewee's name which I asked the filmmaker to hold before my camera to document the interview's details. I used the camera along with my note book as the main equipment to document the interview, along with a digital voice recorder to make audio recordings of the interviews as well. I used a camera canon, medium sized tripod, camera mics, and camera memory. I took into consideration the size and the weight of the equipment as it will be traveling with me to the interviews set locations. I had my personal camera and an extra memory for emergencies, in addition to using my smartphone sometimes to make audio recordings as an extra copy of the interviews. I have not used lighting kits in the interviews due the difficulty of transferring them and because I believe in the natural lighting in the scene in the documentary style interviews.

After copying the recorded material to guarantee extra protection for the interviews, I started transforming the interviewees' answers and responses into a written script. My aim was to provide a broader scope of data to classify the answers and add my comments to it for a clear and straightforward analyzing process. I transcribed the recordings using the traditional manual way as none of the software I tried served me to generate the accurate text as the interviewees were speaking different dialects of the Arabic language mixed with other languages (English or French). In the transcription, I did not omit any features of speech because the full format was necessary for my research purposes. I was not able to carry with the manual transcription as it took a very long time and effort adding to it the translation phase, therefore, and for a few interviews I did not make transcriptions. Instead, I quoted and summarized the relevant information from the interviewees' answers.

It is well known to anyone who has engaged in the fieldwork that at some point the researcher will be buried under increasing mountain of field notes, transcripts, video and audio tapes, no matter how organised they may be.¹⁴³ Therefore, after leaving each interview's location, I ensured to write down my notes. These notes may be called emotional notes as they are general, inharmonious observations, and mostly self-dominated. It includes the interview flow, the location, the city or country where the interview was performed, and side conversations with the interviewees or other people who existed in the interview location either about the research or about the interviews itself. Furthermore, my observations about the interviewees themselves were all taken

¹⁴³ Fontana, *From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text*.

down. I agree with John Lofland and Lyn H. Lofland (1984) that despite the luxury of having a video camera nowadays, researchers ought to collect the empirical material from the interviews by taking notes regularly and promptly and being inconspicuous as possible when taking notes, writing everything down, no matter how unimportant it may seem at the time and finally analyzing their notes constantly.¹⁴⁴

2.4.2 The Analysis of the Data

In qualitative methodology, “the gathered data are primarily in the form of spoken or written language rather than in the form of numbers.”¹⁴⁵ In order to substantiate their knowledge claims, researchers are encouraged to use other techniques other than the quantitative ones.¹⁴⁶ However, John Scheurich (1971) had criticized interviewing and its language because it is based on modernist assumptions rather than being a process by the numbers. Moreover, he considers this methodology “persistently slippery, unstable, and ambiguous from person to person, from situation to situation, from time to time”.¹⁴⁷ Yet, I

¹⁴⁴ Lofland and Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings*.

¹⁴⁵ Donald E., *Language and Meaning*.

¹⁴⁶ Schultze and Avital, *Designing Interviews to Generate Rich Data for Information Systems Research*.

¹⁴⁷ Kaye Haw, and Mark Hadfield, “Research Method in the Postmodern James J. Scheurich,” *British Educational Research Journal*, no. 5 (1998): 637.

consider this variation and inconsistency in this technique a productive tool in generating data when it comes to the topic of my research.

Understanding the language and culture of the respondents is very important because in some researches, when the anthropological interviews tend to rely on interpreters, it becomes “vulnerable to added layers of meanings, biases, and interpretations, which may lead to disastrous misunderstandings”.¹⁴⁸ Although the research’s language is English, the interviews were conducted in Arabic. The interviewees sometimes used English and French sentences, expressions, and terms. I preferred to carry the interviews in Arabic and in the interviewees’ dialect in particular to avoid any limitation to their wording and this is to retain their spontaneity and fluency which may support their views. Moreover, the interviewees, despite their competence in more than one language had chosen to set the interview in their mother tongue and in their local dialect when I asked them if they preferred to use Arabic or English.

I also had to take into consideration that the Arabic language is spoken in many different dialects based on the region and the country. The interviewer, myself, in this research is fluent in the dialect of the conducted interviews and able to understand the spoken dialogue appropriately. Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey confirm the importance of speaking the language of interviewees saying: “The use of language, particularly the use

¹⁴⁸ Fontana, *From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text*.

of specific terms, is important in the creation of a "sharedness of meanings" in which both interviewer and respondent understand the contextual nature of specific referents."¹⁴⁹

"Production of interview data requires awareness of the complexity of self-reports and the relation between experience and language expression. To generate interview data of sufficient breadth and depth requires practiced skill and time."¹⁵⁰ These interviews which were conducted in a language other than the research language were translated into English after being transcribed and reassemble by the researcher. The translation influences transferring the information and feelings as accurate as it was in its spoken language taking into consideration the translator's language skills and background.

To transfer the interviews from the interviewees' language which is mainly Arabic in local dialects to the research language, which is English, was accomplished in two ways; the first is to translate the whole interview before using its data in the analysis process, then consulting a linguistic who is fluent in the two languages; the interview and the research languages, to review the translation. The second way is seconding the translations every time I used the interviewees' answers in the analysis. The first way is considered safer and more accurate to transfer the content and the views from one language to another; however, this method needs extra effort and time to have the English script eventually. It is worth mentioning here, that a wide number of media professionals and filmmakers in the Middle East use English expressions, and sentences and sometimes French expressions

¹⁴⁹ Fontana, *From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text*.

¹⁵⁰ Donald E., *Language and Meaning*.

according to the interviewees' country's traditions and cultures, which facilitates the process of translation of those expressions and terms into the research language.

The sources of the qualitative data collected through the research's methodology are interviews with participants, observations, documents, and artifacts. The data is usually transformed into written text for analytic use.¹⁵¹ As no software was used for the analysis, re-watching the interviews and reading the fieldnote were necessary. The conducted interviews have mainly affected the research structure. It played an immanent role in reshaping the chapters topics and its order.

The Foucauldian approach which treats the epistemological issues¹⁵² was used to understand the treatment of secularism in documentary film in the middle east region. "Foucault¹⁵³ argues that investigating experiences lived in contemporary societies results in engaging with the question of power."¹⁵⁴ He states that power is "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they constitute their own organization"¹⁵⁵. Hence, I argue that the multiple force relations immanent in the society were challenged by

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Tarnovskaya. *Class, gender and cultural work in British documentary film production: Experiences, subjectivities and policy discourses*. pp 98

¹⁵³ M. Foucault *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books. 1978. pp 92 -0100

¹⁵⁴ Tarnovskaya. *Class, gender and cultural work in British documentary film production: Experiences, subjectivities and policy discourses*. pp 99

¹⁵⁵ Foucault M *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An introduction*. pp 92 -0100

the documentary filmmakers' treatment of secularism in their production. In this research I will explore the discourses of filmmakers and media professional and their films to see how they are able to contribute to the transformation of the power-knowledge relations in the filmmaking industry considering filmmakers' accounts as 'local centers of power-knowledge'¹⁵⁶.

The discourse analysis which has been an influential approach to research was developed by social theory (for instance, Foucault, Gramsci, Althusser, Habermas, and Giddens) as well as by linguistics (for instance, Fowler, Pecheux, Sinclair, Coulthard, and Labov).¹⁵⁷ However, my method of analysis will depend on the discourse analysis deployed by Foucault. Discourse reflects social reality according to the Foucauldian studies of media and culture. Foucault argues that listening to individuals and their particular experiences leads to localizing problems in the society. The different discourses generated by the filmmakers reproduce and challenge the social structures in the film industry.¹⁵⁸

In the limitations chapter of this research, I will use Foucault's notion of subjectivity and governmentality. As subjectivity is a constructive element of the power relations according to Foucault, subjectivities are governed 'inside and outside'. The filmmakers' subjectivities are affected by the television and satellite channels regulations which produces repressive structures in the sphere of culture in the filmmaking industry.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* pp 98

¹⁵⁷ Tarnovskaya. *Class, gender and cultural work in British documentary film production: Experiences, subjectivities and policy discourses*. footnotes pp 99

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Therefore, the filmmakers' subjectivities are formed by a large political and historical context. These structures create a mode of governing the self for the filmmakers. The inherited 'disciplinary power' creates both the possibilities and the constraints for the filmmaker's production.

2.5 Conclusion

Investigating the filmmakers' discourses and subjectivities against the power structures in the filmmaking industry is illuminating for film and media literature. The research aims to understand the filmmakers' views and methods as well as their concerns and limitations through the production phases of their films when it comes to treating a controversial societal issue like secularism.

Using the interviews as a qualitative methodology tool in the research gathers data that serve as evidence for the researchers' hypothesis.¹⁵⁹ The language, the translation, transcription, and the circumstances of the interviews are all limitations facing the academic interviews methodology that need to be factored into the analysis of interview data. "The academic interview is similarly subject to a collection of limitations that need to be factored into the analysis of interview data."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Donald E., *Language and Meaning*.

¹⁶⁰ Burke and Innes. *Interviews as a Methodology for Performance Research*.

The interviews have affected the research structure. They play an immanent role in reshaping the chapter topics and its order. Despite of the rich literature available on secularism and the broad discussions and application of it as a concept and ideology, the personal accounts of the filmmakers on secularism are the incite and the essence of the research. Chapter four which discusses secularism and its relationship with the minorities and military dictator regime in the Middle East was expanded during the research analysis phase and based on the answers of a few filmmakers who articulated these issues either during the interviews or in their film's narrative. The filmmakers' personal definition and stance of secularism which was the first question in the interviews was developed from their personal lived lives or based on their backgrounds and ideological and political belongings. These definitions are seen reflected on the production of the directors and producers.

The preparation phase of the interviews revealed high level of bureaucratic procedures within the renowned media institutions as well as high concerns by the filmmakers who work for these institutions and television channels of jeopardizing their work and benefits if they took part in interviews or academic research which discusses their work and production within these institutions. The television channel as an employer has high impact on the filmmakers who work for it, as the latest chose to adopt their institutions' ego. And the bigger the institution is, the bigger their employees' ego. Unlike the independent filmmakers whose response was quicker and their interaction with the interview's topic was more effective. It was clear that they had more freedom in articulating their minds, spontaneous and cooperative. They were less formal compared to the directors who work for the television channels.

The next chapter will discuss the filmmakers and media professionals' understanding and definition of secularism and their approaches in addressing and treating this controversial issue in their films and production.

Chapter Three: Filmmakers' Definitions and Treatment of Secularism

3.1 Introduction

In her book, *Disputed territories: masculinity and social space*, Sharon Willis writes about the reason for studying cinema and eloquently explains how filmmakers' presentation of secularism in films is a self-projection of themselves and a reflection of their desires:

Cinema is not imposed from without on a passive public, but... [is] responsive to certain collective demands or desires ... We need to analyze a cinema that responds to, reads and maps collective fantasies, utopian and anxious, a cinema that is always reading us – reading our social configurations of power and desire, pleasure and violence. This is part of film's allure: as we read it, it also reads us.¹⁶¹

This chapter will present the filmmakers' stances on secularism in the Middle East. Their answers came in response to the open question "What does secularism mean to you?" The open question leaves the filmmakers entirely free to articulate their understanding of

¹⁶¹ Sharon Willis, 'Disputed territories: masculinity and social space', in Penley, Constance and Sharon Willis (eds), *Male Trouble*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. p.266.

the concept. The purpose of my question is to demonstrate a personal stance, anecdotal comments or bodily reaction before the camera. The filmmakers' answers herein varied from political to personal depending on their social backgrounds. I argue that this approach serves the research's purposes better rather than merely repeating definitions of secularism from thinkers and philosophers.

As I am using discourse analysis for the interviews held with the filmmakers, I will present each filmmaker's analysis separately before concluding the outcomes and the crossing points between them. The filmmakers' interviews presented in this chapter will include sequentially Hady Zaccak, Jumana Saadeh, Myriam El-Hajj, and Rania Rafei.¹⁶² The first part of this chapter will present the definitions of secularism provided by these four directors, while the second part will discuss their treatment of secularism in their films. More analysis of other filmmakers' works treating secularism in film will also be explored in this chapter using the film analysis methodology to elaborate on related points, especially like Ziad Doueiri's and Nadia EL-Fani's films.

3.2 Filmmakers and Definition of Secularism

Filmmakers had different definitions of secularism based on their personal experiences, country of domicile, their relations with their family and surrounding

¹⁶² See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

community. Different factors made the definition to each filmmaker particular. However, they all seem to be pragmatic and personalized the term when reflecting secularism in their films away from the academic, theoretical, and hypothetical definitions of the term in the intellectual world. Here in this section, I will include the filmmakers' definitions and understanding of secularism, and I will expand in the next section of this chapter on the approaches they use and implement it in their films to tackle secularism based on their understanding.

In Michael Thabit's article "The contemporary Lebanese documentary through the study of three films on identity, nation and transmission" which focuses on the development of the Lebanese documentary film market through an analysis of three films produced between 2009 and 2010, he states that the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers in Lebanon who focus on the functioning of society rather than on the memory of the conflict, unlike the immediate post-war generation is one of the factors that benefited the renewal of Lebanese filmmaking.¹⁶³ However, Lina Khatib in her book, *Lebanese cinema – imagining the civil war and beyond*, considers Lebanese cinema a small cinema and does not constitute an industry in the common definition of the word. She sees it as a collection of films by independent filmmakers, both in Lebanon and in exile, that often represents issues that Lebanese history books do not dare to address especially the concept of the national identity in the country. She recognizes that the approach used by the new generation of filmmaker has changed into presenting stories of how the film's

¹⁶³ Michel Tabet, "Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l'étude de trois films sur l'identité, la nation et la transmission", *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 134 | 2013, 183-194.

author had lived through the war and that challenged the dominant representation of the war. However, the socio-political effect of the war which is seen in the daily life of the all the Lebanese, remains prevailing in the atmosphere of the film, as it does in each filmmaker's mind, especially those who lived through the Civil War period. Al Khatib says: "the war became a defining element of the directors themselves." As religions and sectarianism were the base of the civil war in Lebanon, the filmmakers focused in their films on issues of social fragmentation, sectarian animosities, class divisions, and individual devastation in the society in Lebanon, and seemed concerned to reveal the dark side of the war. Their definitions of secularism or adopting the concept of secularism for the filmmakers in Lebanon was extracted and developed from the surrounding environment as a tendency towards a solution or as an escape from the reality. While Hady Zaccak defined secularism as "the salvation" and considered it the opposite of sectarianism, Myriam El-Hajj said "I am far from religions" and "us, seculars, are a minority in Lebanon".

Tabet argues that the new generation of filmmakers explore the transition to a sociological documentary form, focusing on current social and political tensions as well as an attention to individuals unlike their predecessors who explored the themes linked to civil conflict and its memory. He states that the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 followed by the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel gave rise to a series of films that showed the war through personal stories. Katia Jarjoura's film *Terminator*¹⁶⁴ is one of

¹⁶⁴ *Terminator*. Film Directed by Katia Jarjoura, 2006

the films that viewed major events from the angle of personal portraits.¹⁶⁵ While on the other hand, Zaccak's film *A History Lesson*¹⁶⁶ tackles smoothly the Lebanese secular society issue out of personal concern for society's history.

3.2.1 Hady Zaccak

Tabet says that documentary production in Lebanon is handled in different ways and Zaccak's film is an example of one of them. Studying these ways allows observing the reconfiguration of the audiovisual market in the Arab world and the emergence of a real industry in Lebanon.¹⁶⁷ Zaccak and his films are a worthy material to study for any research. His search for answers to solve his country's endless conflicts between sects, and his interest in the history of all the events he had witnessed are documented in his films one after another to bring together a soft secular view delivered to the audience between the lines of his films. *A History Lesson* film by Zaccak reflects the topics he is concerned about which are history, memory and their relation to sectarianism.

¹⁶⁵ Tabet, "Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l'étude de trois films sur l'identité, la nation et la transmission".

¹⁶⁶ *A History Lesson*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, Al Jazeera, 2009

¹⁶⁷ Tabet, "Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l'étude de trois films sur l'identité, la nation et la transmission"

Hady who was born in 1974 as he stated in his interview, had experienced the Lebanese civil war throughout his childhood and adolescence. Zaccak says in his interview that he finds himself leaning towards the documentary cinematographic genre gradually since his beginnings. His documentaries manifest socio-political issues out of his concern for the society's history, the development of his interactions with his surroundings, and the effect of the civil war on the Lebanese society. Zaccak introduces himself as secular and he is reconciled with this state in his personal life and relations which are not restricted by any sect in a society built up with sectarian complications.

Zaccak says: "the Middle East region is associated with religions", and it interferes in all living aspects. He directed several films covering the religions and sects before he chose to concentrate on the sectarianism in Lebanon after the 2006 war. His films: *Shi'a Echoes*¹⁶⁸, *Sunni Echoes*¹⁶⁹, *History Lesson*¹⁷⁰, *Mercedes*¹⁷¹, *One Hundred and Four Wrinkles*¹⁷², reflects his concern for history, society's memory and their relation to the sectarianism. Zaccak's cinematographic work can be considered a personal chronicle of Lebanon's history.

¹⁶⁸ *Shi'a Echoes*. Directed by Hady Zaccak 2007

¹⁶⁹ *Sunni Echoes*. Directed by Hady Zaccak 2008

¹⁷⁰ *A History Lesson*. Directed by Hady Zaccak Al Jazeera, 2009

¹⁷¹ *Mercedes*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, 2011

¹⁷² *One Hundred and Four Wrinkles*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, 2017

Zaccak studied at the Institute of Audiovisual and Cinematographic Scenic Studies (IESAV) at Saint Joseph University, “one of the first post-war schools to offer this type of course”¹⁷³ and graduated in 1996. His graduation project was a film asking the question “whether there is a place in Lebanon for a filmmaking industry where dictatorship is prevalent in the country”.

I held my interview with Zaccak in the summer of 2019 in Beirut. Last time I met Hady was two years prior to this interview at the screening of his film *Kamal Jumblatt*¹⁷⁴. I arranged the interview with Hady in person through email and agreed to the time without difficulty. Zaccak had a prior knowledge about the research topic and had seen versions of the interview’s questions showing great interest in them.

On the day of the interview, Hady picked me up near Sant Joseph university, which was closing in preparation for the summer break. He stopped at one of the Lebanese fast-food restaurants called “Za’atar and Zait” which are usually attended by filmmakers and theatre artists to grab a meal. This place is few meters away from the “Photo Mario” building’s ruins which stand there as a witness of the civil war. I avoided speaking about anything related to the interview topic hence the interview had not taken place yet, and to protect the interview’s vital elements which are represented by his words and expressions.

¹⁷³ Tabet, “Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l’étude de trois films sur l’identité, la nation et la transmission”

¹⁷⁴ *Kamal Jumblatt*. Directed by Hady Zaccak,

While having this meal near the critical line between east and west Beirut or “Beirut’s green line” as it was called in the time of the Lebanese civil war in the seventies where the christian neighbourhoods and the Lebanese nationalists on the east, the muslim neighbourhoods and leftist parties on the west. Hady reflected on memories of his film *Kamal Jumblatt* (2015) screening in Amman, and the argument between him and the Jordanian journalist Nahed Hattar on Kamal Jumblatt’s political agenda. Hattar was assassinated in 2016 by an Islamic extremist in front of the city courthouse, “The Palace of Justice” in Amman, for republishing a caricature offending Islamic values. We both went silent here for a moment as the assassination just happened before us and this left us speechless.

In the Middle East a primal scene, as in Hattar’s case here, surpasses the civil and state concepts. Where any party supported by belief and religion has the right to judge the other, execute its rulings and yet be supported by the community when given the license by a religious text. This conversation made me realize that no matter how I kept trying to avoid the interview topic, I found any conversation is leading to it and is part of it, because the socio-political effect of the war is seen in the daily life of the all the Lebanese.

The interview took place in Hady’s flat in Ashrafyya, the Christian neighborhood in Beirut. On the way to his place, we passed by “Sasien square” where a big photo for “Bachir Jumayil” the Christian icon and the president who was assassinated by a Christian Leftist girl for believing he was an Israeli agent, was hanging along with a big cross next to it. At the green line and before we enter “Al Ashrafyyih” neighborhood there was a mosque with two minarets, which were used by snipers in the civil war. These two scenes, which are few

meters apart, are still present to this day in the city of Beirut demonstrating sectarianism and stressing the ethnic differences of its people.

On his desk, Hady started reading the interview consent form and participant information sheet and signed them as any interviewee. Once the camera started rolling, he immediately manifested the filmmaker's characteristics in himself. He asked me about the sound recording equipment, then he offered to reduce the Air Conditioning strength to get a better quality and clearer sound in the recording. He asked about the camera's frame size before asking me to see the frame by turning the camera's screen towards him. I was reassured here that I was going in the right direction of my interview where the filmmaker was being himself and relaxed. This meant that the answers I would be receiving from him would not be influenced or affected by the power of the interviewer or the interview's pressure.

Secularism to Zaccak is "the salvation and solution". He said: "Secularism is to place all sectarianism in the private spaces not in the public sphere". The question "is there a place of a different individual in the sectarian community?" The opposite of secularism is sectarianism. Sectarianism to Zaccak is a primitive ideology: "A Tribal practice". Zaccak finds that secularism in the Middle East is deeply connected with religions. Religions interferes and overlaps with everything in the individual's life against their wishes, and against their backgrounds, ideologies and thoughts, which they experienced and believed in for tens of years. However, at the end, sects and clergies have the final saying in an the individual's life. Zaccak adds: "this paradox annoys me personally." Zaccak's mixed feeling of anger and annoyance is clearly seen when he bends his left-hand fingers toward the palm and, held

there tidily, then brings it back towards his body before he joins both hands together. Then he closes his eyes before he carries on to state a personal experience related to his mentor the Lebanese theatre writer Jalal Khoury: “Khoury who was a Marxist, but the death of this intellectual Leftist did not pass by with a role of a Christian clergy who came to correct his Marxian track and give him the passing ticket to heaven in peace”. Zaccak adds a short laughter here in sarcasm of the reality before he comments: “There is a problem here responsible for generating more wars and increasing the disputes which shall taking us all backward.”

Jalal Khoury ,who was born in 1933 was a playwright, theatre director, academic, and artistic editor¹⁷⁵ and is considered a Lebanese icon and trailblazer of the modern Lebanese political theatre. He wrote several plays: “Juha in the borderline villages”, 1971, which became one of his most popular and widely received plays; “Weismano Ben Ghoury & Partners, an adaptation from Brecht’s famous play “The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui” in this play, he changed the focus of his adaptation from a criticism of Nazism to an attack on Israel in the wake of the 1967 War; and “Comrade Sejaan” 1974, which explored the strange separation and contradiction between family and political party structures in Lebanon.¹⁷⁶ His work had been translated into English, French, German, Persian, and Armenian. In Jalal Khoury’s obituary, the Lebanese Communist Party’s stated: “the intellectual, Leftist

¹⁷⁵ “JALAL KHOURY.” *One Fine Art*, Accessed at: www.onefineart.com/artists/actors/Jalal-Khoury. Accessed 17 Jan. 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Chalala, Elie. *Jalal Khoury (1933-2017): Brechtian Realist Forged by 1967 War, and the Birth of Modern Lebanese Theater*, Accessed at: <https://www.aljadid.com/node/2103> Retrieved 2022-01-17

playwright who kept his liberal progressive beliefs and his Marxist ideology all through this era which was full of social and political twists. He stayed without hesitation dedicated to the public and labor causes, and towards building the secular democratic state. He resisted the Israeli invasions and the imperialist conspiracy¹⁷⁷.”

Zaccak describes documentary filmmaking as his “cause”. He presents his vision of secularism through his films (i.e. *A History Lesson*, and *Mercedes*). His secular personality is present in several films of his production. He seemed annoyed by the sectarianism and primitive behavior prevailing over people’s lives and practices and dominating the public and political spheres. He escaped towards other things and away from people’s sects and practices to demonstrate his secular ideology and the city’s secularity as well.

Zaccak proclaimed the existence of a problem in the region related to religions; the reason behind conflicts and reproducing wars. His secularism was outspoken on the personal level, however, for his cinematic production he depended on studying religions. Zaccak believes that religions are interfering in all life aspects in the Middle East; countries, societies, and history. He says: “If you want to make a film about the history or the people in this region of the world, you need to study their beliefs and sects first.”

As a result of his research about sects in Lebanon, Zaccak had directed two documentary films: *Sunni Echoes from Lebanon* (2008) and *Shi’a Echoes from Lebanon*

¹⁷⁷ Tanius, Said. “The Funeral of Jalal Khoury in Lebanon.” *RT*, 4 Dec. 2017, Accessed at: arabic.rt.com/culture/913565-الخطوط-الأمامية-صاحبجحا-في-جلال-خوري-المسرحي-الكاتب-المسرحي-لبنان-يشيع-الكاتب-المسرحي-جلال-خوري-صاحبجحا-في-الخطوط-الأمامية-913565.
<https://arabic.rt.com/culture/913565-الخطوط-الأمامية-صاحبجحا-في-جلال-خوري-المسرحي-الكاتب-المسرحي-لبنان-يشيع-الكاتب-المسرحي-جلال-خوري-صاحبجحا-في-الخطوط-الأمامية-913565>.

(2007). His next film was *A History Lesson* which was produced by Al Jazeera in 2009¹⁷⁸. The film presents a debate about secularism in Lebanon by presenting the schools' curriculum of Lebanese history. Zaccak shows the continuation of the war in the present state through the educational system. He leads viewers through the daily life of Lebanese schools. He "superimposes the sounds of the civil war on images of children playing in the playground."

179

3.2.2 Jumana Saadeh

"Arabs usually define secularism as separating the religion from the state. Today I see it as a lifestyle. There is a modern lifestyle, or religious lifestyle, and there is also a style which can be described as a secular lifestyle." Jumana Saadeh the Palestinian documentary filmmaker described secularism using those words, with eyes were wide open before the camera. Jumana's interview took place in Amman, the capital of Jordan on 24th of February 2018.

Saadeh is one of the documentary filmmakers, and video journalists in Jordan. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism and media from Yarmouk University in 2010, and a

¹⁷⁸ "A History Lesson, New Production for Al-Jazeera Documentary." *Aljazeera Documenatry*, doc.aljazeera.net/cinema/الوثائقية-درس-في-التاريخ. Accessed 3 July 2022.

¹⁷⁹ Tabet, "Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l'étude de trois films sur l'identité, la nation et la transmission".

master's degree from Lancashire University in 2013. She's concerned about refugee issues and, immigration, as well as violations against human rights. Her first documentary film was "Second-hand Refugee" for which she won the BBC Arabic award for young journalists for in 2015.

In 2017 Saadeh had directed her second film *No Kids Land*¹⁸⁰. Her film was about refugee Syrian children living separated from their families in religious orphanages, both Islamic and Christian. This film was produced in partnership with the BBC and aired on its channel.

Contacting Saadeh for an interview was not a matter of a concern. I knew Saadeh since 2009 when she was one of my students when I was a full-time lecturer at the faculty of mass-communication in Al Yarmouk University in the period between 2009-2013. Jumana took two courses with me then, one of them was "Media and Society". This course was an open area for discussing different controversial topics, as I tended frequently to create a provocative argument with the third-year students about the role of the media in societal change and in presenting controversial issues to the audience. Secularism, the role of the religion in the public sphere in the Middle East, personal freedoms, minorities; all were hot topics for discussions in the classroom then. Jumana was one of the voices who had an independent opinion in the classroom, usually was on the contrary of the one I was presenting.

¹⁸⁰ No Kids Land. Directed by Jumana Saadeh. Independent Production. 2017.

Saadeh's production of her documentary *No Kids Land* from inside a religious institution providing services to less a fortunate and helpless group in the society was good material for my research about the filmmakers' stance on secular values in the Middle East.

I contacted Saadeh through the email and she was interested to do the interview. We set the interview location in an office located in "Mecca Street" in the west of the Capital Amman. Amman is divided into east and west, but the partitioning is not based on a sect or a belief like Beirut, since the majority of the citizens in Jordan are Sunni Muslims. The partitioning is based on the financial status and the social class. West Amman is known to have a number of high respectable suburbs and is inhabited by the wealthy, fortunate people, unlike the old traditional neighbourhoods in East Amman. The streets names surrounding the interview's location have a Sunni Islamic connection: Mecca Street, Al-Madeena Al Munawara Street, Al-Harameen conjunction. These main streets are filled with commercial offices, car's agencies, cafes and restaurants. The mosques in the suburbs surrounding these main streets are massive and built in luxurious aesthetic designs and styles. However, it's rare to see crowds around or attending prayers in these mosques, unlike the simple ones in east Amman.

The appointment for running the interview was at seven o'clock in the evening after her working hours. Though, Jumana had sent me a text message to postpone the appointment for one hour as she hadn't finished her work commitments yet. Jumana had a job then with an advertising agency as a TV commercial producer. After finishing the interview preparations with Lamees Assaf the editor and content creator for Hibr news website, who is an expert in dealing with filming equipment, to avoid any technical issues

and guarantee the interview run smoothly. A short walk in the cold winter day before the interview was a good chance to have a conversation with Lamees about the filmmaking industry in Jordan and the Middle East. Lamees articulated sarcastically: "This industry is for the graduates from American and British universities who don't need to work." She laughed loudly after this statement. Lamees believes that the chances for the middle-class females in the Arab area to work in the filmmaking industry is very limited and challenging. Women who chose to work in this field usually come from wealthy families and are not looking for an income.

Saadeh arrived with her extrovert personality ready for the interview despite of the long day she had at work. She took her place on the guest's seat before the camera and silently watched me setting up the camera with my assistant and listened to our conversation. Saadeh didn't comment on the camera setup or the other technical preparation unlike Lamees who gave a few technical notes, especially when I falsely turned the mic off to save the camera's battery thinking like many other unprofessional cameramen. Such an act might have jeopardised the interview's preparation efforts and wasted the priceless information acquired.

It has been seven years since I saw Saadeh last time in Irbid a city in the north of Jordan. Back then, Jumana used to wear the regular Islamic Hijab, but that didn't stop her from being social and having a joyful personality, a clear voice, and a complete eye contact with the speaker. In one of the lectures, Saadeh protested my use to the word "cover" referring to the "Hijab". She said: I don't like my professor to use the word "cover" just because it is covering my head. We use the word cover at home to refer to the bedsheets!".

She looked different at the time of the interview as she changed the way she is wearing her Hijab from the old traditional style with a modern one which cover her hair but leaves her face and neck showing. She also had a piercing in her nose.

When I asked Saadeh about secularism definition to her, she smiled, shook her head and touched her right shoulder with the tips of her left-hand fingers before she answered: “Arabs usually define secularism as separating the religion from the State. I read to Georges Tarabichi¹⁸¹ about secularism recently. I see secularism today as a lifestyle. There is a modern lifestyle, or religious lifestyle, and there is also a style which can be described as a secular lifestyle.”¹⁸²

Saadeh believed that a secular person should be open minded, masters divergent subjects, accepts others without being judgmental, respect their privacy, and deals with any issue avoiding self-projection. Moreover, a secular person, to Saadeh, would respect others in his surrounding, either family members or any close relations, accepting their choices and would not force them or expect them to abide by his or her thoughts and beliefs. A secular person masters coexisting, and he or she would accept whatever their eyes lay on in their

¹⁸¹ “Georges Tarabichi a Syrian thinker, prolific writer, critic and translator. He is an icon of liberal thought and secularism, He was born in Aleppo 1939 and died in Paris in 2016. Tarabichi left his mark on an entire generation of middle eastern and Arab scholars, creating a spark of never-ending controversy from the early 1980s until his death.”. International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF). n.d. “Georges Tarabichi.” Arabicfiction.org. Accessed June 20, 2020. <https://arabicfiction.org/en/Georges-Tarabichi>.

¹⁸² Jumana Saadeh. Interview with the author

surroundings. He or she will accept other's lifestyles, their choices, their beliefs. A secular person, in conclusion, respects and accepts others.

Saadeh smiled and pointed at me and recited what I said in a lecture: "You used to ask us to stop evaluating issues and judging thoughts based on what we have socially and religiously inherited. You asked us to be impartial and explore the issues ourselves far from the pressure of the firmly established beliefs in the society. Saadeh adds that in time it became clearer to her that secularism is not evil although it's not the whole truth or the ultimate solution to the region's problems. However, secularism had proven to be a successful experience in other societies around the globe. She articulates that all thoughts and beliefs have pros and cons, but my experience as a filmmaker which gave her the chance to delve into myself better, made me more convinced of her desire to be a person who adopts the secular values.

She articulated that she understood secularism ideology better and accepted it more than she used to before. She adds: "This doesn't mean I will adopt it and promote it". She clarified: "But it's not that evil idea which was put in the dark side in the brain under the forbidden taboo category anymore, as it was presented by the consumed culture in the Arabian region." This better understanding of secularism made Saadeh present the idea fairly in her films even when the question is: "secular or religious?". Saadeh referred to a different reason behind the changed approach used by the Arab youth to manage the controversial issues in their societies. She articulated: "The Arab Spring". Saadeh said that the Arab Spring waves were the reason to overcome the religious, political, and social taboos by the young generation working in the media sector. It was also the reason behind

the following change in presenting and tackling the controversial issues in the Arab societies. The taboo topics frame was narrowed considerably compared to the period before 2010.

Saadeh sees that the series of the anti-government protests and uprisings that spread across much in the Arab world in the early 2010s, starting from Cairo and Tunisia and the following movements which was called “The Arab Spring”, had changed the nature of the Arab youth and had broken a lot of boundaries and prohibitions, as an unthinkable topic like “atheism” was put back on the table and discussing it became possible. Saadeh said “atheism is now discussed in films, and novels”. And she added: “All topics became discussable, including secularism and the religion’s role in the public sphere”.

The Arab Spring was sparked in Tunisia following the street vendor Mohammad Bouazizi’s self-immolation in protest of maltreatment by local officials and for seizing his products in 17th of December 2010. Although this incident hadn’t been documented by any camera, it had quickly spread through the country, and it triggered an unprecedented anger wave which then led to start the protest movement named the “Jasmin Revolution” in the media.¹⁸³ The unpredictable revolutions requested to topple the regimes in the region, and it overthrew some deep-rooted dictatorial regimes that had ruled for decades in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and the Sudan. Its echoes had reached other countries like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Morocco. However, the “Arab Spring” was not as

¹⁸³ “What has been accomplished from the “Arab Spring” dreams” (ما الذي تحقق من أحلام الربيع العربي), France24, published at: 17/12/2020 accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/ar/-/ما-الذي-20201217/الأخبار-المغربية>
تحقق-من-أحلام-الربيع-العربي-بعد-مرور-عشر-سنوات-على-انطلاقه

fruitful as it was expected by the protestors in their demands of “Bread”, “Freedom”, and “Social Justice”. On the contrary their expectations were suppressed dramatically with the reappearance of radical religious ideologies and military interventions in the political sphere alongside repressions of freedoms and the outbreaks of conflicts and wars in the region.

The term “Arab Winter” had appeared on the title of Noah Feldman’s book¹⁸⁴ referring to the tragic failure of the Arab Spring as described by Michael Ignatieff.¹⁸⁵ However, it can’t be denied that a change had happened to the societies texture since the beginning of the revolutions in the Middle East. The stance towards the prohibited and forbidden had changed in the reality of the prevailing cultures, and the solid and settled social norms and standards had been jiggled. It seems this change had an immediate impact on personal lives of the youth generation who either participated, interacted or watched those protests, especially workers in the media sector and filmmakers as it helped them to cross over the unapproachable redlines put in place by the governments and conservative societies.

Although Saadeh had referred to Georges Tarabichi one of the thinkers in the middle east, and seemed inspired by his writings about secularism, her vision of secularism took a different perspective. Saadeh expressed the secular side in her in the frame of personal freedoms, privacy protection, and individuals’ right to choose, which is very far from Tarabichi’s arguments about total secularism and the political power’s influence from Islam

¹⁸⁴ Noah Feldman, *The Arab Winter tragedy*. Princeton University Press 2020

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

in the Middle East. Saadeh seemed so centralized around the issue of personal freedoms as secular value. The issue of women's head cover, the "Al Hijab", was present always and spontaneously in her talk, either when mentioning that the percentage of the women recently chose to take off their head covers has increased as a phenomenon in the Arab region, or to be used as an example in her films when tackling secularism issue, signifying women's right to choose. She said: "I won't be hesitated to make a scene of a women taking off her head cover on the screen although I know this could be a sensitive issue in the Muslim societies in the Middle East". Which for Saadeh represented a revolutionary act, and a symbol of personal freedom which she believed is a right to be protected and guaranteed by secularism and that the secular society should counter the authority of the family and the community.

In 2020, Saadeh was a guest on Alternative Cinema show on BBC Arabia as a director to talk about her new film *No Kids Land, No Mother Either*¹⁸⁶. Saadeh appeared on the screen without the modern head cover she was wearing when I had the interview with her in 2018. In a concurrent sequential step with her vision of secularism, as an approach to eliminate the compulsory power of the religious ideology in the Middle East and consequentially to eliminate the conservative community's authority over the individual's personal decisions. Here, it is obvious that the filmmaker's understanding of secularism is shaped from his or her personal experiences which he or she reflects on in their cinematic production. It is also a part of the filmmaker's personal needs and is based on his or her social relations. Therefore, as the film reflects the director's personal point of view, we

¹⁸⁶ *No Kids Land, No Mother Either*. Directed by Jumana Saadeh, BBC, 2020

shouldn't ignore the director's personal life which has the clear and immediate impact on the director's views and stances from the controversial issues in his or her society. Moreover, the filmmaker himself or herself can be the main character in a story that could be turned into one of their films.

Saadeh seems to be concerned about refugees' cases. The three films she made were based on stories of Syria's immigrants or refugee cases: *Second hand Refugee*¹⁸⁷, *No Kids Land*, and *No Kids Land, No Mother Either*¹⁸⁸. However, her film *No Kids Land* had spotlighted another issue which is the role religious institutions play in the Middle East. She discussed the religious effect of charity institutions on the refugee children who had lost their parents or were separated from them.

In the interview, Saadeh sat herself up right, held her hands together, closed her eyes, and seemed upset commenting on the film. She said: "There is a big and clear religious effect on the children, to a limit which made me involuntarily psychologically averted. Here you understand that secularism is a good thing." She used here a term used in the Levantine region referring to something delightful: "شي ظريف". Saadeh chose to use this term which she knows I usually use. This gives me an indication of the change in her stance toward secularism.

¹⁸⁷ *Second Hand Refugee*. Directed by Jumana Saadeh, Independent Production. 2014

¹⁸⁸ *No Kids Land, No Mother Either*. Directed by Jumana Saadeh, BBC, 2020

3.2.3 Myriam El-Hajj

“I’m neither a historian, nor a journalist, let alone a politician. Taking family privacy and emotional intimacy as a starting point, I simply examine the mechanisms for transmitting past violence.”¹⁸⁹

Myriam El-Hajj is a Lebanese director and comedian who was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983 and lived during the civil war period. El-Hajj did her cinema studies in Lebanon before pursuing her master's degree in filmmaking in Paris. There she started another master's degree in theatre, and she has been playing with a Commedia dell'arte troupe (Les Festinanti) for seven years now. She has directed two short films and numerous videos. Her first feature documentary film, *Trêve: A Time to Rest*¹⁹⁰ was selected in Visions du Réel in 2015 and received many awards including the prestigious “Prix Découverte de la SCAM”. In addition to filmmaking and working as art director at Fondation Liban Cinema, she teaches cinema at the Lebanese academy of fine arts (ALBA).

El-Hajj responded promptly to my email requesting a video interview with her for research purposes. However, later she requested to do the interview a day earlier as she became engaged with another appointment. Although I didn't prefer to do two interviews in the same day, due to the efforts the interview needs of preparation and concentration in

¹⁸⁹ “Interview Cinema: Myriam El Hajj.” *Www.institutfrancais.com*, 2 Mar. 2021, Accessed at: www.institutfrancais.com/en/interview/myriam-el-hajj.

¹⁹⁰ *Trêve: A Time To Rest*. Directed by Myriam El-Hajj. Independent Production. 2015

addition to the discussion the interview's open questions create, I managed to set her interview after five o'clock in the evening in order not miss the chance to interview El-Hajj.

I met El-Hajj in the premises of Fondation Liban Cinema offices, which are located near to the museum's conjunction and the famous Damascus Street which was called "The green line" in the time of the civil war which separates east and west Beirut. I took my interview equipment with me from home in Badaro and walked to the location which was not that far.

The high temperature and the humidity weather in Beirut in the summer in addition to having a previous interview that day made me arrive distracted and I thought of cancelling the interview or reschedule it. El-Hajj was sitting in the office in "Fondation Liban Cinema" with shelves covering the wall behind her, filled with magazines and CDs. which seems to be the archive library of the institution. El-Hajj was formal as it was the first time we meet face to face. She stayed still in her chair without any facial expression while I started preparing for the interview.

Myriam's experience as a filmmaker made her understand the environmental circumstances' effect on the interviewer, the cast, and the interview settings. She said that she agrees with me that filming in a hot weather makes her doubt that something might go wrong in the shooting. El-Hajj was aware of the noise the Air conditioner in her office makes and offered to switch it off and turn the fan one on instead. The directors are always keen to provide this note as they understand the importance of the sound quality in the film production.

El-Hajj was interested to know the reason I chose secularism in the film as a topic for my research before we start the interview and added that this is an important topic, but it's not approached academically, especially in the media and filmmaking industry. I was keen to provide a full explanation about my research and its methodology as a part of the interview's introduction and to take El-Hajj to the core of the interview's topic, which she seemed connected to and interested in.

I ask the interviewee usually, when to doing the camera set up to carry a sign before the camera with their name on, in addition to the interview's location and time. Myriam asked to correct the spelling of her surname to be "El-Hajj" instead of "El Hage" as in her email. I asked her to correct it in writing herself and represent it to the camera. "Hajj" means the pilgrimage, and it's a surname used by families from a different religious background in Lebanon and the Middle East. It refers to the religious pilgrimage which is a journey to a holy places of one of the three monotheist religions, that their founders born and lived in the Middle East region passed down to their followers. "Hajj" is used by middle eastern communities to refer to the person who came back from a religion pilgrimage, and sometimes to call an elderly out of respect regardless of visiting the holy places.

Although I am concerned to interview filmmakers from a different religious and intellectual backgrounds for the research purposes, El-Hajj's name did not reflect a certain sectarian element at the first instance, as her forename and surname can be used by either Muslims or Christians. And as I didn't know El-Hajj before, her family's sectarian belonging remained ambiguous to me until I saw her film's trailer. *Trêve: A Time To Rest* (2015) is a documentary film produced by About Production company and filmed in Beirut in 2013.

The film had recorded a part of the daily life of El-Hajj with her family. El-Hajj had sent me an e-link to watch the full version of her film by sending me a link by email right after I contacted her for an interview appointment. The trailer started with the voice of a man driving his car in a foggy weather crooning an old love song. The scene only shows the front screen of the car from inside with praying beads and a cross in the middle of the scene hanging down from the front mirror, which only shows the drivers eyes. Hanging the cross in the car is a religious symbol used by conservative and religious societies. This had given a direct indication of the sectarian belonging of El-Hajj's family.

El-Hajj was born in Beirut in 1983. She is from a Christian family who witnessed and participated in the civil war in Lebanon. Her parents were comrades fighting on the same side before they became life partners. El-Hajj described herself saying: "I am the war's daughter!" as the war was the event which made her parents meet and become closer to each other then. El-Hajj was raised in the civil war atmosphere and surrounded from all sides by the war's question: "Why are they fighting?" This question was always present in El-Hajj's mind and grew up with her as she kept looking for an answer to it and to everything else surrounding her, which she had inherited herself, as had the others of her generation, from a broken sectarian country which is still stuck in the war and its resolutions of religious dividing and political portioning. El-Hajj said: "I don't like the structure of this country. It doesn't resemble me. I don't know how it reached this level."

El-Hajj looked at me and used her hand to express her firm opinion and how far she is from the religions by moving her hands apart in an affirmative movement. She said: "You cannot imagine how far I am today from my religion and all the religions. It's up to an

extend of hating them all.” El-Hajj spoke about a period when she used to hate her Christian sect and specifically the “Maronites”. She used to blame her sect and considers them responsible for starting the civil war in Lebanon because of their desire to take over the country. In time, she understood that not only her sect was the one to blame for the war, but all the other sects and parties shared the responsibility of destroying and sabotaging the country. She said: “The easiest way to start a war is to ask people to raise their weapons to protect their religion and beliefs”. She continued: “Religion was their excuse to kill each other. It was a game which used religions to set the country on fire”.

This was the politics and the power games, employing the religion which is the easiest tool to persuade the public of the necessity of the war and as an incitement to use the violence. She used the term: “They think” and then said: “No. It’s not the religion they fight for, it’s a bigger game. It’s a political game. It employs those people and their beliefs to fulfil the politicians’ agendas.” El-Hajj later nodded her head and confirmed saying: “As long as the religion remains in the core of the public sphere, it will always seem to be the reason to fight over”.

In August 2015, El-Hajj had participated in the protest series in Lebanon in response to the government’s failure to solve the disposal of rubbish crises requesting the government to resign. The protesters who came from different sectarian divisions had raised many demands on the side of the “you stink” campaign including secularism. This referred to the government’s failure to persuade each sect to bury or burn its rubbish in its region, which resulted in an enormous health and environmental crisis. The protestors blamed the politicians and the parties’ leaders representing the sects in Lebanon. Most of

those leaders were the same leaders of the Lebanese civil war. El-Hajj had thought that the fact that the new generation which didn't participate in the civil war but yet were living its consequences, had took part in those protests might change the situation in Lebanon. However, the election results of the house of the representative in 2018 were disappointing. El-Hajj commented in French: "Déception" while a smile appeared on her face to the sarcastic reality. The Lebanese had chosen sectarianism again and elected the same leaders of the civil war.

El-Hajj's stance from secularism is based on a personal experience with her family and the surrounding sphere. El-Hajj was raised in a radical environment which took the religion and the sectarian base an excuse and a motivation to fight and kill. The war's memory and questions chased her and were reflected on her by condemning religious and sects, and her sect particularly before the other, and blame them for the civil war. She rejected the cancelation culture. El-Hajj believes in secularism as an ideology which provides protection against using religions as a trigger in the wars. Secularism she believed in doesn't reject the personal choices of the others especially the right to believe. She recognized the parties' choices of adopting their own identity even the one related to religions and beliefs, yet she refused the interference of religion in the public sphere. She emphasized on the importance of separating the religion from the public sphere, the state and the law. Her faith in secularism is a base built to protect the personal freedoms, and individuals' choices and rights of marriage, inheritance, nationality and abortion far from the religious interference in the legislation and the civil laws.

El-Hajj believes in all forms of separating the religion from the public sphere. She put the religion on one side, and everything else on the other side. She articulates examples on her previous statement: “Religion should not be related to abortion as a choice, shouldn’t be related to passing my nationality to my children, and shouldn’t be related to marrying a foreigner. All these matters religion shouldn’t be involved in.” However, El-Hajj’s enthusiasm towards the values she believes in clashes with a fact which seculars in Lebanon usually forget. She swallowed before she said: “Us who think this way are very rare in this country, and we sometimes forget this fact. Our films remind us that seculars are a minority”.

There are four successive fast scenes in the 90 seconds trailer of *A Time to Rest*. The first scene is for a religious symbol in the middle of the screen. The second scene is for a man cleaning a hunting gun, followed by a scene for a man aiming and shooting, and the last one was a sentence “The war makes you alive” said by a smiling man to the camera. Reading the trailer; Al Hajj wanted to deliver a message here: “religions make wars”. She had summarized her stance as a secular by showing the danger of having the religions present in the public sphere. El-Hajj had experienced practically as she grew up in a preservative religious environment within a family who’s all its members participated in a cancellation war what religion and sects can make to the country’s shape and how individuals live, and decisions are affected by the interference of sects in making and implementing the legislations.

A discussion followed the viewing of her film *Trêve: A Time To Rest* in Metropolis cinema house in Beirut, with the attendance of the director and the acting cast about the

present situation in Lebanon and whether the old militia's warriors are going to carry the weapons and fight if the war started again. The answers came out shocking to El-Hajj confirming they certainly would, moreover, a couple in their twenties were proud of the films characters who had protected the Christians and their existence in Lebanon and the Middle East. She was surprised that there is a new generation that encourages the war and internal conflict and defends the idea of using weapons to protect religion. El-Hajj was reminded by her films that religion and sectarianism is an issue which cannot be surpassed in Lebanon, and the sectarian prejudice and alignment is a deep matter. El-Hajj said: "I found out that seculars who refuse the use of religion to start out a war are a minority." On the hand, she was also criticized for presenting this militias side of the story without mentioning the other side.

3.2.4 Rania Rafei

In Lebanon, secularism exists not only in films, but it is seen in the city's culture and geography as well due to the sectarian divide. The nature of Beirut draws the questions of secularism in all its details. As a researcher, I like to provide the reader with a depiction of the places where interviews took place and the circumstances surrounding the research's interviews for a better understanding of the interviewees' narrative.

To reinforce my knowledge about documentary films concerned about the relation between the state and the ideology or religion in the Middle East, I usually discuss the topic of my research with colleagues either filmmakers or journalists out of my interest and. Rami Kodeih, the filmmaker and director of *Seculars in Lebanon* suggested *74: The Reconstitution of Struggle* a film directed by Rania Rafei.¹⁹¹ I hereafter made contact with Rania and invited her to a taped interview. She showed quite an interest in the topic of my research and agreed to have an interview in Lebanon. Once I reached the Lebanese capital Beirut, I contacted her again to confirm the time and the location of the interview. As Rania resides in Tripoli city in the north and does not have an office in Beirut, we agreed to set the interview in my place which is located in Badaro neighborhood in Beirut. Badaro is a central neighborhood and very close to the National Museum of Beirut. On the way, the voice of "Marcel Khalife" a famous Lebanese singer warbled from the Car's recorder with a famous song about love and booze during the Lebanese Civil War. "Tonight, I will make the booze glass jump and kiss the bottle" features the singer, whilst drunk one night, complaining

¹⁹¹ See Appendix Seven: Posters

about and describing love in his city Beirut during the war. He talks to his lover; “We are living a war. Conflicts between east and west. Pumping, blasting, killing, and hitting. You saw me, why didn’t you hide me. Who made you believe in this? You are a human, we are humans. I loved you! We were neighbors. We have been displaced and became enemies.”

I run my interview with the director Rania Rafei, at Badarou neighborhood near the Green Line which separated the Lebanese capital, Beirut during the Lebanese Civil war, from 1975 to 1990, into Muslim neighborhoods in the west and Christian neighborhoods in the east. This neighborhood, which is aligned with the famous Damascus road still contains old buildings or one renovated but maintained to be identical to its original ones. This predominantly a Christian neighborhood which lays at the west of Beirut was almost abandoned during the war, but its residents decided to leave it and moved to the eastern Christian part of Beirut as it was in a dangerous district separating fighters at both ends of the city. Nowadays, this neighborhood has a lively nightlife, famous with the neat, small, close to each other bars; however, it suffers what the entire city suffers from; the constant electricity outages which bring chaos and reduces the quality of the services provided to its residents. On top of this are the water outages, not forgetting to mention the unsuitability of this water for drinking even when it functions. The city council had almost finished a trash collection project after garbage bags, overstocking in streets, became an unsolvably difficult issue. More indication that this is a tragedy with wide political and environmental dimensions that are not totally disconnected from the sectarian system in Lebanon.

Rania had arrived on time for her interview in the afternoon of a humid hot day, which is typical of Beirut’s weather in the summer as a Mediterranean coastal city. Although

I offered Rania to do the interview inside instead of the balcony to avoid the hot weather, despite my constant approach always to show the rich background in the picture's frame that adds tremendously to the interview, Rania with a filmmaker's sense undoubtedly, told me that she does not mind doing the interview in the open balcony while moving towards it, saying: "I am used to this kind of trouble". In the camera frame of the interview, an old yellow building is seen in the background, and another one under construction, in addition to the Lebanese council of ministers previous building. Rania brought to my attention the annoyingly loud sounds coming from the construction site, which is considered as a constant distraction and a limitation to filmmakers in shooting locations. However, the overall details (picture and sound), project a side of the indispensable daily chaos of Beirut. Rafei concurs with this though in the interview: "this is Beirut's voice, and it gives an idea about its nature!"

Rania Rafei is a Lebanese Director, born in 1979, and has a diploma in audiovisual and cinema studies from the Lebanese academy of fine arts (ALBA). Rafei, who belongs to Tripoli city, which is the second largest city in Lebanon after the capital and located in the north of Beirut and is also known as a Sunni conservative city, was interested in the Arts since she was young and started studying theatre but suddenly decided to change to the cinema. She studied design at the university and included it in her career as a filmmaker. She has been directing documentaries since 2005. However, Rania didn't quit the theatre completely, she has two theatre experiments, and the latest was "Fatima – The Shi'aa Dance". Rafei smiled and moved her left hand to the other side of her body saying: "Despite having a Sunni background..." referring to the Lebanese sectarian equation, in which both

the Sunni and Shi'a sects in Lebanon and the Middle East stand on opposing sides politically and regionally, creating a strong polemic in the sectarian sparring.

Rafei was offered the role in "Fatima – The Shi'aa Dance" when she was taking lessons in dancing as her instructor offered her to participate in his play. Although Rafei was not a professional dancer as she said in the interview, she had liked the show and agreed to take part in it. What is noticeable in "Fatima – The Shi'aa Dance's" choreography, which was designed by Ali Chahrour, was that the play was not just an artistic performance as much as it was a revolutionary and political act. It contradicted with the prevailing culture of the Shi'a sect in their common ritual practices of chest beating in mourning ceremonies and what this indicated. It considered the chest beating as a public declamatory emotion rather a historical inherited religious and political act.

"Latmya" or "The mourning of Muharram" holds a remarkable position in Ashuraa' ceremony rituals observed primarily by Shi'a Muslims. According to BBC ¹⁹², for Shi'a Muslims Ashura is: "a major religious commemoration of the martyrdom at Karbala of Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. The killing of Hussein in the battle of Karbala was an event that led to the split in Islam into two main sects - Sunnis and Shi'as[...]". Ashuraa' is a religious Shi'a commemoration ritual on the anniversary when Imam Hussain ibn Ali and the grandson of Prophet Muhammad was martyred by the forces of Umayyads¹⁹³ in the Battle of Karbala. These commemoration rituals are held in Shi'a holy

¹⁹² "What Is Ashura?" *BBC News*, 6 Dec. 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16047713.

¹⁹³ Newman, Andrew J. 'Āshūrā'. *Britannica*. Accessed on 21 Apr. 2022 Accessed at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ashura-Islamic-holy-day>

cities like Karbala city in Iraq where the Battle of Karbala took place as well as in other cities with sizable Shi'a population. These "Latmya" rituals had developed from consolation ceremonies to be known later with its special customs. Mourning is considered a new phenomenon in some regions of Lebanon and some Syrian Shi'a villages as it had emerged with the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran¹⁹⁴.

The play "Fatima – The Shi'aa Dance" play considers the woman to be the centre ground of the Shi'a mourning, and the core of expressing grief contrasting to her normal historically inherited role as she appears in an unacceptable look religiously by showing her hair, arms, and chest when she practices this ritual. The exciting matter here is the secular indications of the play which reject the sectarian speech by giving the individual its value as a free person with independent needs and decisions aside from the group and religious political speech, which is represented by the sects or the tribe or the totalitarian state in the Middle East. The play is in direct opposition to political notions which had grown in the society under the cover of religion and which had erased the individual's identity in favour of the sect or the religious group image. About "Fatima- Shi'a Dance", the Lebanese journalist Badia Fahs¹⁹⁵ said:

Fatima is a brave show that tears down the new religious concept inlaid with politics about the mourning and grieving rituals within the Shi'a Muslims. It contradicted

¹⁹⁴ Alshakikh Faisal Al Kazimi, Baqiatollah magazine, 21 Apr 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.baqiatollah.net/article.php?id=8849>

¹⁹⁵ Fahs, Badia. Daraj Video. 15 October 2019 accessed at: <https://daraj.com/22724/>

with the audience's and the Shi'a elites' culture about death, mourning, and grieving. Ali Chahrour's choreography which uses two dancers to represent Fatima and one of them performed by Rafei, had returned the preliminary public emotions, and freed this humanitarian act from the historical religious load as from the sectarian political weight. It gave women the core role in expressing their sorrow. In "Fatima" she messes her uncovered hair up, slaps her face and uncovered chest area, and cries out loud despite that women's voices are 'Aoura' prohibited in the prevailing religious and social hereditary. Moreover, she dances. Dancing which used to be a deep expression of the grief before religion took over grieving. Ali Chahrour had presented the grief in 'Fatima' as individual's personal matter where the dead person's name is mentioned as the lost one, and not through a religious symbol. This is a revolution on political notions that had outgrown in the society under the religion's cover. These notions erase the individual's personality in favour of the sect and the public.

However, Rafei finds herself in the cinema, and is fond of experimental style especially the experimental process of mixing cinematic styles together. Rafei said: "What I really like cinematically is mixing the narrative with documentary". Rafei started her career with the documentary filmmaking which she was attracted to as a way to represent history and discuss issues like freedoms, women rights, and secularism in a credible way which might contribute to a desired change. Rafei had executed a number of documentary films for the Al Jazeera channel which can be considered one of the only network which provides

funding for making documentary films in the Middle East. During her work on several social and political documentaries for the television, Rafei was working at the same time on her film which took her back to her favourite cinematic styles, the experimental process of styles mixing. However, and due to the difficulty of funding an independent film in the Middle East, *74*¹⁹⁶ film took a longer time to come to light. This film was a private and independent production of Rafei and her brother the journalist Raed Rafei. Although Rafei's credit as a filmmaker doesn't exceed ten films, when she started talking about *74* it was like she can finally inhale fresh air after not being able to breathe for a while. She said: "it's my first independent film, and its different from all the other films I made before."

The *74: The Reconstitution of A Struggle* is an experimental film that intersects documentary with drama. It observes the discussion and the movements regarding Lebanon's identity in 1974, which is the year before the Lebanese Civil War commenced in 1975. The year when Lebanon was searching for its secular identity, the identity assassinated by the Civil War and which closed the broad door of secularism.

In a previous interview, Rania states about her film showing in Morocco that she does not like the statement "in general"¹⁹⁷ and prefers to answer in a precise specific manner. When I reminded her about the interview, I asked her to interpret secularism in a personal manner. She smiled as she wiped a side of her face and said: "I opened google before the interview to see what's said there about secularism". She declared that she

¹⁹⁶ *74*. Directed by Rania Rafei. Independent Production. 2012

¹⁹⁷ Madina Channel. "Interview with Rania Rafei." *Www.youtube.com*, 3 Apr. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxPXbZ3YODw

won't provide an elitist answer: "Secularism when it comes to me is a personal issue". She continued:

Secularism is attached to my life, for example, my family, I am from Tripoli, my father is an Arab Nationalist, and belongs to the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party (Baghdad-Iraq). At our home, he always used to say: "we are seculars", this is part of my family. On the other side my mothers' family which had gone through a huge transmission; all the women in my mother's family wore the head cover as my uncles had become religiously fanatic and influenced by the Fundamentalist "Tawheed Movement" which was established in the early eighties of the last century in my city and spread its fundamentalism understanding of Islam in Tripoli and its surroundings before transforming it from a Sunni city to a city described to be Extremist Sunni Fundamentalist. I lived this familial atmosphere as I lived the transition Tripoli witnessed from a conservative city to an Islamic city".

Rafei pointed with her right hand to the far right, referring to the radical Islam in her family. Her body language showed the wide distance between her and this ideology which she cannot unite with neither philosophically nor as a lifestyle. She adds about her understanding of secularism which had solidified at a more early age than usual due to the family's and city's' circumstances:

In time I understood what my father meant when he was saying "we are secular", he meant "we are not like your uncles". He meant that we belong to a different part of the Arab world which separates the religion from the State. He believed that his

society is conservative and has its embedded traditions, but he doesn't support the interference of the religion in the law and the legislation process. Religion and the State are not intersected. He meant that We do not belong to the ideology which mixes the religion with the State, and wants to enforce Islamic law

Despite the ideological atmosphere which proposes secularism in the surrounding atmosphere of Rafei, as she was raised in an Arab nationalist home that believes in secularism and carries the ideology of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party which is one of the parties that supported secularism at an early phase in the Middle East, she yet has an emotional stance with personal features towards secularism. Influenced by the surrounding environment, Rafei had related secularism to modernity and freedom. She had suddenly stopped while she was talking about Islamic movements, Shariaa and law to speak about an advanced value related to her personally as a Lebanese young lady: "Emotionally, in all my life, secularism had always been related to two matters; freedom and modernity." This confirms my argument about the particularity of secularism in the Middle East which is developed from the personal stances of the individuals.

Despite the dogmatic ideology in her familial surrounding and her mother's radical Islamist family, represented by the Tawheed Movement which had represented the Sunni Radical Islam and transferred Tripoli into a radical city though the political activity of the movement, Rafei expressed her stance clearly and precisely as belonging to a part of the Arab word that separates the religion from the State, however, it is one that still acknowledges it's exclusive culture and conservative nature without mixing the religion in

the State and the imposing it on the legislation. She said: “we don’t belong to this ideology that mixes the religion the religion with the state and wants to enforce the Sharea law”.

In 2005, many young demonstrations arose included several groups with numerous demands. Rania’s participation in these demonstrations, protests, and cheers in Beirut’s streets had added another dimension to her understanding of secularism in a reality. She used her fingers to mimic the quotation marks: “these demonstrations were known as ‘secular demonstrations’.” She continues describing the scene while using her hands as if collecting several things in one place: “we used to go down to the street to find ourselves in a pool of homosexuals, seculars, feminists...” then she looks up for a moment making a cascade with her hands continuously: “it was an umbrella for all persecuted cases in Lebanon. This is secularism.” Rafei seeks secularism as a result of her personal needs as a woman, artist and filmmaker. These needs are marginalized in a society with multiple powers and in a conservative city that moved toward the extreme.

Rafei’s view of secularism had been formed clearly and at an early age because of her family’s circumstances. She was a rebel adolescent seeking freedom and modernity in a radical Islamist environment. Rafei’s conception of secularism meets with her rejection of religious persecution, especially considering her situation as a woman who works in filmmaking. She said: “it pressures me in an oppressive way as a woman, as a different person, and as artist in a radical city”. Feminist issues were immediately present in her mind as she mentioned for instance the personal status of the individual under law in Jaafari court which is a Shi’a sect’s court in Lebanon. In Lebanon, each sect of the eighteenth recognized sects in Lebanon has their own court to rule in their cases. In the Jaafari court, custody is

given to the father in case of a divorce. It rules to take the child from his mother at the age of two. Which Rafei considers a breach of the fundamental right of women and children and an oppression in the name of religion. Rafei stopped talking in an attempt to wipe the sweat off her face at the interview's location which is outdoor in the humid hot weather. She continued: "away from emotions, we need a secular State where regulations and laws are not based on Islamic laws".

Although Rafei has formed a clear understanding of secularism on the personal level as well as on the state and law levels, she admits that the issue is not as simple as it looks as governments in the Middle East are benefiting from religious speech and coverage. She says:

In Lebanon, governments are formed of the sects' leaders. The leaders who represent capitalism and feudalism are also the theologians and every other thing. It's not of their interest to establish a real State especially a secular one. Secularism is against having a religious power over the citizens. A secular State means to dismiss every "Sheikh" in the Sharia courts and every priest who benefits economically from the religious system and the sectarian personal status law. Secularism is definitely against the power of the church, and against the power of the clergies deciding to ban a film! Religion is not just an abstract situation; sectarianism hides a lot behind it like feudalism and tribal and familial ruling. Religion today is the den for the power parties.

Rafei recognizes the prevalent idea of the hostility of secularism towards religion and hence at secularism is rejecting religions power, so that it would comparatively be against the religion. In a community where religion is present and interferes in all of life's minuscule details, a civil alternative should be sought without colliding with the society, to create a civil atmosphere unconnected with the images of justice provided by the religion. However, Rafei seemed to have reservations about the idea of importing a ready model of secularism, from her point of view thinks that the form of secularism needs to be discussed: "my outfit should be tailored to fit me whether this outfit is a sentiment, a law, or secularism. The society should look deeper for the solution, as well as secularism which concurs with its reality, culture, and surrounding". Rafei confirms that vital discussions, direct conversations, and secularist movements are effective even if they won't provide a final answer or ever reach an agreed point.

3.3 Filmmakers' Treatment of Secularism in Film

3.3.1 Hady Zaccak

The documentary film *A History Lesson* traces History Lessons given in five different schools in Beirut and its surrounding areas and with students from year nine¹⁹⁸ whose answers represent the real contradictions in the Lebanese community despite of having a unified curriculum in a county whose history stops at the independence. Despite the decision to unify the historical and the civic education curricula in the Taif Agreement in 1989, which ended 14 years of civil war between the parties' leaders, these curricula are still in the bottom drawer despite being ready to be taught at schools.¹⁹⁹

The identity crisis that the Lebanese live every day is the film's plot. The film debates the contradiction in the methodologies used in teaching history in the middle years in schools that have different sectarian backgrounds. This view can notice the massive cultural gap between students which cannot easily be backfilled.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ "A History Lesson, New Production for Al-Jazeera Documentary." *Aljazeera Documenatry*, doc.aljazeera.net/cinema/الوثائقية-درس-في-التاريخ. Accessed 3 July 2022.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ "A History Lesson Film and the Lebanese Society." *RT Arabic*, arabic.rt.com/news/35973-. Accessed 3 July 2022.

Sectarianism and dialectically opposing individual and groups are demonstrated in the characters, scenes, sounds, and symbols of the film. Signs of Lebanese diversity parade on the screen and are seen from the first moment: “statues of the Virgin, sura from the Qoran, crucifixes, folded hands, flag greetings, sounds of bell towers and calls to prayer”. Majd Salhab, a student of the German School, the only secular school in the film, represent the director’s ambivalent relationship to the country. The unity of the country represented by the national anthem melody which Zaccak’s shows Majed playing on the piano in his office at first is swept away by the cacophony of the History Lessons which represent the disharmony between sects in Lebanon as each different voice tells their story. Another scene shows students who perform ballet versus students praying each according to their rite, before both groups enter the classroom, which itself represent the wider country that embraces varied confessions and their discordant rituals.²⁰¹

The scenes afterward are of interviews with students and their parents. Zaccak shows that these students who attend different schools, each according to their family’s sect or religious belief, are the exact image of their families, as you can expect what their answers to be when asked the interview questions. Zaccak tracks down the reality in the Lebanese community through his camera. He shows the transmission of a community’s ideologies to the classroom so the school and the home happen to be within the same sphere. In order to measure the variations between the student’s answers he asked each student the same set of questions: when he asked them who are their favorite historical

²⁰¹ Tabet, “Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l’étude de trois films sur l’identité, la nation et la transmission”

figures? The Shiite student replies that "it is Khomeini". The Christian said "it is Béchir Gémayel", the leader of the Christian militia of the Lebanese forces, while Majd,, who in Zaccak's film represents the secular current in Lebanon, showed his admiration for all the political figures who fought for the country's independence. Moreover, the students disagreed on the meaning of the country's independence: Nour who attends the Shiite school said that "Lebanon experienced two independences, that of 1943 and that of 2000, when the Israelis withdrew from southern Lebanon". While for Sara who attends a Christian school independence meant the withdrawal of the Syrian forces in 2005 that marks the country's liberation. "Zaccak's documentary thus shows that the Lebanese have still not found the path to the unity they promised themselves to achieve after the war."²⁰² Zaccak had chosen to view the film's characters in an order to serve his storyboard which aims to direct the audience and attract their compassion towards his preference without saying his opinion out loud. He meant to put the Majd scenes which represents secularism in a certain order between the scenes to show the differences between the secular and sectarian.

Zaccak's interpretation of secularism is literally separating the religions from the state and put all sectarian's related issues in private circles rather than the public as the solution toward relieving the Lebanon's plight. This concept is aligned with Barbier's proposal of a complete separation between the state and the civil society, between the public sphere and the private domain.²⁰³ Zaccak said that he asked the question whether there is a place for the individual within groups that are more sectarian and closer to tribal

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Tarabichi. *Hartaqat: On Democracy, Secularism, Modernism and Arab Resistance*. p210-213

thought: “as if there is a tribe, the human being should always belong to”. Zaccak seemed agitated and ended his sentence with laughter when he stated an example about his Marxist professor ‘Jalal Khoury’: “no matter how the person lives his life freely and secular but at death the clergyman seems he wants to return him back to the religious sectarian frame as if he is correcting his path to be able rest in peace in the skies”. He added: “it is an enormous problem which constantly ignites wars and conflicts”. He proceeded that even when he felt fed up with people being retracted in sectarianism, he decided to make a film about cars, he found out that even cars are categorized in a sectarian frame: “add a cross... draw Imam Ali’s sword... cars are dressed and named as citizen’s... To be a recognized citizen you should put on this informal custom yet unique to each tribe.”

Zaccak dwelled on talking about his journey exploring secularism in his films. He said it was like a research trip among the varied religious groups triggered by an incomplete film project called “Ali and Jihad”. The film was supposed to tell the story of a man who chose to change his religion after several accidents in his life. Zaccak couldn’t complete the film to protect the main character of the film from being assassinated. Zaccak then mentions how he was introduced to the Angelinan missionary, the appearance of which coincided with the existence of the American military in the region post Iraq’s war and Afghanistan’s war. And this phase helped him understand how both easterners and westerners interact with the religions. About his film “New Missionaries” Zaccak said it was quite problematic as it touched a taboo topic in the region: “I was still trying to understand the inseparable relation between religion and politics in this region”.

Zaccak's next destination was Egypt to shoot a film about Copts funded by *Al Jazeera* who requested to have an interview with Al Azhar's president to verify to the viewers that there is no actual problem in what the film presents. Iran was the place to study the Shi'a and observe the differences between the formal politics and the regular people who change before the camera from who they really are behind it.

Zaccak discloses his surprise of people using the same speech used in the 1975 between Muslims and Christians in July's war 2006 thinking it could be another civil war although the parties this time are different (Sunni and Shi'a): "us... them...", and that "we can't stand living with them". This highlights an important divisive discourse. This can be seen as a review of the reform work of the first committee responsible for laying down the general principles of the teaching of history at school. When Zaccak decided to do his film *A History Lesson* he was also surprised at the new generation which differed from that of his other film *Sunni Echoes* and *Shi'a Echoes*. He expected to carry new ideas, only to find out that he was dealing with the same, if not worse, mentalities in regard to religions and sectarianism. He concluded that one secular history book is not the solution he thought would end the conflict, as the whole system is defective as result of a weakened state, ineffective public schools, and a incompetent national University, while on the other side all private sector organisations are connected to strong well established religious institutions.

The films *A History Lesson* by Hady Zaccak and *West Beirut*²⁰⁴ film by Ziad Doueiri²⁰⁵ share the same opening scenery. They both begin in a school's playground with a flag, and an anthem. These elements represent a unifying patriotic spirit, and an advanced symbolism for a country administered by laws and the constitution. They present the different image of Lebanon prior to the civil war and dividing Beirut, in contrast to the current situation in shade of the political sectarianism. In *West Beirut* the students stand by the headteacher singing the French national anthem. The film's protagonist Tariq goes up to the top floor of the school's building and with a sound speaker he interrupts the singing and sings the Lebanese national anthem instead of the French one. The students stop singing the French anthem and happily join their colleague and start singing their national anthem with a big applause after.

On the other hand, in *A History Lesson* in the time when sectarianism escalated in Lebanon, the opening scene begins with the Lebanese flag hoisted on the flagpole and students saluting it in a queue. Following similar scenes to other schools' playgrounds in the morning lineup. The viewer can hear different prayers and religious recitations been read to the students through sound speakers. Then a scene of a school theatre and a student is standing before others seated on chairs and starts a hymn: "Our Father who are in heaven, your love is endless." Before a prayer started. These schools of the different intellectual and religious backgrounds are the locations where Zaccak had held his interviews with the students about Lebanon's history. Zaccak represented a side of Lebanon's history as it is

²⁰⁴ *West Beirut*. Directed by Ziad Doueiri. 1998

²⁰⁵ See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers, and Appendix Seven: Posters.

taught in schools and as students from different background perceive it. The sub identities prevail over school's names and logos, on their coaches while the national flag is seen on an outer wall of one of the schools with faded colors in a seemingly private message referring to the sectarian dimension for each school.

The director films different scenes from History Lessons in different schools where the teachers are having a discussion with their students about Lebanon's independence. National leaders names are recited in the lessons as those of whom had formed the first governments after Lebanon's independence from French colonialism. The viewers might expect the film to be limited to this collective national event, but the later scenes presents different stories about the Lebanese history and about the vital events and the foundation stones from the students' families point of view.

The families belonging to sectarian and ideological beliefs seems obvious when the director films inside the students' houses and their bedrooms. The pictures and symbols they keep in their private spaces are not of much difference from those seen in their school's premises. A student's father with a picture of the Virgin Mary in the background comments on the History Lesson of the independence: "it is a thing from the past and it is not useful for our future." While another parent, with a photo in the background of "Hassan Nasru Allah" the leader of "Hizbu Allah" party, and an icon for Shei'a in Lebanon, requests a unifying history curriculum of the true history of Lebanon written by the government that shows the great victories the Islamic resistance movements had accomplished over time.

Other families accuse the history book with being dishonest and that the history written in it has been changed and rewritten by the winning and ruling parties. The film's

viewer after these interviews with the student's families understands that there is not only one curriculum for the Lebanese history taught in schools, rather many books introduced and used by each school based on its sectarian background. The ninth graders whom Zaccak had chosen to film with, know very little about their national history compared to the French revolution's history and the world wars.

Zaccak takes a medium shot scene for a number of students in a form of VoxPop interviews. The students' answers were varied to his questions: "Who is your favorite historical leader?", and "Which states are friends to Lebanon?". The answers reflected identity markers indicating a problematic approach for students processing their national history and sectarian reference. Some considered their sects leader to be a historical leader. Some considered "Ruholla Khomeini" the Iranian Islamic revolution leader the one who achieved the Great Lebanon's victories. Others considered Napoleon or Hitler a historical leader. As for Lebanon's friend states question, the answers came from the sectarian alliances perspective, not the states policies and history. France could be the common answer, then came Iran and Syria, as well as Saudi Arabia and Qatar for their financial support Lebanon as articulated by one of the students.

Zaccak in *A History Lesson* agrees with Nadia El-Fani's *Laicite, Inch'Allah*²⁰⁶ in that presenting secularism in their films aims to create discussions among the audience about controversial issues either political or social which will then be lit up in the absence of a secular state, secular institutions and secular universities. Zaccak and El-Fani both proclaim

²⁰⁶ See Appendix Seven: Posters, and Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

their secularity and declare it as their identity. However, Zaccak on the contrary of El-Fani, tends not to irritate his audience when presenting secularism in his film. He did not mention the idiom “Secularism” all through his film *A History Lesson* or referred to it directly neither in tackling the film’s plot or in the questions he asked the students. However, I believe secularism remained the elephant in the room in all the film’s scenes, and it was what Zaccak wanted to signal as he articulated this in his interview with me.

Zaccak’s first name is Hady which means in Arabic “the quiet person”, he described his approach in presenting secularism in his films with the quiet and strong address and discourse delivered to the audience, without provocation. This approach is clearly seen in all Zaccak films. Zaccak considered approaching a controversial topic like secularism in the Middle East in a provoking manner, a form not far from the relationship between sectarianism and radicalism itself. He banged his fists together and said: “the strong provocative style is not different from the sectarian.” He points to the right side referring to the right wings’ ideologies, the conservative, religious, and the radicals which Zaccak is standing in a contrast with all of them on the far left. Zaccak considered the secular who refuses to acknowledge the differences in the others and the atheist who has gone far with his atheism, both are like extremists and sectarians. This worrying similarity is as disturbing as the thoughts and extremist practices of radical parties and sectarian ideology. Zaccak held his right thumb with his left hand, which was pointing toward the right, nodded his head reassuring himself and said peacefully: “I don’t want to be like them. I will lose my secularity.”

I can sense Zaccak's vision of secularism, and his bias towards it in his film *A History Lesson*. He is using an indirect approach and unshocking strategy as in a story telling. Secularism is the opposite of the sectarian ideology which was present in the film's discussions and clear in the students' answers, each according to his sect. The icons that indicate Lebanese sub identities are obvious in the film's scenes, the interviews' backgrounds, and events which Zaccak's camera had documented in the schools' premises and the students' houses.

As the film approaches the end of its 51 minutes, the identity gap the Lebanese lives becomes clearer, and their sectarian belonging and its reflection on the reading of Lebanese history, and the manner in which it is taught, is persistently Zaccak asks the students a question of how do you identify yourself, and the students answers varied between those who consider themselves Phoenicians, whilst others said Arabs, and others refused to link Arabism to their Lebanese nationality, justifying this to the Westerner's understanding of the term "Arab" and always connecting it to Islam. While other students chose to add their religious beliefs and sects to their identities, moreover, they had even used the religion before the nationality at times.

Majd is one of the students who answers Zaccak question before the camera. Zaccak had chosen Majd precisely for his film in the preparation phase. Although he didn't give him extra time or more shots than the other students in his film, Zaccak's bias towards Majd was obvious. Majd represents a different value in *A History Lesson*, his interventions in the classroom, his answers before the camera, the symbols surrounding him in his room at home or at his school makes him a secular model in this sectarian surrounding. He

foregrounds the civil national Lebanese identity among the other sub-identities and cultures.

Zaccak films Majd arriving at his school carrying a telescope signifying science, with no other religious or sectarian events and symbols in his surroundings. In his room there is a big map of Lebanon, a picture of the Cedar Tree which represents a national symbol, a button on his bookshelves saying: "One Nation, One Army", and an airplane toy written on it Middle East Airlines, the national Lebanese airlines. Majd's confident answers to Zaccak's questions are the core of the comparison the viewer of the film will keep running through their mind. Majd studied in the German school in Beirut which is the only school in the film that does not belong to a certain sect. Zaccak meant this school in his film to be the ideal model for secular institutions. Majd presents himself as a Lebanese citizen in consonant with his surrounding and culture. When Zaccak asked him about his sect, he answered succinctly and confidently: "I respect all sects in my country, but I settle as Lebanese only.

Although Zaccak in *A History Lesson* had used the school playground and the flagpole with the flag rising in the beginning of the film as in Doueiri's film *West Beirut*, however, he chose to postpone the national anthem till the end of his film. One of Zaccak's questions to the students was if they can sing the national anthem or if they can recite its words, surprisingly led to all of them with the exception of Majd the student in the secular school, remembering the words by heart and promptly singing: "All of us! For our Country, for our flag and glory!"

As the educational objectives which were voted by Lebanese deputies in 1989 during the Taif conference aims at strengthening national belonging and integration, and spiritual

and cultural openness. Tabet marks out in his article²⁰⁷ that *A History Lesson* has a special place in Zaccak's career insofar as it stands at the crossroads of his various concerns. He says that this 51-minute film, which was produced in 2009, tackles a classic of Lebanese debates about the unification of the history curriculum: Placing this film in the context of recent history, it can be seen as a review of the reform work initiated by the State in 1996 with the establishment of the first committee responsible for laying down the general principles of the teaching of history at school.²⁰⁸

As stated above the identity crisis the Lebanese live every day is the film's plot. Although Zaccak in *A History Lesson* had used the school playground and the flagpole with the flag raising in the beginning of the film as in Doueiri's film *West Beirut*, he chose to postpone the national anthem till the end of his film.

Zaccak had succeeded in establishing a heated discussion in the society about his film's topic. The indirect approach of presenting secularism had presented a strong and calm message to the audience in an unprovocative manner. His film which shows how sects' leaders couldn't agree on one version for the Lebanese history and ended with 20 history schoolbooks presenting different visions and stories of Lebanon's history to be used in the schools as sectarian institutions, had left an impact on the Lebanese society as well as on

²⁰⁷ Tabet, "Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l'étude de trois films sur l'identité, la nation et la transmission".

²⁰⁸ Betty Gilbert-Sleiman, "L'unification du manuel d'histoire au Liban : enjeux et contraintes", in Mermier Franck et Varin Christophe (dir.), *Mémoires de guerres au Liban*, Arles, Actes-Sud collection Sinbad, 2012 p. 95-107.

the sects' leaders and the clergies. This is what happened when the president of the parliament in Lebanon described the history taught at schools as "disgraceful" after Zaccak's film was screened on Al Jazeera channel in 2009 for the first time²⁰⁹. Nabeeh Berri the Lebanese parliament president and one of the Shei'a leaders in Lebanon directed the office of the parliament to copy the film and give all the representatives in the house a copy of it in preparation for discussing a unified history curriculum.

The feedback on a film like *A History Lesson* on the society in Lebanon was taken more personally when screened to schools' representatives and the pupils and their families, and each party was worried about the images used in the film and how it negatively present their party, although no feedback was given regarding the actual content of the film. However, when the film was screened on TV it made wide echo throughout the Lebanese society and reached the Lebanese house of parliament which in his turn instructed to establish the reform committee to rewrite the general principals to teach history in school. Zaccak mentions his film was used on Independence Day of Lebanon on LBC channel News as an opening instead of the usual formalities and national celebration news. The outcomes of discussion groups carried out after each screening varied depending on the city where the screening took place, and the remarkable observation was how each sect was comparing itself in the film with the others in a manner to measure whether they

²⁰⁹ "A History Lesson, New Production for Al-Jazeera Documentary." *Aljazeera Documenatry*, doc.aljazeera.net/cinema/الوثائقية-درس-في-التاريخ/. Accessed 3 July 2022.

win over the other parties by being better presented, nonetheless the secular message in the film was not present or clear to them.

History is a subject Zaccak had been pondering since he was a teenager as he used to spend days writing his personal chronicles of the liberation war waged in 1989. Therefore, it was his chosen subject when requested to make a film for *Al-Jazeera*.²¹⁰ Tabet agrees that *Al-Jazeera* had enjoyed a large audience in the Middle East since the end of the 1990s where censorship locked the media space. He agrees with Mohammad El Oifi on his view about *Al-Jazeera's* effect versus the censorship limitation in the region: "allowing the Arab viewer to access free, pluralist information made by Arabs and for Arabs"²¹¹.

Zaccak had used a subtle narrative method to tell his film's story in *A History Lesson*. He appeared as an observer in the film but used a delicate method to tell and deliver his message to the viewer as the third person by using editing techniques to attract the audience's compassion towards his preference without saying his opinion out loud.

Micheal Tabet referred to the narration method of the films analyzed in his paper as having a critical approach to the community. Moreover, their filmmakers aspire to tell the story as outsider witnesses to the daily lived reality. He says: "made twenty years after the end of the civil war, these three films take a trip to the heart of community representations in Lebanon and bear witness to the impossible birth of a nation. They also manifest the

²¹⁰ Tabet, "Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l'étude de trois films sur l'identité, la nation et la transmission".

²¹¹ Mohammed Oifi, " L'effet al-Jazeera ", *Politique étrangère* 2004, 3, p. 650.

aspiration of their authors to place themselves outside community narratives and to tell stories and destinies crushed by the logic of the group.”²¹²

3.3.2 Jumana Saadeh

Saadeh’s Film *No Kids Land* starts with a scene of a child trying to ride a bicycle between two tents, followed by children’s faces staring at the camera with their wide-open eyes very close to the camera’s lens with others wandering outside at a refugee camp in a cold winter day. The film then presents three characters each of them speaks to the camera in a wide medium shot. The first is the spokesperson in the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Lebanon declaring that 16,000 Syrian children are living without their parents on the borders of Lebanon due to the running war in Syria. The second character is a clergy who is to be the founder of “Bait Mariam” orphanage, speaking about how keen his institution is in providing care for children and keeping them in touch with their families. The third is a Muslim “sheikh” who is to be the founder of “Dar Al Hayat” orphanage. He articulated that the role that Sunni Muslims play in being responsible for these children is greater than any other party since they share with them same beliefs and values. Saadeh shot her film in a refugee camp in “Al Biqa’a” the border city between Syria and Lebanon.

²¹² Tabet, “Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l’étude de trois films sur l’identité, la nation et la transmission”

She filmed as well in two religious children care homes from different sects that accommodated a number of the refugee children.

During our conversation about how filmmakers chose to present secularism in their films in the Middle East, Saadeh mentioned two cases from her film *No Kids Land*. The first was “Dunia” the administrator in the Islamic orphanage “Dal Al Hayat”, and the second was Zeena, one of the children residing in the Christian orphanage “Bait Mariam”. Saadeh came across an appalling scene of how a complete strangers perform religious indoctrination on helpless children, who lack the will and consciousness to resist, in the absence of their parents and families.

The first case features, the orphanage’s administrator “Dunia”, who heads towards the refugee camp collecting the children who had lost their parents in order to transfer them to “Dar Al Hayat” orphanage. She targets the refugee tents, asking and looking for the cases her institution may serve. Saadeh interrupts her speech with a long sigh “Aaaaah” adding: “like someone collecting tomatoes and putting them in a bag”. Suggesting she is taking advantage of the bad circumstances, the war, those seeking refuge, and losing one or both parents. While the institution provides food and the shelter, it simultaneously foregrounds its identity and beliefs to those children which the administrator considers a religious obligation to upbringing amongst a generation committed to the principles of Islam.

Saadeh’s camera follows Dunia’s trip between the tents in the camp in her Islamic outfit the long fully covering dress called “Jilbab” and her headcover, using a white mobility cane. She kindly walks between the families, asking about orphanages. She enters one of the tents and introduces her institution, the services it provides for the children and its

religious objectives. Before a few women and children, she gives an inspiring speech promising them that they will go back to their country knowing how important it is now to keep their Syrian identity and their religious text. A father standing by to one of the tents refuses to send his children who had lost their mother to live far from him, and he chooses this repellent environment in the camp rather than sending to live away from him. A later scene shows a medium sized van over filled with children leaving the camps gate heading towards the orphanages.

The second case Saadeh found shocking by is the thirteen years old Syrian child Zeena who lives in “Bait Mariam” orphanage. Saadeh was shocked in the preparation phase of her film that many children had changed the names mentioned on their formal identification documents to different names. Zeena responds to Saadeh’s question “What’s your name?” with: “Marria, I am not Zeena anymore. I am Marria now.”

Saadeh continued: “I have met a girl who lives a great psychological conflict”. The tone of Saadeh’s voice rises and she shook her hands in disapproval and sadness before she resumes asking: “can you imagine? A thirteen years old child wants to change into Christianity and refuses Islam. She fears her uncle if he took her to live with him that he might force a religion she does not want on her. Why would a child at this age become a subject to these big questions?”

In the film, Zeena or Marria is seen holding prayer beads and praying before Jesus’s photo and recites hymns from a book. Later she appears visiting her uncles and the family. A girl and woman show up wearing headcovers. The viewer understands that this a Muslim family. When the visit is over, Zeena is seen kissing the little children’s cheeks happily, then

she kisses her uncle's hand before raising the back hand to touch her forehead. This is an Eastern habit to show respect to parents or the elderly or to ask for their blessing²¹³ sometimes. The uncle kisses Zeena's forehead. In the returning journey to the orphanage, Zeena, who was wearing reading spectacles and her eyes were unfocused and clearly feeling confused says to Saadeh's camera that she is ready to move back to her uncles family to live with the rest of her family members, only if she can take a cross and Mary's picture with her, and to be allowed to keep her Christian religion and be able to do prayers. The film shows that Zeena is suffering from a conceptual confusion which requires a specialised psychological follow up.

Saadeh followed the main characters in her film as they go in their daily lives. She presented the pros and cons of the charity work provided by religious institutions in a balanced way. The interviews she presented were organised and given similar timing. Although she had worked on her film with accordance to the BBC constraints and guidelines. Yet, she was able to show the negative influence on the vulnerable children while living in the religious institutions' atmosphere, where they were subject to a daily and constant brainwash and a massive directing process towards certain beliefs, which led them to have an ideological and identity conflicts at an early age and affected their childhood as it

²¹³ Eleej Noon, "Hand Kissing Meanings." *Raseef22*, 3 July 2018, raseef22.net/article/153885-

ArbeiterIn, Gast. "The Turkish Hand-Kissing Tradition." *Renk.*, 26 Nov. 2017, renk-magazin.de/en/seyda-explains-the-turkish-hand-kissing-tradition/.

deprived them from their simplest rights of living in a healthy environment, physically and psychologically.

Saadeh's film *No Kids Land* had an unseen scene between the scenes which imposes itself on the audience intuitively. I was able to hear the director's voice asking for those children to live in an impartial environment far away from any political and religious influences. Saadeh articulated in the interview that she thought her message was clear to the audience: "We have to think in a civil and humanitarian way. We want impartial institutions governed by the state to care for those vulnerable children. Away from the religious text and political ideologies." She presumes that exposing those children to big questions about religions and beliefs in return for providing them with food and shelter makes them subject to deep psychological and mental problems. This is what *No Kids Land* clearly indicated. Jumana inquires in the interview: "who allowed those institutions to expose those orphans who lacks capacity and have no families around to this religious pressures?"

Although Saadeh had referred to Georges Tarabichi, one of the secular thinkers in the Middle East, when she was asked to define secularism from her perspective as a filmmaker, her interpretation of secularism seemed more personal and humanitarian. She read secularism as the base to accept others and respect their privacy and choices. Her interpretation of it as not to enforce any personal beliefs and views on the close and surrounding circle of relations was exactly the idea that triggered her to explore secularism in a documentary film. The direct religious impact of the orphanage institutions with sectarian ideologies was the core discussion in the *No Kids Land* film. Both characters Dunia

and Zeena which Saadeh had presented in her film were provocative to Saadeh as they show clear examples of how beliefs and thoughts are enforced on others who were the vulnerable war children. Saadeh reconsidered the efficiency of the secular values which propose a neutral civil life away from religious beliefs.

Supporters of liberal secularism find that traditions and religious beliefs should not have a binding power over the society.²¹⁴ Richard Dawkins the atheist British evolutionary biologist and the author of *The God Delusion* believes it is unethical and illegal to teach religion to a child. He says that forcing a religion on a child is as bad as a child abuse.²¹⁵ Although Saadeh accepts the idea of passing the religious beliefs between parents and children, unlike Dawkins, she finds it an unacceptable matter when it comes from strangers. She considered the education provided by the religious orphanages a repellent behaviour and a child abuse. Those institutions should be impartial and fulfil its civil role which should differentiate between the care services they provide and the ideological instructing and the religious education. Saadeh's introduction of secularism in her film is connected to her personal understanding of it, which can be summarized in an idea of accepting the different and not forcing personal thoughts on others. Her obsessions about personal freedom and the right to have a choice prevail clearly in her films as in her words.

²¹⁴ Rod Dreher, "Secular Liberalism as Consensus." *Real Clear Politics*, 6 Apr. 2009, www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2009/04/secular_liberalism_as_consensu.html.

²¹⁵ Rob Cooper, "Forcing a Religion on Your Children Is as Bad as Child Abuse, Claims Atheist Professor Richard Dawkins." *Mail Online*, 22 Apr. 2013, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2312813/Richard-Dawkins-Forcing-religion-children-child-abuse-claims-atheist-professor.html.

Saadeh seemed happy articulating the wide scale of freedom she has in introducing and presenting different issues in her documentaries as a filmmaker. Answering the question of the approach she used to introduce secular values in the film she said: "I am free. I know what I want. And I always say what I want. But not in a direct and straightforward way." In the context of talking about introducing controversial issues in the film to the Middle Eastern societies, Saadeh gave an example of "the cohabitation" issue. She emphasized that she is willing to present such a topic in her films but not in an obvious and forward manner. She said: "if the cohabitation issue is discussed in a film using an explicit and direct approach like the one used in the morning shows or the talk shows, every Jordanian family will flare with anger when watching it."

Saadeh prefers to use limited freedom in her films. Her first rule is "no provoking" which is the term used by Saadeh and other filmmakers interviewed when they referred to the methodology they use when introducing secular values in their documentaries. They tend to use the indirect approach. However, Saadeh had added another term to describe this approach she is using. She said: "it's a timid approach!" Saadeh Said: "frankly, I don't have that courage to speak openly. I know what I want, but I don't want to irritate anyone!" When I asked her to clarify what she said she laughed and added: "I am talking about everything against the Arab societies' beliefs". She drew the letter "S" in the air suggesting the indirect, unprovoking way she follows before she continued: "but I always find my way."

She seemed assured of her freedom and ability of introducing any controversial issue without provocation. Presenting the filmmakers' visions and beliefs of the controversial issues by considering them as ordinary issues and expecting the viewers in the

Middle East to accept it smoothly is not an approach used by a majority of the documentary filmmakers especially those who consider the Middle East their society and the place where they live. Unlike other filmmaker who live either in the United States of America or in Europe and make their production about stories in the Middle East, it can be seen that they prefer to use the shocking approach as in *Laicite, Inch'Allah* by Nadia El-Fani the Tunisian filmmaker who lives in France and chose the direct approach in introducing secularism as a controversial issue in her film.

Saadeh said in English: "They don't care!" referring to the filmmakers who uses the direct and provoking approach in introducing controversial issues although they live in the Middle East. This cluster of filmmakers who chose to use a direct shocking approach unlike Saadeh's have a wider scale of freedom and financial independence. They are not tied up with work and funding limitations. Saadeh referred to those filmmakers as living in their own bubble and detached from their societies.

The unprovoking approach is very important to Saadeh when introducing a controversial issue. It seemed she needed to be always aware conscious and thinking carefully and thoroughly to be able to say what she wants in her films without provoking the viewer. She finished her talk here saying: "I always look before I leap". Saadeh's unprovoking approach appears clearly in her film *No Kids Land* in discussing the role of the religious institutions in indoctrinating the children. She used a quiet and relaxed approach by adding stories of other children to her main characters' stories, like that of Syrian children living without their parents outside the religious orphanages such as Rabee' the child who lives in Saida in the south of Lebanon. Saadeh in her film shows his school and how he is

living with his adolescent brother without grownups as his mother had immigrated to Sweden. She also presents scenes that have spiritual dimensions which satisfies the conservative viewer in the Middle East. Moreover, she shows the positive sides of the care provided by the religious institutions like playgrounds, the decent food hall, the education process, singing gathering around the tree celebrating Christmas, children praying together and reciting prayers when the bus moves. Despite all of these scenes, the director's repellent feeling can be easily received by the viewer. The message of the negative effect and psychological problems the children in those orphanages suffer from due to the ideological and religious indoctrination is also received by the viewer.

In the film *No Kids Land* Saadeh avoids provoking the audience. She entirely averts any direct condemnation towards religious beliefs or a religious person or a religious institution. However, her approach of presenting the story and the characters in a cinematic method which moves the viewer from one story to another, and from one location to another reduces the intensity of the criticism in her message which in her film was targeting the religious orphanages practices. Saadeh edited the film's scenes in a way which moves the audience emotionally towards the psychological conflict the orphan children live through due to exposing them to questions that exceed their needs and abilities. The film *No Kids Land* had used an approach similar to the "S" letter its director Saadeh had drawn in the air before my interviewing camera to deliver a message to the audience and urge the viewers to question whether there is an alternative to providing the necessary care for those children in a friendly environment. Considering the civil alternative was Saadeh's implied message and her unheard voice: to guarantee an unbiased environment religiously and to politically protect the orphaned refugee children from any form of ideological or

religious indoctrination. Saadeh said that she cannot make a direct film about secularism as an abstract concept and also said that she has to feel the story to be prompted to make a documentary film about it. Independent filmmakers evaluate the importance of the causes and priorities them in accordance with what it touches in them. They treat at their films from a personal point of view. Therefore, independent filmmakers treat secularism in their films in accordance with their personal definitions.

3.3.3 Miriam El-Hajj

El-Hajj knew that academically she was going towards the cinema or theatre studies at an early age. She went back to Beirut from France after doing her master's degree in cinema studies to make her documentary films and to chase answers to many questions in her mind as in all the war generation about the unknown and absent history of the war. Those who started the war hasn't passed to the new generation the truth of what was going on then. Lebanon's history stops at the time the war flared up and its story remained stopped at the independence declaration.

El-Hajj said that she made her first film in 2013 fortuitously. She used to accompany her uncle Riyadh to his new hunting gear and supplied shop and she spent the time there listening to the conversations between her uncle's and his friends and other family members about hunting and the war. Those men were active members in the Christian militias who participated in the ideological and religious fighting then. El-Hajj documented

the stories she heard in the shop, and she immediately knew these stories are a good material for a dramatic film about the civil war. But she recognized later that she has a contact with living characters telling the unspoken war history. She realized that she has a valuable documentary material in her hands. *Trêve: A Time To Rest* film²¹⁶ came out to be a personal film showing El-Hajj's family answering their beloved daughter's questions. El-Hajj's voice was heard in the film, but she was not seen. She was making a film which provides answers to the post war generation about those fighters and the presence of the religion in the politics game. Al Hajj Said: "I'm neither a historian, nor a journalist, let alone a politician. Taking family privacy and emotional intimacy as a starting point, I simply examine the mechanisms for transmitting past violence."²¹⁷

The opening scene of *Trêve: A Time To Rest* starts with a close-up shot of a hunting cartridge filling machine. Bars moving horizontally up and down in a systematic organised order and a steady sound. This is followed by a scene of a side profile of man in an elevator going up. His features cannot be seen in the dimmed lighting. He opens the elevator's door and enters a wide space within a factory. The viewer hears a singing sound: "this love is torturing me... oh god". The following scene of for a shop's front screen and a man in his fifties enters the scene from the right side of the viewer. The man with the white hair and the big paunch entered the shop with his dog. The director's voice introduces the film's

²¹⁶ See Appendix Seven: Posters

²¹⁷ "Interview Cinema: Myriam El Hajj." *Www.institutfrancais.com*, 2 Mar. 2021, www.institutfrancais.com/en/interview/myriam-el-hajj.

main character by calling him: “Uncle Riyadh! Hi!” Riyadh in return greets his niece warmly as did his dog Mira.

El-Hajj announces in the first two scenes of her film its nature and genre. It’s a Familial story from the close personal circle of the filmmaker. The main character of the film is the filmmaker’s uncle “Riyadh El-Hajj” who owns a hunting gear shop, and the conversations in the film are held an informal context. The filmmaker is speaking to the main character from her position as a family member not as a director, therefore the conversations are run smoothly in a warm atmosphere and the topics approached are about sensitive memories like the militia’s checks points much it is about the family’s love and marriage memories.

Later in the film, a conversation between Riyadh and a customer in the hunting gear shop – the film’s main location where most of the conversations were held- occurs before the gun’s display screen where Riyadh was showing the customer the types of guns he has and giving him their prices. The film moves to another scene presenting other characters and introducing the relationships between them. They were Riyadh’s old comrades, the warriors in the radical right Militias in the civil war. Further scenes show Riyadh standing leaning on a gun display cabinet talking to his friends and laughing with them about their hunting days with the sound of the news anchor coming from the TV. Riyadh’s younger brother - El-Hajj’s father- offered him his chair, which is a middle eastern habit to show respect to the elderly.

In another scene the conversation is about hunting dogs in the presence of Riyadh’s pampered dog “Mira”. The friends are talking about their dogs looks and strength and the

breeding season. One of the men mentioned giving his dog a “Viagra” pill to help him in a new relationship which made Riyadh and his friend, who had passed their youth year, teased their friend about his sexual ability and him needing the “Viagra” himself rather than his dog. Hunting and war were the main topics in the conversations between Riyadh and his friends. The common factor was the weapon or “the death smell” as one of Riyadh’s friends who used to be a sniper in the civil war named it when referring to the birds he’s hunted. Those old warriors who entered the war at the age of 14 are living the past and know nothing except about their weapons. Those warriors of the radical right Militias tell some of the stories of the civil war before El-Hajj’s camera in pride and with honour. The happiness and pleasurable feelings don’t leave this group when they remember the scenes of shooting and killing between Muslims and Christians in the war in Beirut, even when they talk about the massacres committed by those militias in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

Between the questions El-Hajj asked about the civil war memories which are referred to by the film’s protagonist as: “the most beautiful days the one can live”, she questioned the romantic side of Riyadh and his friends as well. The love stories, marriages, photos of the newlyweds in the war time. El-Hajj seemed as though she was trying to be fair with those warriors. Despite her questions which condemn the sectarian war, she tends to show the human side of them as they joined the war young. They became soldiers in the war at an early age and remained nothing but soldiers even when the war ended. The war left them without any personal gains, nevertheless, it had resulted in forming a failure state. Riyadh and his friends had nothing left but to celebrate the past and glorify their decision

to participate in a cancellation war as the right decision for them to protect Christianity in the east.

Riyadh appears in the opening scene with the hunting guns telling how he used to owe his own camera and a tripod which he used to take photos of himself and his bride in his wedding day without the assistance of a professional photographer. Riyadh mentioned laughing that his wedding didn't cost him anything, "only me and her, a best man, and a bridesmaid". Riyadh talks about a wedding in the war time, without a family or guests, a feast or a party. But despite all of these exceptions, the presence of a priest who was the fifth person was necessary to hold the marriage ceremony. Riyadh mentioned that "Father Amin" liked the idea and considered it the best wedding he had ever officiated. Riyadh said then that he was relieved anyway with or without having the family and friends invited, this way is more convenient to him. Riyadh laughs and El-Hajj expanded with er questions asking her uncle from behind the camera: "how did you know Auntie Muna?". The war appears again in Riyadh's answer, as he met his wife at the Militia's checkpoint which he served at as it was next to his wife's house. Sarcastically Riyadh continued: "hope these days won't be repeated!" He laughs and give the camera man a wink as this sentence doesn't resemble him, before he carries on in sarcasm:

"What a crazy time that was! They were the best time of my life.

Don't let anybody tell you otherwise.

Wherever there is a feeling of suspense,

Whether in a battlefield, or elsewhere, you feel alive!

Many people say that war...

But, well, war makes you feel alive!”

In the scene, El-Hajj presents the pride of the sectarianism that exists in the society until the day. It shows how pleasure can be derived from the war and the religious conflict. Secularism is present in this scene as El-Hajj criticizes the society and the sectarian system. She emphasizes that the use of the religion in the public sphere has the power to defeat the state and civil values.

El-Hajj in her film *Trêve: A Time To Rest* asked the main character and his friends her questions from behind the camera, sometimes she was inquiring the information, and others was a part of the conversation. However, her questions can be categorized into two types, on one hand she sounds like the pampered family member who has affectionate relations with the family members and the family friends. This was obvious when she asks about the love stories and the marriages stories. On the other hand, she sounded at a distance from the film's characters when she asks about the war and the fighting. Her stance appears different as she declares she was on the other side of the film's radical characters. She didn't only ask the general questions of the war, she moreover, expands in the dialog to ask about the details.

Riyadh and his friend Tony and a third friend appears sitting on plastic chairs in front of the shop in a wide shot. Tony was on the right of the scene with his left side facing the

camera. He is holding a gun happily and aiming at a far point. He shoots before standing up to check how accurate he had got his target. The following scene is of Riyadh and Tony inside the shop standing by the table in a medium shot surrounded by the rifles and hunting gear. Tony is filling his shotguns with gunpowder when El-Hajj asked him about his role in the militias in the civil war. Tony answered her that he was a sniper before El-Hajj asks him again about the identity of the people he shot. He answers her comfortably: “the Palestinians. They were the ones who fought us the most”. El-Hajj carried on: “have you killed anyone?” Tony answered her without any hesitation: “of course!”.

As El-Hajj continued questioning Tony, he mentioned the Beirut bus massacre 1975 Ain el Rummaneh incident, which was the spark that set off the Lebanese Civil War in which the Christian militias were accused of killing several Palestinians including women and children. Tony carried on filling his bullets with the gunpowder and stack them standing on the table. He told El-Hajj that he witnessed the bus shooting in 1975. Smiles of satisfaction are interspersed in between the dialog for killing the bus passengers easily according to Riyadh and Tony’s tale. El-Hajj replied: “so they have the right to seek revenge, you killed them!” Tony said justifying: “it occurred by a coincidence.”

In another scene, where El-Hajj seemed at a distance from the film character’s stances on the war, she called two characters – her father and uncle- to sit before the camera in hunting gear shop. She discusses with them the massacre of Sabra and Shatila. This massacre which was executed by the Christian Militias under the Israeli army’s cover inside the Palestinians camps Sabra and Shatila in 1982 after the fighters of the Palestine Liberation Organisation left Lebanon, along with their weapons by the sea towards Tunisia.

Riyadh insisted on defending the decision to fight the Palestinians then despite his brothers attempts to stop him from mentioning details in front of the camera. But he looked at him and said: “I do not give a shit!” before he carried on talking about what he called: “the reality of what happened”. El-Hajj announced in front of her family’s men that she is against the family’s stance from the war, and she is in opposition to their involvement in killing. El-Hajj said in the film: “I am communist and stand with the Palestinian case, but you my family, my father and uncle belong to the radical party in Lebanon!”. El-Hajj referred to Jean Genet’s essay “Four hours in Shatila”²¹⁸ and the awfulness of what he had witnessed in the camp of the scattered corpses, slaughtered bodies and raped women.

El-Hajj’s condemnation of the sectarianism and particularly the criticism of her Christian sect and especially the Maronites was the basis of her film to introduce her vision of secularism by showing how religions and beliefs are used to set off wars and how they force peoples to use weapons by implanting interminable hatred. In addition to testimonies about an undocumented history and unagreed upon nationally in Lebanon, El-Hajj presents the consequences and the impacts of the past which are still present in the minds of the old militia’s warriors, who still process the same attitude towards the other and believe their decision was the right decision. The other in this case is the Muslim who belongs to a different sect and a different religion either a Lebanese or Palestinian, and is the one who threatens Christianity’s place in the Middle East. This was the sectarian Christian leaders presentation to their soldiers which was known by “Kissinger’s plan”, referring to the former

²¹⁸ Jean Genet, *Four hours in Shatila/ et al. أربع ساعات في شاتيلا / Arba’ Sā’āt Fī Shātīlā*. Tanger Morocco, Librairie Des Colonnes Éditions, 2015

United States secretary of state. This plan is mentioned by Riyadh when he was talking about his participation in the “Qaa’ Al Reem” attack in Zahleh. They attacked a group of soldiers from the Arab Lebanese army, which was with the Muslim sects and the leftist party in the war. Riyadh said while he was boiling his coffee on a stove by the side of his rifles:

“Unlike them, we had a cause

We fought to assert our existence

Their cause was to drive the Christians away

If they had succeeded in Lebanon

There would not be one Christian left in the whole of the Middle East

And Kissinger’s plan would have been a success

Since 1945, the plan was to wipe out all Christians from the Middle East”

Although Riyadh believed he was defending a cause according to his statement in the film. He believed his and his friends’ decision to fight the Muslim militias and the leftist militias in addition to the Palestinians was for a great cause which is to protect the Christians existence in their land. El-Hajj believed that there is no such a cause, and the generation of her uncle and his friends were deceived by a sectarian speech which prayed on used their religious emotions. El-Hajj said in the interview:

Most of the Christian Lebanese Militia warriors I have met in the process of documenting the war mention “Kissinger’s plan” in their talk. The leaders of the war and the sects told them that the plan was to evacuate the Middle East from the Christians and displace them to Europe and domicile the Muslim Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. And Christians should fight. This plan doesn’t exist! If you look in the books for Kissinger’s plan, you won’t find it. Kissinger didn’t say this. I cannot surpass this matter in my films. What was said to this Christian to fight? No one is born with passion to blood and killing.²¹⁹

El-Hajj thought that secularism was clear in her film *A Time to Rest*. It was put forward in the religion which was strongly present in the presentation of her family’s religious community and her radical Christian district, but also in how being religious had led individuals to be involved in those wars. El-Hajj believed that the fundamental cause of the war was the sectarian desire to take over Lebanon as the politicians and the sects’ leaders had used religions and religious speech to promote killing and committing massacres in order to protect the Christians homes and land. El-Hajj presented religion in her film to condemn it and to condemn the political regime which based on sectarianism, for the state’s failure.

El-Hajj had presented the protagonist, Riyadh’s personality as it is in reality. The person who belongs to the radical Christian district. She meant to present the religious part

²¹⁹ Myriam El-Hajj. Interview with the author.

in her film as a main element in the story and the character. She would not have been able to present the story of the old civil war warriors _today's hunters_ without referring to their ideological belonging. El-Hajj believed it was important that religion remains clear in the film as an identity for this group who made a war for a cause they believed was fair. Those warriors believed they were protecting the targeted Christian's existence in the Middle East region and not only Lebanon.

El-Hajj talked about the language used with the people and soldiers in the war time in a region religiously prejudiced describing it as a first-class religious speech. The incitation to carry a weapon and fight was for the threatened Christianity, an opportunity to protect Christians in Lebanon who feared they were to be displaced and their lands dispossessed in an international regional plan. This is how new fighters were lured to fight and how the fighting continued. As religion was the main incitement subject, El-Hajj stated that she wouldn't have been able to make the film without pointing at the religion as a reason for the civil war and as a vital element which cannot be discarded in the films characters' conscience and feelings.

El-Hajj believes that secularism is not in discarding the religion or ignoring its existence in the daily lives of the people in these communities, she said: "this isn't realistic! Secularism is in separating the religion from the state and the law, but not in ignoring people's choices and identities as the Lebanese media -television or cinema – tends to do." El-Hajj said that the society is presented completely neutral without any religious particularities which is not the reality in Lebanon. She articulated: "today we watch a Lebanese series on the television that hides all aspects related to religions in an attempt to

be neutral. The names of the characters don't have any religious depth to tell if the character is a Muslim or Christian". El-Hajj said that she doesn't understand this approach, which is far from the reality in Lebanon, as she cannot avoid the religion in the society in her film's treatment. She said: "religion existed in my film to be able to reject it. To decline connecting it with wars and to refuse using it as an instrument for calling to it". El-Hajj's hands' movement and her body language were affirmative and showed the confident approach she used in the film to meet the challenges of representing secularism. She stated that the film's protagonist's identities are strongly connected with the religion. And a country like Lebanon is built on basis of sectarianism and one cannot ignore or deny the truth that a conflict or a war can easily be set off because of these religions.

Although El-Hajj condemns the usage of religion in the politics and in setting off the civil war in Lebanon, she respects people's right to believe. Her secularism acknowledges the beliefs but within the personal zone of the individuals without carrying it to the public sphere. As she had presented the religious side in her family which incited them to fight, she also presented the personal and spiritual side of them in her film. She didn't try to ignore her characters beliefs and show them to be neutral as the Lebanese media do. Religion is a spiritual ritual in the daily life of the film's protagonist as it was the instrument in the sectarian political speech that set the war off in Lebanon. El-Hajj considered beliefs a personal feeling and a right, she said:

I didn't hide any religious appearances in the film. In one of the scenes, my uncle Riyadh had lit a candle for Mary in front of his shop. I intended to keep the scene to show that these people have a belief. This is another side in their personality. This is

a beautiful side in them. They have the right to believe but they don't have the right to kill in the name of the religion.

Another two minutes scene in *A Time to Rest*, El-Hajj shows a religious ritual to get rid of the enviousness. Riyadh was setting by a table in the corner of his shop, he passes his hand on a glass of water and reverently pray while his eyes are on the water. He draws a cross with his hand around the glass and repeats the prayers. He carries the glass and gave to Myriam and asks her to drink from it as he believes she was a subject of envies, and this water will eradicate them. He then explains to the films crew behind the camera about enviousness and how it makes one feel sleepy when praying. He gave an example of himself as this happen to him when he prays for his son Charbel and how envies can make one ill and tired. Although Myriam didn't seem to be convinced of her uncle's argument about enviousness, and his way of treating it, and although the scene is not directly relevant to the sectarian war and the killing story, she intended to keep the scene in her film to show Riyadh's human side and nature as a Christian and a believer away from the war's cruelty. El-Hajj said that there is no such thing as pure evil and pure good, both sides exist in humans.

Trêve: A Time To Rest represents the separation between an individual's belief and the belief which involves in the politics aiming for the power. El-Hajj had succeeded to reflect in her film's treatment her vision of secularism which she had also articulated in the interview. Moreover, El-Hajj wanted to show the humanitarian side in the film's characters' personalities. She had presented the opposite side of their personalities as militia fighters in civil war. Despite of her condemnation of the Maronite sect and the fighters from her

family for being the main responsible party of the civil war in Lebanon, El-Hajj was keen to present how the details of their daily lives' spontaneously show their human side, expressed through their private religious rituals, their marriage stories, their love songs, even the unrestricted friends' conversations that include swear words and sexual gestures, which cannot be missed in any conversation in the Lebanese society.

El-Hajj was also keen to show the effect of incessant killing on those warriors. While Riyadh was talking about his battles in the film, El-Hajj asked her uncle if he had killed anyone in the war, and he explicitly answered that he did, but added immediately: "I cannot forget those whom I have killed from a short distance. I still see their faces in nightmares."

El-Hajj demonstrated her rejection to the religion's interference in politics and power by showing its result on the film's characters. Those elderly who had believed in the Christian cause then and fought for it, had been destroyed by the war. They gained nothing from the war, neither wealth nor education. They wasted their lives and mastered one thing which is fighting. And although the civil war had finished, the government hadn't had any plans or programs of rehabilitation for these people to integrate them into the civil society. Therefore, they remained isolated in the past and the hunting and its gear became their lives. They still believe that "the case" they defended then was "right"

El-Hajj tried in her film *Trêve: A Time To Rest* to ask the question whether Riyadh and his comrades' case was actually a real "Case" which carried her family and sect to enter the war and fight and took her and her generation to a country she cannot recognize its history. "Why did my family enter the war?" "Who is the killer?" "Who is the victim?" El-Hajj keeps asking: "Why has Lebanon reached this level of corruption?" "Why do we live

this reality which doesn't resemble us?" "Why are we surrounded by a reality we reject yet it doesn't want to leave us?" El-Hajj tried to find answers and present it in her film although she believes that any question about the war will remain an open question, but she as a filmmaker will keep introduce these questions in her films.

The questions asked by El-Hajj probably had been answered in the history books which revealed in much detail who did what to whom during the war, for what reason, and with what outcome, however, they do not comment on the everydayness of the war experience from the point of view of people. Lina Al Khatib in her book *Lebanese cinema – imagining the civil war and beyond* considers the cinema industry in Lebanon always related to the war's period. She says: "Over the last 30 years, Lebanese cinema has acted as a commentator on the development of sectarian conflict in Lebanon; on the normalization of war; on the reconstruction of Lebanon in the postwar period; and on the way the war still lurks in every corner in today's Lebanon."²²⁰

Unlike Micheal Tabet²²¹, who says that the new generation of filmmakers in Lebanon focuses on the functioning of society rather than on the memory of the conflict, she finds the Lebanese cinema playing the role of a socio-political commentator in the country which is still living under the war's shadows.

²²⁰ Khatib, Lina. *Lebanese cinema – imagining the civil war and beyond*, 2008, I.B. Tauris, Page Range xvii–xxv

²²¹ Tabet, "Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l'étude de trois films sur l'identité, la nation et la transmission".

El-Hajj's method of telling her story in her film *Trêve: A Time To Rest* is more personal as she and her family were a part of it. El-Hajj appeared taking part of her family's activities and heard asking and running conversations with them. However, she seemed as an outsider when she was commenting on the war and religious details. She was standing on a distance from her family's ideology. This is consistent with Micheal Tabet's arguments, as he mentioned in his paper that the filmmakers aspired to place themselves outside community narratives and to tell stories by the logic of the other."²²²

In the interview time with El-Hajj, she was working on a new project. She mentioned the place's name where she was meeting her characters in order to explain the depth of sectarian feeling in the lives of the Lebanese:

I am filming today with people from Fern El Shebbak neighbourhood in Beirut in which the Maronite Christians are forming the majority of its inhabitants. I cannot surpass the religious identity of the people there as I cannot overcome the fact that this sect particularly was the one that set off the civil war. I cannot eliminate the effect of their beliefs on their reality in the film... The sectarian dimension in the Lebanese lives is bigger than being surpassed by the filmmaker. Every group of people in Lebanon will try to take the one to its sect. Therefore, secularism will remain in all my films.

²²² Tabet, "Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l'étude de trois films sur l'identité, la nation et la transmission"

One doesn't need to go to much effort or spend time looking for a conversation about the civil war in Beirut. In the night before my interview with Meriam, I walked from the museum's conjunction west towards Al Mazra'a neighbourhood, one of the Muslim neighbourhoods in Beirut. In Sae'ib Sallam Street I stopped at "Abu Nabeel" Falafel shop, to have a sandwich which is presented with a big platter of pickles. This meal is called "The poor's meal" in the Middle East. On a table a few meters away from me, a group of old men were sitting there for their meal and a conversation stoked about the civil war in addition to sectarianism and political parties, which are normal conversational topics present in the daily life of the Lebanese people. Its presence is also obvious in the cinema industry in Lebanon. The cinema culture is also connected to the war which divided the country as it divided the cinema: pre-war cinema, war cinema, post-war cinema after the war.²²³

El-Hajj Said: "Lebanon isn't really a cinema country."²²⁴a country. Our film culture is linked to the wars that tore the country apart: pre-war cinema, war cinema, post-war cinema. There isn't much choice. As a child I watched a lot of Egyptian programs and films that made me want to become an actress, before I turned towards directing."²²⁵

²²³ "Interview Cinema: Myriam El Hajj." *Www.institutfrancais.com*, 2 Mar. 2021, www.institutfrancais.com/en/interview/myriam-el-hajj.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

3.3.4 Rania Rafei

Rafei had directed several films for the Television, and worked for the Qatari channel “Al Jazeera” which is the main producer and sponsor of documentaries in the Arab region. The topics Rafei covered from Yemen, Algeria, Lebanon and Canada had had a socio-political nature. These documentaries which could be classified under the classic documentary style, were suitable for the television, and their topics were requested directly from the Al Jazeera Channel or it’s local production agencies. The film’s topics were: the students movements in Yemen, the theatre in Eden city, scouting in Lebanon, Algeria’s former president “Chadli Bendjedid”, the assassination of the Palestinian novelist “Ghassan Kanafani”, the assassination of “Wissam al-Hassan” the brigadier general at the Lebanese internal security forces and the head of its intelligence- oriented information branch, a film about the shocking image in the media, and another about the kidnapping of Canadian children by British colonial forces and include them in missionaries, in addition to other social topic films about Arab artists and poets, and elderlies hobbies which start after they reach their seventies.

In the research and preparation phase of making a television classic film about the students’ movements in Lebanon, Rafei and her brother Raed Rafei had settled upon the incident in which the administration offices of the American University in Beirut were broken into by their own students in 1974 in order to protest against the rise of their tuition

fees.²²⁶ The incident which was accompanied by a strike and students demands, happened one year before the start the sectarian war in Lebanon. Rafei decided to take the discussions of the student movement's leaders, which happened in the sit-in protests in the American University's president's office, to be her first independent experimental film *74: The Reconstitution of A Struggle*. This film, which is far from the shallow treatment of the events, presents social and political discussions about the student's search for a homeland. The film, which points at the importance of these discussions and raises their value was a different experience for Rafei compared to the films she used to make previously for Al Jazeera.

The film *74* is a long narrative documentary fiction film of 100 minutes which belongs to the hybrid experimental genre. The characters of the film are real political activists whom Rafei tried to express with her personal voice through their talks and stances in the film. The director mentioned in the credit crawl at the end of the film that the character's conversations were improvisational in an attempt to find a place. The makers of *74* film presents throughout characters from a countercurrent group which might be marginalized by the society as it does not intersect with the sectarian and feudal values prevalent in Lebanon. Rafei describes her relationship with her first independent film saying:

²²⁶ Roy Dib, "Beirut 2013: Where Are Students?" *Al-Akhbar*, 20 May 2013, al-akhbar.com/Literature_Arts/51119/.

In *74*, I started to find the language I like in the cinema. A personal language. Something related to the experimental. To work with people who are not actors. To search the history. A documentation yet a fantasy at the same time. A mix of all these things. In *74* I decided to work with a group which have the same mindset as mine. We are a group looking for a place in our homeland Lebanon.” She continues that she and others with the same mentality and views do not have a place to live in Lebanon, because they do not belong to either the sectarian Lebanese society nor the feudalist family structure deeply rooted in Lebanon: “we actually don’t have a place in this country because we are different. We are a group that doesn’t belong to the sectarian society neither to the tribe or “the Lebanese familial. We only want to be Lebanese citizens. *74* is my own voice, a searching journey of a place in the country and in the cinema. A search of secularism.²²⁷

Rania’s film’s story is based in the American University in Beirut, considered an important platform of students discourses about Lebanon’s secularity. The film searches, in an experimental fantasy style on one hand and drama documentary on the other, the discussions that were running in Beirut in 1974. Rania chose the American University because it is one of the incubators of several sects, clusters, and streams, which reflects the wide variety of the Lebanese society then. About the question posited then Rania says: “ow can we create a secular form to this country away from its feudalism and sectarianism?”

²²⁷ Rania Rafei. Interview with the author

74 discusses the debates were going on prior the Lebanese Civil War, when discussion was more important and wider than sects and religions, aiming and requesting a modern society that gathers all Lebanese under a civil law unrelated to the citizens' religions and sects. All movements were demanding of rights for all Lebanese like education, bread, as well as challenging the state's structure. Rania believes that the year prior to the war saw the beginning of the search for Lebanon's secularity, but the war aborted this search and transformed it into a bloody conflict that lasted 15 years on the question of whether Lebanon is an Arab or not an Arab state? Whether it is with or against the Palestinian case? Whether Lebanon is a Muslim or Christian State?

The establishing shot which gives information to the audience about the film's plot, location, and characters starts with a number of sequences of archival footage in black and white of student movements in the American University in Beirut right before the main gate in Bliss Street. The picture which takes the whole screen, starts to zoom in very slowly to show groups of students of both genders having personal conversations. They are wearing the seventies clothes of the last century, with long thick hair, most of them have Stalin's moustache, and others with full moustache and beard which is the look known in the sixties and seventies of the last century as a symbol of rebellion in the time of the Leftist rise protected by the USSR. Men and women were wearing Charleston wide trousers and big collared shirts with matching blouses, holding books and papers and newspapers. Behind the students is the stone wall of the main steel arched gate, the oldest gate of the American University, located on Bliss Street, named after Dr. Danial Bliss, the American missionary who founded the university in 1866. It was called the Syrian Protestant College then. The archival footage continues to appear, filling the screen with a strong youth voice

commenting in Arabic as if someone reading a revolutionary statement or a newscast mentioning dates and different political events. Some were related to the students and their demands, and others concerning the conflict with Israel:

19 March 1974 : Massive student gathering in the American University of Beirut

25 March : 25000 demonstrators demand the nationalisation of bread production

8 April : Israeli Phantom shot down in south Lebanon and two pilots have taken prisoners

24 April 1974 : Announcement of a general strike

The film moves on to the reacted scene in the university's president's office, which the students occupy. One of the student strike leaders is sitting on the president's desk and working on a typing machine with a long arm, a cigarette in his mouth, with an American flag on his side. He runs a conversation with his colleague, who is looking into the university's records about the university's budget for the year 1973 and its expenses. A young lady, one of the strikes leaders, enters the scene, removes all the items on the desk besides the flag, and puts them in a card box she is carrying. She asks a friend to help her put down the United States' president photo frame from behind the desk and replaces it with a photo of Che Guevara, the Argentinian Marxist revolutionary. All the leaders in the office gather to fix the position of the new picture on the wall.

Two other young men enters the office as they fix some mattresses in preparation for a lasting protest while the leaders continue their search in the university's records and its correspondence with the American embassy. Six of the strike leaders move to the middle table in the office to meet. Fawaz reads the newspapers head titles: "Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian political leader declarations, secrets of October's war between Egypt and Israel 1973, labor strikes, students strike...". A young lady stands before the University's campus map and organises the security groups at the university's gates. The groups have leftist revolutionary and soviet names: "Mao1 group, Katyusha2 group, AbuLaila group, Sputnik1 group, Vidal group". One of the leaders inform the groups to prohibit anyone except students entrance to the university's campus unless authorized by the strike leaders and through the security groups. Another leader gives a statement through the university's broadcast. The scene shows him alone in the location talking to the mic with headphones on his head and broadcasting equipment on his right: "we have toppled the head of the pyramid. The reactionary and the imperialistic pyramid".

The commenting voice comes back again to connect the scenes of the strike leads and their conversations with the dates by stating it through vocal headlines. Rafei had used the commentator's voice in the opening scene of the 74 film to document the students' movements that the American University had witnessed in Beirut in one tune and in the same rhythm: the date, the time sometimes, a pause, news about the protests and the latest development day after day. And in the same style she referred to the local and regional news of events occurring simultaneously in the surrounding of students' protests.

74 presents the chronological structure of the students protests by the vocal commentary along with the acted scenes of the strike leaders. The vocal commentary took place in silence without music or any external sound effect in the middle of the film's scenes. As the student's protests in 1974 had been affected by the events on the barricades in France 1968, the director of 74 in choosing the news commentary style in the silence to interrupts the film's main scenes seemed to be affected by the French director Godard's style in his rare film "Here and Elsewhere- 1976" about filmmaking in the Fydayes and the Palestinian revolution²²⁸.

Rafei uses the "experimental cinematic" style which concerns her personally as a directing style. Although she mixes the documentary with the narrative styles, Rafei employs the theatrical style which is not far from her academically and practically. She shot her film in one room as through it were a theatre stage and uses the close up shots facing the characters also similar to the theatre, in which actors face the audience in front of them to deliver a monologue. She also uses the Neorealist style, as she used actual political youth activists to react to the event rather than using professional actors.

The Lebanese director and critic Roy Deeb²²⁹ wrote about 74 film and the cinematic experimental style of Rafei saying:

²²⁸ *Ici et Ailleurs* (Here and Elsewhere), a 1976 documentary-treatise directed by French New Wave pioneer Jean-Luc Godard and made as part of the "Dziga Vertov Group" with Jean-Pierre Gorin and Anne-Marie Mieville.

²²⁹ Roy Dib, "Beirut 2013: Where Are Students?"

In their research, Rania and Raed Rafei went back to the available documents about those protests either, photos, films, or articles. They held interviews with people who actually participated in the university's take over. However, their decision was not to produce a traditional documentary which only recollects the archival material and represents it. They decided to relive this era with actual political youth activities from our time today. They worked with Naseem Orabi, Nizar Sulaiman, Reta Hadraj, As'ad Zbyyan, Yousra Al Shami, Sandra Njeem, and Ma'roof Mawlood. They chose the neorealist style to work with actual political activists and not actors to react to the event.²³⁰

The neorealism in *74* had reinforced the existence of mature conversations which represent the stance of the political activists' actors whom Rafei had chosen from her close circle and who share the same mentality with her regarding citizenship and belonging as outsiders of the feudalism and sectarianism reality. They are different from their surrounding and seeking a place in homeland they wish to be secular in order to be able to practice their dissimilarities. The improvisation in the conversations between the film's characters – the leaders of the students strike – had caused some scenes to be confusing and poorly treated. The answers provided by the film's characters to the director's questions seemed to be reflecting the views of the political activists themselves, rather the characters they play. Their answers were personalized with a political and ideological depth more of the present than the past. The questions about the identity of the country remained

²³⁰ Rania Rafei. Interview with the author

open with no solutions presented. This had created an untraditional documentation of the American University take over events in Beirut 1974, as well as the discussion about Lebanon's identity and the attempts to find a secular platform that combines its citizens. Rafei stated: "the film asks the question of how this country could create a secular platform that suits everyone to live in. A vital platform developed from its actual needs, yet modern at the same time and away from the old obsolete secular and feudal frames, and the dominant social and political groups."

Rania said: "The search in 74 film is a search for secularism. Also, the American University was one of the most important incubators of these exploring discussions because it had students from different backgrounds who were questioning the possibility of creating a secular state instead of the sectarian in Lebanon. The film presented how this search was held by the students who came from different sectarian backgrounds by running an interactive conversation on one table to find a common language between them..."

In the shot of strike leaders meeting on the floor in the corner of the president's office, the camera takes close screen shots of the leaders while they are talking to each other. "Comrade Joseph" speaks about the importance of benefiting from the fellow "comrades" students experience in France in 1968, who had entered a new concept to the French educational system by rejecting the patriarchal authority of the universities' administrations on students. The camera moves to take the actions of the group at the meeting: smoking, checking, sketching of a girl's profile as a love message between two people in the meeting; Eyad the Palestinian dreamer and "Reema" the leftist Lebanese who

believes in the majority's dictatorship. A timid smile from Reema that shows the mutual feelings. A coffee kettle and cups followed by a vote on the meeting's resolutions.

The meeting's sounds are interrupted by the sound of the commentator who continue to document the event of taking over the university in its sixth day along with the local and regional accompaniment news: A battle in the Syrian Golan Heights, Israel is using new American weapons, the Lebanese Politician Kamal Jumblatt alerts: Al Hakam pays the price for eliminating the left, the students of the American university denies using drugs and having sexual intercourse in the university's campus and students union announces that strike will continue until their demands are achieved.

The film characterizes the strike leaders using unprofessional actors to play the real persons from the Lebanese student's movement and from the university. The film shows student's lives while protesting in the university's premises and living in them in an acted drama style. It shows their discussions about the state's type, the laws nature, their singing songs for Al sheikh Imam; an Egyptian singer known of his sarcastic songs criticizing the prevailing situation in the Middle East in the sixties and seventies of the previous century during the revolutionary lefty wave. The film shows more scenes of resting and sleeping times after a hard day. In one of the most important scenes, Rania illustrates the discussions between protesting students who are from different backgrounds, classes, sects, and movements. The scene shows the heated discussion about Lebanon's identity at a table that combines the country's contradictions around the issues of sects and politics. The group expels one of the participants in the discussion. The female student who seems to represent the Lebanese front. This discussion implies the difficulty among Lebanese parties to agree

on the secularity of Lebanon. Rania sees that her film demonstrates the country's search for its sentimentality, secularity, and laws prior to the civil war. This model cannot be imported as a ready model and applied as is, rather it should be weaved as a dress to suit Lebanon's needs. These weaving needs time, discussions, and construction in addition to excessive efforts and endeavors and it will not be easy for all. She says:

The discussions should keep running, and it is a glory itself keeping it on. Winning or losing is a different matter" Rania adds: "You may hear some people saying these discussions are ineffective and worthless. In Lebanon we always go into this discussion that these demonstrations are pointless "tasteless". I do not agree with this. I believe that continuous movement is an add itself, and it shall always produce something new.

In the scene paving the way for the students leader's split, a wide shot is taken of another meeting of seven strike leaders to discuss the demands of the university to "terminate the state of chaos". The leaders gather around the table on the twenty first day of the strike and comrade Joseph administrates the meeting from the top of the tables whilst six other students sit on its sides with a window and walls in the background. Signs of serious disagreements arise in the meeting about the purpose of the strike, its demands and its political reflections. Some consider the strike a movement related to the students' interests due to the tuition fees rise. They want to maintain the educational process without jeopardizing the students' future. Those were represented by the "the Lebanese league", the students arm associated with Kataeb Party the Christian right political party. Others

considered the protests a conflict with the government and the political parties outside the university, and the students' movement as part of these wider protests, and an inseparable part of the associations, workers and farmers demands. Those individuals were representing the leftist parties and associations. The dispute progressed as the voices of the leaders start to rise arguing about the purpose of the student's movement.

Ghassan, one of the leaders, demand a realistic reflection of the student's movement away from the left and right theorization. Ghassan refuses the different ideological and elitist logics proposed by the members: masculinism, paternalism, colonialism the obedience slogans, the persecution problem, the existence fear... Ghassan in 74 film had left the sectarian and the familial frame to join the other strike leaders. But, despite not belonging to any minority group, he disapproved of the way the students' movement was managed. He couldn't fit within the right and the conservative criteria and found himself closer to the leftist vision who led the strike, and declined the bias based on the religion, family, or sect. Ghassan represents in the film the group which found itself side of the sectarian religious and familial classification. This group chose to practice an alternative from the options proposed by what they saw as primitive societies: embodied by the religion, the tribe, and the family. Ghassan decided to choose himself and prejudice with his battles. In the meeting Ghassan was against the leftist revolutionary speech presented by Fawaz. He had a pragmatic approach that considered the student's interest, for whose future the strike took place for in the first place. However, in regard to Alya' the minority Christian right's representative in the meeting who was sitting next to Ghassan in a two-shot scene and considered herself standing on the same side with him, he raged and refused to be classified alongside her, saying: "don't piece me together with you! My

disagreement with them is different from your disagreement". Alya' here leaves the meeting and the students' movement, but Ghassan continued the battle he had started.

Fawaz continued declining his dependence on the slogans, the reality from his point of view was that the country was subject to a serious political partitioning, and the fight is not with the university's administration but rather with a political party and a political authority which declines all sorts of change in the country. Fawaz entered the students protests in the context of the leftist revolutionary framework and through a political party that leads associations, workers and farmers protests.

The 74 film present the sectarian political parties, and serious discussions about the national identity which are built upon different ideological and sectarian backgrounds and that remain present in Lebanon and the Middle East. The film's characters represent the Lebanese parties and sects and their stances. Each one speaks in the language of the party he represents. Rafei tried to present through her film a closer illustration of the various parties speech, their backgrounds, their objectives, identities, and fears. She presented her own vision of the importance of the continuity of running these kinds of vital discussions among the groups that make up society in order to reach the secular platform she aims for. The vital discussion was the most distinguishing feature in the period of the protests and students' demonstrations in Lebanon in 1974. These discussions were the citizens' discussions in their homeland, away from the sects and the sub identities created by civil war which terminated the Lebanese search for secularism. Rafei said:

The year of 1974 was the year when Lebanon was searching for its secularity. In 1975, this search was aborted and replaced with a gory conflict that lasted for fifteen years and discussion about Lebanon's identity whether its an Arab state or not, does it support the Palestinian issue or against it, and whether it a Muslim or a Christian state. In the film, the discussion escalates to show the impossibility of finding the aimed secularity. This search was executed in 1975.

The identities speech around identity arose, distinguishing the majority's stance at the leaders meeting in the film against Alya' who is accused of carrying the minority conservative right's stance at the strike and absorbed their fears of existence. In a close up shot, Alya' who represents the Lebanese league looked agitated as she was speaking about the students future, and the reason she took part in the protest was to oppose tuition fees and not to free Palestine from the American University of Beirut "AUB". As a result an argument between Alya' and Reema her colleague who is a Leftist, arose. In shot two and three shot and the camera is moving in a panoramic medium shot between the women who sat opposite to each other at the meeting table. Rima said: "the fear of existence is just an illusion in your head and based on rumours. You have to go with the majority's opinion. We are six and you are one". Alya' replied: "I will go with the free opinion, and not the ideology you all believe in". The camera follows Alya' who stood up and left the meeting with a negative attitude from the others: "let them benefit you, your place is not here anymore!"

In the interview scene before Rafei's camera, Alya' enters the screen frame in a wide medium shot with the university president's desk in the background and Guevara's photo

on the wall along with a wide slogan written in red bold font "Fascist authority". Alya' lifted a chair up from the floor and sat in the middle of the before the camera and said: "there is no point to stay". She emotionally answered the filmmakers: "I didn't feel alone. Because I really believed in my ideas." She raised her hand and pointed to her head where she carries her thoughts and continued: "my ideas can be simply stated: believing in the individual. Its about listening to others. By nature, questioning cannot stop".

In medium shots, participants talk directly to the camera to document their personal information, their school, their views of the strike and who they represent in their struggle. Other shots document personal confessions as in this female protestor's shot who is leaning at one of the yellow walls, with a caricature poster on her left of a soldier saying "soldiers of what, soldiers?" She seems to be talking seriously holding one hand near her chest and the other touching her face and neck while saying "revolution": "You may not call it a big revolution, but I am positive I am running a revolution with myself". This scene is followed by a scene of another protestor who had been hit and his face is covered with blood.

The scene after the meeting scene is an interview with one of the students' leaders "Hanzala". In a neutral, eye-level shot, the character looks directly to the camera in a wide medium shot. The leaders of the strike use the real names of the actors representing the characters. They introduce themselves and their speciality. But the interviews seemed real. The answers were improvised and expressed the situations and the ideas of the political activists. The scenes were a mixture of reaction and interviews. The reaction was of the leaders' characters who led the strike against the American university of Beirut in 1974, while the interviews were with the real characters of the young political activists who

represented the strike leaders' characters. The interviews reflected the activists' personalities, stances, and fears in the time of making the film. The 74 film was trying to document the connection between the students' demonstrations event before the civil war and today's political sectarianist reality in Lebanon in a search for the secular identity and the possibility of having it discussed.

Hanzala sat on the floor and used matches to light a cigarette. A part of the window is seen in the background and pillows and covers on his side. He is wearing a red T-shirt with a victory sign on it. Long dark hair and beard and black glasses. He presented himself before Rafei's voice came up to ask him a question: "Why are you here as a part of this group?" Hanzala answered that he and his behaviors were not accepted elsewhere. That he contradicted with his surrounding and this group explains his presence, but it wasn't by choice. Hanzala articulated that his choice was to "live in a revolution" that looks for existence and a place, because the alternative is to be marginalized like someone living by the river unconcerned about what passes though it. Someone who watches the life passing by, but not daring to go down the river. Hanzala expressed his refusal to the idea of being marginalized and this is why he is a political activist. He said:

I am looking for a place with a question in my mind all the time: do I have a place in this country? A place to live and make my films without being considered a "Weirdo" without becoming entirely marginalized, same is my work, or don't I. I don't know! But I still believe that I have a place here also my films without considered "marginalized". I lived the experience of being marginalized in my adolescence

years, and I was happy and proud to be marginalized. The way I looked, and my reactions... I used to tear my jeans and have tattoos. I was different from my surrounding society, and I was proud of this. By as I grew up, I found out that I want to be included in this society and not to live disconnected from it but without being controlled and suppressed. I want to make my films the way I like, and to exist within the society as I want and not to be an outsider. A place with this description is very difficult to find. It's a search of a secular platform.

The second interview was with Fawaz, the sober and serious character in the group. He was leaning on an old wall that has a handwritten slogan on it: "abandon the illusions and be ready for the struggle". The filmmakers asked Fawaz about the just and equitable society that he considers exists in the communist and Soviet Union experience. Then Rafei asks him a personal question about love and relationships which took him by surprise. He smiles but looks stressed when he answered that he is not in a relationship at the moment but was in a one before. He holds his hands in front of him and put his both thumbs up and smiles saying: "In love, I am who I am". Fawaz thinks that the place to control the emotions and the words should be in politics not in love.

Yusuf Al Shamali was interviewed by Rafei's camera from the meeting's president's chair. His surname indicates that he is from north Lebanon which has the Muslim majority. He said that he represents the opinion of the majority of the students: "generally, I represent the voice of every poor or miserable person". Then he asks a question that imposes itself in a secular society directed at an activist from the Sunni Muslim's majority,

and moving the indication towards the present reality rather the historical documentation: “can Yussef al-shemali become an extreme Islamist or capitalist one day?” He moved his fingers like politicians and smiled as he looked at his hands and answered: “No”. This question about the development of the political game of the areas whether the sectarian conflict that could the leftists in 1974 became conservatives and on the right in the future? And where will its take the search of the state, citizenship, and secularism in Lebanon?

By trailing Rania’s production preceding her film *74*, I found quite a number of the films she either researched or directed were about different causes and persons. There are films about student and scout movements in Lebanon and Yemen, and other films about assassinations of Lebanese public figures. However, at the time she seemed to be avoiding deep discussions about issues like the secularity of the state or society. Despite that Rania had lived her adolescence years marginalized of her society and its conservative values in order to choose herself and her life, and she told me she was happy with this marginalization then. Rania had her tattoo at an early age as a symbol of her revolution against the society and its rules and taboos. The lizard tattoos were clearly seen on her neck and arm. Secularism was present in Rania’s close environment and in her home, and remained present later in her personal struggle for a civilized state that includes everyone regardless of their differences in a country weighted by differences and heterogeneity, sects and family structures.

Rania believes that her film *74* had discussed the secularity of Lebanon. It is obvious that it took her several years to present such a topic so close to herself and to her questions as a human and as a Lebanese filmmaker. When I asked her why she hadn’t presented this

question earlier, she paused for an instant, then she nodded her head down a little bit before moving it towards the right, away from my sight. For a moment, she wasn't Rania the filmmaker, but she managed to recall the director in herself, repositioned her head and eyes and started overusing both of her hands in a moment that shows her awareness of what was going on then and said: "I was trying to keep my head above the water. I wanted to work, live and collect money."

Rania reflects on the conditions around her first independent film, saying that she decided to make a film with a group of people who share her similar ideas and thoughts. People whom she can search with for a place to live together in their country. She stated that her and the others with the same mentality have no place to live in Lebanon. They are different and don't belong to the Lebanese sectarian society, nor to the feudal familial structure which is deeply rooted in Lebanon. She said: "we are Lebanese citizen who are looking for a place for ourselves and our films in this country".

3.4 Treatment of secularism in films of *West Beirut* and *Laicite, Inch'Allah*

This section of this chapter will explore the treatment of two films of filmmakers from the Middle East. A different and direct treatment of secularism is found in these two films *West Beirut* by the Lebanese director Ziad Doueiri and *Laicite, Inch'Allah!* by the Tunisian director Nadia El-Fani. Doueiri who resides in the United States of American returned to the Middle East region after the end of the Lebanese civil war to make his film

on sectarianism and the war's effect on dividing Beirut. While El-Fani who resides in France returned to Tunisia to document the political events in Tunisia and the revolution's effect on reforming the state's constitution.

3.4.1 *West Beirut* (1998), by Ziad Doueiri

Ziad Doueiri the Lebanese film director,²³¹ cinematographer, and writer succeeded in documenting the civil Lebanese war in his 1998 film *West Beirut*. The film won the Prix Francois Chalais at the Directors' fortnight of Cannes Film Festival in 1998. The film is classified as a biopic movie as Doueiri was telling part of his childhood story living through the civil war in Beirut. He used archived footage²³² alongside shot scenes which is a documentary film technique. Doueiri replays the incident of Beirut's bus massacre also known as the "Black Sunday" in a dramatic frame showing when an armed squad from the Christian Phalangist Party shot the Palestinian Muslim passengers on the bus and killed tens of them. This incident is considered the spark that set off the Lebanese Civil War in the mid-1970s.²³³

West Beirut begins with a black and white scene showing the main characters Tariq and Omar in the school's playground surrounded by students filming the military aircraft flying over Beirut, and trying to identify the type of the aircraft and which state it belongs to, using a small black and white camera in addition to filming themselves and their laughter before the teachers asked the crowded students to enter the schools' building.

²³¹ See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

²³² Ayoub Waoja, "Ziad Doueiri: Why a Lebanese Should Fight for Palestine." *Aljazeera Documentary*, 7 June 2021, doc.aljazeera.net/discussion/المخرج-اللبناني-العالمي-زياد-دويري-لم/

²³³ Jureidini, McLaurin, and Price, *Military operations in selected Lebanese built-up areas.1979*, Appendix B, B-2.

Another scene shows a side of Beirut's buildings in the early morning. A mosque's minaret on the left side of the frame and the sound of the Muslim's prayers calling followed by a rooster crowing in the middle of the frame. This makes the audience understand this is happening in a neighbourhood where the majority are Muslims. The following scene is for Tariq and his parents (Riyadh and Hala) in their family car driving him to his school which is located in the other side of the city.

Gunmen in cars blocking the road, and others on their feet shouting at cars to make a way for their cars to pass. Riyadh asks the newspaper salesman to hand him over two newspapers Al Nahar and L'Orient. Hala reads the titles in the first page: "Ein Rummaneh's incident: 30 were killed and others were wounded."

The cars speed slows down as they are approaching a check point in the city centre with a lot of armed men. One of them walks towards the car and asks for the identity cards. He looks at the cards and asks Riyadh: "Who are these with you?"

Riyadh: My wife and my son.

The gunman: where are you going sir?

Riyadh: to my son's school.

The gunman: School? Haven't you heard what is going on? You are not allowed to pass. Go back!

Hala: Who is not allowing us to pass?

The gunman walking away: The Christians.

Riyadh putting his head out of the car's window and in a higher tone than before: But I am from here!

The gunman: Only Christians can pass.

Riyadh insisting to pass: But sir, we are from Beirut!

The gunman approaches Riyadh's car again and moves his Kalashnikov gun from his right hand to his left hand and leaning towards the driver's window shouting directly at Riyadh: Beirut?! Beirut became two Beiruts... east and west!

The gunman: Muslims are not allowed to pass.

He hits the car's front boot with his hand and shouts: Go back!

Riyadh and Hala frowned. Riyadh drives his car back. Hala asked: which Beirut are we?

Riyadh answers her: apparently west Beirut.

This scene represents how Beirut or what was described with as "Eastern Switzerland" looked like in the civil war years. East Beirut with Christian neighborhoods, west Beirut with the Muslims majorities, and a green line separates the citizens of the city. The citizens were separated based on their sects and religious beliefs. The movement, and the killing was based on the identity card. The wars carried on till 1991 with the Taif declaration, when the leaders of the Lebanese sects and war parties' leaders agreed to stop the shooting.

In an interview on the BBC Arabic with the director Ziad Doueiri, the later describes crossing the check point at Beirut's Museum during the war in 1979 towards east Beirut

with his Christian friend as a terrifying experience “as being driven to the incinerator”. Ziad describes how he felt going to the other side of Beirut: “its psychologically quite far, although it only takes a few minutes to reach there but with a Christian friend to make sure you can pass the check points”. He seemed like describing the Lebanese living on the other side “the other” as an enemy like describing the Israeli enemy. He says: “meeting up or standing on the other territory generates the same inner feeling of hatred and rejection”.²³⁴

Doueiri presents himself and his family as seculars. His Muslim Sunni family had never cherished sectarianism or praised religious symbols and icons. He mentioned his mother who had never worn the head cover to set an example of this. Doueiri who lived his childhood in Beirut during the civil war had to move school from east Beirut to another in west Beirut when the war started in 1975, and resulted in having Beirut divided between the sects. He moved with his family to the United States in 1983 to study cinema and he didn't go back to Lebanon until 15 years later to make his first film about his memories of the city and its divisions.

In *West Beirut*, there is only one place where Beirut is not divided at, which is the brothel run by “Um Waleed”. The lady who refuses to admit the division happening in Beirut, and its sectarianism raising issues. She is not scared of the weapons carried by the militias in the streets. At her house's entrance, Beirut seems unified, and the war dressing gown falls down. In a scene of a demonstration in west Beirut to protest Kamal Jumblatt's

²³⁴ BBC News Arabic. Ziad Doueiri in Al-Mash'had with Giselle Khoury. 26 Sep 2017, on Accessed on 26 Sept 2017 accessed at <https://youtu.be/6nebHoALV9s>.

assassination and the participation of the film's main characters Tariq and Umar, the shooting starts, and the two young men find themselves hiding in the back seat of a Mercedes car which later crosses the "green line" without being stopped or shot from any side. To find out later that a red brassiere attached to the car's antenna was the peace symbol and the passing identification card. When the car stopped, Tariq found himself in front of a brothel in an abandoned neighbourhood. He hears a voice of a lady shouting: "your war stops at this house's threshold!". Men walk in but leaving their guns out, and others collecting theirs and leave. Tariq decided to walk in and he finds men from all parties drinking and dancing together. When the lady showed up and asked him to introduce himself he said: "I am Tariq Doueire. I am from west Beirut", she replied with an irritated tone: "What west? Here, there is no east and west. And raised her voice and said: "at Um Waleed's house, its only Beirut!".

Doueiri suggests that there is only one solution to terminate the war and unify Beirut which is eliminating sectarianism and religion including their icons. This was articulated through the main character in his film when in a later scene Tariq goes back to see "Um Waleed" to talk to her about the city's problem, but she asks him to leave her house because she is fed up with these problems which are affecting her business. She tells Tariq that she is in a bad mood and the war made her "disaffiliate her religion". Tariq's was shocked to hear this sentence, as he believed "Um Waleed" - the only hope he thought will unify Beirut - was atheist.

"Um Waleed" is a pseudonym of a real woman called "Lama'an" who had opened a brothel during the civil war after her sons were killed one on each side and her work as a

singer stopped due to the war in addition to losing her beautiful voice to smoking. It had been said that she had big effect at the time, as she hosted parties attended by men from all parties. Therefore, she has been fought by the parties leaders and her house's surroundings were pumped to stop their men from spending the night there since it was located at the "Green line".²³⁵

3.4.2 Laicite, Inch'Allah! (2011), by Nadia El-Fani

In June 2011 in Tunis the capital of Tunisia, hundreds of Salafis attacked one of the cinema houses, broke everything and beat the audience. They wanted to stop the screening of a documentary film by the Tunisian director Nadia El-Fani²³⁶ called *Ni Allah, Ni Maître* (*No God, No Master*) which is considered a shocking title in the Middle East. In this Film the director criticizes the increased incursion of religion in the Tunisian society. The director shows the society's hypocrisy, with signs of caring about the manifestations of religious appearances rather than a real adherence to the fundamentals.²³⁷

²³⁵ Emad Bazzi, "The Hustle behind the Walls of Beirut's Busiest Prostitution Houses during the War Years." *Raseef22*, 25 Jan. 2019, raseef22.net/article/95986-.

²³⁶ See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

²³⁷ Samir Jeries, Reviewed by Imad Ghanim,. Cenemic days in Colonia with "No Fear after today" slogan. Deutsche Welle 9th October 2011. Accessed at: <https://www.dw.com/ar/علمانية-إن-شاء-الله/a-15447111> and <https://ar.qantara.de/content/ym-synmyy-fy-kwlwny-tht-shr-l-khwf-bd-lywm-lmny-n-sh-llh>

The film starts with scenes from the Tunisian revolution in 2011 before and after Zine El Abidine the former president who was forced to flee after months of protest against his rule. El Fani then went back in time in her film to August 2010 when she had started shooting. She had exposed the Tunisian society's ambivalence about moral and religious beliefs. She showed how people are rushing to liquor stores to buy large amounts of wines and beers before the shops close during the holy month of Ramadan, when people are required to fast. During Ramadan days, she showed how cafes are filled with customers as usual, drinking their coffee and babbling. The only difference is that they are sitting inside hiding from being seen not fasting.²³⁸

The director changed the title of the film to make it less provocative to: "Laïcité, Inch'Allah!" (Secularism, God Willing). However, the film remained rejected and the director was targeted and harassed. It did not make it acceptable to be screened in any cinema house, and the director kept receiving death threats on her Facebook.

This direct presentation of secularism topic had impinged with Islamists in Tunisia. El-Fani comment on this saying: "now is the time. Before writing the new constitution.". from her point of view as a director, the constitution should clearly state on the complete separation between the state and the religion, where religion is considered a private matter distinct from the state.

²³⁸ Ibid.

In the film the director runs conversations with the public in the streets and at different places. In one of the scenes, she films herself entering a coffee shop in Tunis the capital on a Ramadan day when Muslims fast from eating and drinking during the day according to Islam. The shop's front screens are covered, and it seemed its working with its full capacity. She walks towards the bar between the customers who try to cover their faces with their hands not to be filmed, and some express their objection to be filmed: "why are you filming?"

About the reason of rejecting to be filmed filming, another customer says in French: "eating is illegal!".

El-Fani: "nothing of this is illegal in the Tunisian law. Law does not forbid you from eating in Ramadan. The state is a thing, and religion is another thing!"

The customer: "The Tunisian constitution says Islam is the state's religion!"

El-Fani: "it says Islam is its religion. But it does not say individuals have to be believers. This is freedom. Everyone choses what suits him or her."

Although El-Fani changed the name of her film to reduce conflicts with Islamist groups who responded with violence to the screening of the film in Tunisia. This wasn't of any help to enable the audience from watching the film and discuss it. Moreover, the discussions El-Fani had held in her film proves that there was a cluster in the Tunisian society who refused her clarity and forthright in presenting a controversial topic like secularism and refused her stance from the religion versus the state in regard to protecting an individuals' freedom.

Apathetic citizens using Islamic rituals carry an understanding which gives religions a power that exceeds the state's power. Their understanding expanded the authority to interfere with people's daily lives and to change laws to be concordant with religions. From their point of view, religions and religious books override civil laws, moreover, they claim that the state has a religion and it is declared in its constitution.

The 1959 Tunisian constitution which was drafted after its independence in 1956 declares in its first article of the general provisions Tunisia to be an independent state and its religion is Islam: "Tunisia is a free, Independent and sovereign state. Its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic, and its type of government is the Republic."²³⁹

In the 2014 constitution, the sentence: "this article may not be amended." has been added to this article.²⁴⁰ This constitution which was drafted by "the representatives of the Tunisian people, members of the National Constitution Assembly"²⁴¹ was adopted by the Constituent Assembly elected in 2011 in the wake of Tunisia's revolution that overthrew president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and replaced the temporary 2011 constitution which formed the basis of government after the suspension of the constitution of 1959.

The political Islam represented by the Islamist Ennahda party won the first legislative election held 9 months after Zine El Abidine Ben Ali ouster. Islamists winning 90 seats with

²³⁹ Tunisian Constitution 1959, Accessed at: www.wipo.int and at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2008.pdf?lang=ar

²⁴⁰ Ibid

²⁴¹ Ibid

more than 40 percent of the vote.^{242 243} And a new Article was added about religion, “The state is the guardian of religion”, which was not stated in the previous constitution of 1959, in order to protect sanctities and prohibit violation against it.²⁴⁴

“Article 6: Freedom of belief, conscience and religious practice, neutrality of mosques

The state is the guardian of religion. It guarantees freedom of conscience and belief, the free exercise of religious practices and the neutrality of mosques and places of worship from all partisan instrumentalisation.

The state undertakes to disseminate the values of moderation and tolerance and the protection of the sacred, and the prohibition of all violations thereof. It undertakes equally to prohibit and fight against calls for Takfir and the incitement of violence and hatred.”²⁴⁵

²⁴² “Tunisia - Unity Government.” Encyclopedia Britannica, www.britannica.com/place/Tunisia/Unity-government.

²⁴³ “النهضة” تفوز بـ 41,47 بالمئة من مقاعد المجلس التأسيسي و”العريضة الشعبية” تسحب قوائمها” / France 24, 28 Oct. 2011, www.france24.com/ar/20111028-tunisia-elections-ennahda-winner-islamist-new-constitution.

²⁴⁴ Tunisian constitution 2014. Accessed at: https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2014.01.26_-_final_constitution_english_idea_final.pdf

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

The last scene in El-Fani's film is in a theatre hall of a seminar showing the director and three other speakers on stage discussing the complete separation between the religion and the state with the audience, before the new constitution had been drafted in 2014. The comments varied from the structures constructing the relation between the organisations and institutions in the society and laws and constitution articles from one side, to others concerned about the reflections on the individuals' freedoms, development, creativity, clothes and rituals under the guardianship of religious parties.

El-Fani summarizes her approach tackling secularism in her film in this seminar in a way not less controversial than the film's title. The last scene in the film is a scene from the seminar which took place after the regime had been brought down, a discussion about the new Tunisian constitution with a big flag in the background on the stage with one of the speakers says: "I dream about excluding the first chapter of the constitution. And I call for not having any article about Islam in the Tunisian constitution."

El-Fani won the International Secular Award in 2011 for her film *Laicite, Inch'Allah*. A prize organised by the Secular Republic Committee with the aim of rewarding those committed in favor secularism.²⁴⁶ El-Fani's forthright presentation of secularism issue either in the title or in the film's content, and the glance of the society's reaction she showed towards secularism reflects her direct approach of tackling such a controversial issue in the film industry. She reflects her beliefs as a filmmaker and presents her vision of

²⁴⁶ African woman in cinema blog, *Nadia El-Fani, Laureate of the International Secular Award 2011*, translated by Beti Ellerson, 29 June 2011, Accessed on 9 Jun 2022. Accessed at: <https://africanwomenincinema.blogspot.com/2011/06/nadia-el-fani-laureate-of-international.html?m=1>

the secular values directly. She aims as a documentary film director to cause a shock and create a discussion about the civil state and the new constitution, which is supposed to distinguish between beliefs, and cultural values and laws, individual rights, and freedoms. El-Fani was not concerned about making a consensus view about secularism. In a conference in Cologne Germany, she said: "I am not the former president to win 99% of the votes. I am more concerned of creating a debate."²⁴⁷

3.5 Conclusion

Foucault states the connection between power relations and knowledge saying: "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."

²⁴⁸ Filmmakers' definitions of secularism varied based on different factors which form the field of knowledge according to Foucault. These factor which could be either their personal experiences, country of living, surrounding community or their relations with their family made the definitions special and unique. The definitions seem to be pragmatic and

²⁴⁷ Samir Jeries, Reviewed by Imad Ghanim, *Cenemic days in Colonia with "No Fear after today" slogan*. Deutcshe Welle 9th October 2011. Accessed at: <https://www.dw.com/ar/علمانية-إن-شاء-الله/a-15447111> and <https://ar.qantara.de/content/ym-synmyy-fy-kwlwny-tht-shr-l-khwf-bd-lywm-lmny-n-sh-llh>

²⁴⁸ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. pp27

personalized unlike the academic, theoretical, and hypothetical definitions. The filmmakers were creating a scene when answering the definition question in the interviews.

The definition question paved the way for the following question of secularism treatment in the film. Filmmakers' willingness to introduce or treat secularism in their films depended on their stance from it, as the filmmakers who claimed they have treated secularism in their films are the ones who believe secularism is the solution for the societal issues and the regional problems. Secularism should be a personal concern to the filmmakers and mean something to them to reflect a vital and deep treatment of it in their films. Their interpretation of secularism initiated from situations in their childhood, from personal relations or from interactions within the industry despite their intellectual or political backgrounds or ideologies. In each case secularism was born from a situation.

It is difficult to exclude religion from the general discussions in the Middle East. Especially political, cultural, social, legal, and historical discussions. Secularism cannot be tackled in any conversation without mentioning religions. Although filmmakers whom I have interviewed in the Middle East have not defined secularism as a synonym to atheism or a direct opposite to the concept of religion, but the religion's symbols and sects were clearly present when they spoke without a sensing and direct conflict with religions. However, filmmakers who are living out of their countries or probably out of the entire Middle East region tend to use the shock factor and tackle secularism issues directly in their speech as well as in their films.

Filmmakers in the Middle East are into developing a Middle Eastern model of secularism which is compatible with their society's nature. They refuse to import the

western model of secularism and drop it on their society. They are aware of the society's particularity and don't want to delete its identity. They believe that applying the western secularism model in a direct and colliding way shall not be successful as the secular intellectuals and nationalist parties adopting secularism had failed this approach before and found no echoes to their views. Secular filmmakers felt they are a minority in the society and strangers among the majority. Yet they are keen to be present and find themselves a place within the society and the industry and are hoping their voices to be heard in the society and reach the wider audience of cinema.

Chapter Four: Secularism relation to Minorities and Militarism in film

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss two topics related to secularism treatment in films in the Middle East. The first section will discuss the minority's stance on secularism in the Middle East from the filmmakers' perspective. In contrast, the second section will examine the filmmakers' stance and treatment of militarism and totalitarianism in the Middle East. I will use the discursive analysis methodology on the interviews of Deema Azar, a Jordanian film producer, Hady Zaccak, the Lebanese filmmaker, and Myriam El-Hajj, the Lebanese filmmaker, to study the minorities issue. And I will study the following three films: *Le Professeur* (2012)²⁴⁹ film by the Tunisian filmmaker Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud, *Laicite, Inch'Allah!* (2011) by the Tunisian filmmaker Nadia El-Fani, and *74: The Reconstitution of A Struggle* (2012), by the Lebanese filmmaker Rania Rafei to explore militarism treatment in the films in the Middle East.

Minorities, the secular intellectuals' alliances with the army generals, militarism and dictatorship are controversial present issues in the Middle East related to secularism. They are present in the reality, the media discussions, and the political disputes in the Middle East. The Arab national parties established by the minorities adopted secularism as a solution for the region's problems. Those minorities apprehension the religious states ruling

²⁴⁹ *Le Professeur*. Directed by Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud, 2012

by the majority's religion which is the Islam and treated minorities as a second-class citizen. Moreover, the totalitarian regimes in the Middle East also had adopted nationalism ideology either with the autocracy, the single party state, or the military coup to overthrow the existing governments justified by the war status with Israel or to provide protection to the state. The military coups reappeared recently in the Middle East and was accompanied by an attack on the secular intellectuals as alliances to the dictator regimes. These regimes had solidified its ruling by the military suppression as well by conservative religious institutions.

I was keen in my research to include filmmakers who belong or to minority groups in the Middle East or originally related to a minority group due to historical connection between secularism and intellectuals or politicians originating from a minority group in the Middle East, especially the Christian minority. The filmmakers' discourses about the relation between the minorities and secularism unexpectedly exceeded the superficial opinion or judgment of being with or against it or having a positive or a negative stance from it to a special treatment of secularism. Filmmakers who belong to a minority were interested in presenting the minorities identity which religion is part of it unlike the cinematic neutral or unclear treatment of their identity. Most of the cinema and television production in the Middle East tended to blackout and discarded the Middle East sub-identities in an attempt to support the collective national identity. This treatment used neutral names for the film characters that do not indicate a religion or origin. It also avoided using religious symbols in the production, which created an unrealistic image of the reality in the Middle East.

4.2. Filmmakers and Minorities Identity in the Middle East

One of the goals of secularism defenders in the eastern part of the Middle East is to provide a solution to the Christian minority living in the Arabic-speaking region with Islam majorities²⁵⁰, which the Ottoman Empire ruled before it dissolved. Secularism, from this perspective, was a step to eliminate the Islamic religious impression of the ruling components in the Arab countries. It was also a step toward considering citizens are equal in rights and duties despite their varied sacred belongings. Therefore, secularism found in the Middle East a fertile soil.

Lebanese Shibli Shumayyil, Egyptian Salama Moussa, Lebanese Farah Antun, and Lebanese Jurji Zaidan were amongst the prominent Christian secular thinkers in the Middle East. The latter were largely affected by the Enlightenment. Several secular parties and movements had been established in the framework of the minorities like the Arab Ba'ath Party 1940-47 and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party 1932, as their founders were Christians²⁵¹. However, those parties became famous even outside the minority's frame,

²⁵⁰ Eskandar Mansour, "Tarabichi, Rooting of Secularization." *Ahewar*, 15 Oct. 2010, www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=232104.

²⁵¹ Adam Ajlouni, *Arab Christian Nationalist Thinkers and Arab Christian Nationalism in the Levant*. Honors Theses (Bachelor's) University of Michigan. 2009 Accessed on 25 Jun 2022. Accessed at: http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/2027.42/63948/1/ajlouni_adam_2009.pdf

and the adaptation of their philosophies reached its peak in the time of the Arab nationalist ideology; it had also influenced the ruling process of several countries in the Middle East.

Deema Azar²⁵² is a Jordanian film producer and a Tale Box production company co-founder. She is also a script development consultant at the Doha film centre, Qatar. Deema worked as a regional training director in the Jordanian Royal film commission. *The Parrot*²⁵³ was the first film she had produced as a Jordanian-German co-production.²⁵⁴

Tele Box production is located in Jabal Al Lewaibdeh in the old part of Amman. Al Lewaibdeh is one of the seven mountains Amman is formed of and one of the oldest neighbourhoods which the wealthy and royal members inhabited in the beginning of the last century, and it is also known for the buildings of the unique Ottoman architectural style. The company's office located in an old residential building is not the standard style business office but a cinematic and intellectual style with a wooden table in the middle obviously used for writing workshops and informal chairs and couches with a balcony on the street. When I arrived, Azar was trying to organise few papers as she was in the process of developing a new film script *Farha* with her partner, the director Darin Sallam.

My appointment with Azar was on the morning of the 26th of February in 2018; while I was trying to fix the camera's focus, I had a chance to carry on a friendly conversation about the Tale Box projects since it was established in 2016. The Tale Box's logo is a

²⁵² See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

²⁵³ *The Parrot*. Directed by Dareen Sallam, Amjad Rasheed. Tale Box Productions/ Monokel, 2016.

²⁵⁴ See Appendix Seven: Posters

traditional Damask storyteller who used to wear a red fez and set in a highchair in the old café to tell different stories to the audience in an enthusiastic telling style.

Azar said that secularism issue had been introduced in films; however, she said that no one had tackled it in a direct approach as proposed in my research. Azar defined secularism as the separation between religion and life and banning the mandatory effect of religious practices in the public sphere, like the use of religious symbols in the workplace, neither the Cross nor the Quran. She said there shouldn't be any religious impressions prevailing on the place's identity. As a producer, Azar's definition of secularism complies with her visions in filmmaking. She does not consider films as a tool to impose certain religion, preach beliefs, or enforce religious identities. However, Azar had announced early in the interview her concern in presenting the minority's identity in the Middle East. She treated religion in her film as an identity rather than a belief.

Azar appeared closer to the French model of secularism when she articulated her rejecting stance on the use of religious symbols in the public sphere, like the having the Quran or the Cross in the workplace. Azar seemed affected by the work environment she experienced while working in the Institute francais de Jordanie before moving to the film sector. Moreover, Azar's concern in the minorities' religious identity was far from the French laicism solid model. However, she emphasised that she is only concerned with this matter as an identity, not a belief. Religious beliefs and religious symbolism intersect in the Middle East situation, and it becomes harder to separate them when it is related to Islam.

Azar referred to *The Parrot* film, which was produced in 2016, to give an example of the minority's identity and the difference of using religion as an identity, not as a belief. She said:

*“The Parrot starts with a Palestinian family, which is not seen all through the film leaving their house and substituted in the following scene by another Tunisian Jewish family who came to reside and live in their house. We had to use the Christian and Jewish religious symbols in the location not to present the religion as a belief but to show the identities. We wanted to show the different ethnic backgrounds of the two families in the film. I am interested in religion as an identity topic, and *The Parrot* is a perfect example since the identities of some minorities are inadequately presented in Arab Cinemas. There are Christian Arabs, and they are a part of this region. They are part of the seven hundred thousand Palestinians who had been exiled from their land and left their houses in the Nakba in 1948. I find this topic important to be presented and tackled in the films but as an identity matter, not an absolute belief.”*

The Parrot film 2016 for the directors Darin Sallam and Amjad El Rachid, which Deema Azar produced, presents an articulated moment in the Middle East's history: the moment when a Palestinian family left its home to be taken over by a Jewish family. The Palestinian family is not seen in the film; however, the house, which is the location of most of the events and the parrot which the Palestinian family left, represents the absent Palestinian's role. The film is about a Jewish family arriving from Tunis to live in a Palestinian

The identity of the Palestinian family is apparent everywhere in the house. The religious symbols like the cross and the last dinner painting, along with Mary's icon on the doors and the wall, signify the Christian identity of the family. The cultural and educational level of the Christians as a minority in 1948 is also observed through the design of the place, the silver collectables, and the music played in the house on the gramophone. Azar, in the interview, referred that the religious indications in the film were not for preaching purposes as she isn't with the approach that enforces the religious beliefs in cinema. However, she explained that in the same treatment of secularism in the film, and as a producer and a filmmaker, she is keen to use religion in her movies to refer to the identities, not the beliefs.

Azar seemed to blame Arab cinema for disregarding the presence of the minorities, ignoring them, or not presenting them properly, especially since these groups were not new-founded or had incidentally existed in the Middle East. *The Parrot* film considered this issue and treated it adequately by depicting the Christian family. The Christian family represents the minorities in the film, which is a genuine Palestinian family originating in the coastal city of Haifa where the film takes place. Moreover, these families suffered the consequences of the war as the majority leaving behind their houses, money, and memories and experienced the exile's pain.

Azar mentioned that "seven hundred thousand" Palestinians had fled Palestine and immigrated during the war; she added that there were Christian families among these Palestinian immigrants. *The Parrot* reinforces the importance of the minorities' sub-identities as a central component of the middle east societies, despite the promoted message by the Arab cinemas and media of the one solid unified identity in the Middle East,

which is the majority's Islamic identity. The film presents other identities in addition to the one promoted by the Media, which are the Christian Arabs and the Tunisian Jews. The Arabic Christian's language and accent are reflected on the parrot's tongue. The pet was left behind by a Palestinian family. Also, the Tunisian Arabic accent used by the new occupant family of the house, which the film shows the wife unfamiliar with the Hebraic as her mother tongue is Arabic. The parrot who lived in an elegant white cage in the house kept repeating Arabic phrases in every Palestinian house, reminding the house owners all the time, which irritated the colonized Jewish family: "People, where are you?"

"Na'em! Na'em!" "Grandma... Give me a kiss!" "Hurry up! Hurry up!" "Kiss my ass!"

The parrot is the voice of the place with its shrilled memories in every corner. Although Muses, the husband in the Jewish family, wanted to get rid of the parrot, Rachel, who felt difficulty adjusting to the new place, tried to keep him in the house to entertain her daughter Aziza.

New religious symbols are shown in the film to represent the identity of the new arrivals. Muses and Rachel appeared in the film, replacing the cross, the paintings, and the personal photos on the walls with a picture of the Jewish candle holder "The Menorah" and a photo showing a rabbi. This use of religious symbols indicated the religious identity of the new Tunisian arrivals. However, the film meant to show marks on the wall of the old things that were on it despite hanging new items there as a reminder of the house's original owners. Rachel, the wife tried to clean the marks on the wall. Still, she failed to made a clear message to the audience that the Palestinian's identity cannot be erased by changing the appearances of their authenticity and genuine relation with the land.

In another scene in a different location, *The Parrot* created a different dimension of the minorities issue in the Middle East by introducing new minorities identities represented by the colonizing Jewish families. The first was the Sephardi Jews (Eastern) identity defined by the Tunisian family, and the other was the Ashkenazi Jews (Western) identity. The film presented them as totally different identities and at a distance from each other. In the scene, a western Jewish family came to visit Rachel and Muses' family in their new house. The two families sat at the dining table for dinner, and the vast gap between the two identities is shown at that moment when they had nothing in common. The two families sat opposite each other at the dining table, each with their different habits and culture in the language, speech, food, and even the way of eating. The film shows the superiority of the Ashkenazi family over the Sephardim family in the unfriendly looks toward the Tunisian hosting family's habits. As the two families communicated in Hebrew, Rachel was speaking in Arabic in a clear Tunisian delicate with her husband and daughter "Aziza" and sounded unacquainted with the Hebraic language. She leaned toward her husband Muses several times to ask about Hebraic terms to communicate with her Ashkenazi guest.

When her husband told her the meaning of the parrot in Hebraic, she used the word in an Arabic sentence and her body language to deliver the message. She said: "Aziza and your son can play with the parrot", putting her pointer fingers from both hands together. "Play together". The dining table scene presents a side of the Jewish minorities living in the Middle East region with an eastern culture presented by Rachel in the film with her Tunisian culture and Arabic language. This was an indication in the film that Jews existed as a minority in the region which complied with Azar's vision of secularism as a cinematic producer and her concerns about presenting the minorities' identities in the Middle East.

The Parrot brought to the attention the Christian minority's identity and stance from the colonisation and the "Nakba". It showed them as the land owners who had been expelled and evicted and, in a position, not less the majority in their sacrifice as articulated by the parrot who speaks for the house and the Palestinian family and uses their language and expressions. The parrot, who speaks Arabic, interacted in accordance with the situation on behalf of the Palestinian family and kept repeating different phrases over the film's duration, like: "People! Where are you?" "Na'eem, Na'eem!" "Grandma... Give me a kiss!" "Hurry up! Hurry up!".

Later, when the parrot in the film had bitten the guest boy's hand, the Ashkenazi family had to leave in apparent resentment. This situation drove Muses, frustrated with the parrot and his actions and unstoppable commenting, to throw him out in the street. In the morning, as a group of Israeli soldiers passed by the parrot's cage, one of them saluted the bird saying "Shalom", to be answered by the bird immediately: "Kiss my ass!"

The last scene of *The Parrot* film shows the Palestinian family's stand from the Israeli soldiers who took over Haifa said to the parrot: "Kiss my ass!" in a humorous response when the soldiers said, "Shalom" to him, which means "Peace". This reaction of the parrot represents the minority's keen rejection of colonialism and exiling the Palestinians and taking over their land during the Nakba in 1948 and substituting them with arrivals from far countries with different cultures and identities. Azar's view of secularism is clearly reflected in the film as its producer by using religion as an identity for the minorities in the Middle East.

In the last scene of *The Parrot* and after the parrot's comment, the gramophone sounds up as at the beginning of the film but with a song for Egyptian singer Laila Murad (1918-95): "Why are you looking at me like this with a deceiving look in your eyes?" which is another sign for another minority in the Middle East. The famous Egyptian singer and actress Laila Murad was descended from a Jewish ancestry which remained in Egypt, unlike the rest of the Jewish ingathering who decided to leave, affected by different factors and fears between 1948 and 1952.

The Parrot presents the colonial project in Palestine by questioning the acceptance issue of whether the new arrival Jewish family belongs to the new place and whether the house and the parrot will accept their presence. Will the family be able to adjust to this new place with its details that seems awkward to them? The family looked simple in the big house with its clear identity and elegant furniture and design, reflecting a different lifestyle to the new Jewish residents. The existence of the parrot in the place also added to the family's home alienation feeling and disrupted their unison with the house. The parrot, which represents the original owners' memories, kept repeating Palestinian sentences used by the former Palestinian family who lived in the house.

The Parrot had made a new addition to the film literature, which treats the Israeli occupation of Palestine narrative. It introduced the existence of minorities in the Middle East as the house in the film was filled with Christian religious symbols indicating that the family who lived in it was a Palestinian Christian family. The film implies that the habitants of the Middle East region are not only the Muslims, but other religious groups and sub identities live there as well. *The Parrot* presented the minorities and their identities by using

the religion as the main component of the region's culture. It showed how the Palestinian Christian was forced to leave his house and be exiled as the rest of the community's clusters.

Myriam El-Hajj, the Lebanese director of *A Time to Rest*, approaches the religious speech's core in the conservative Christian community in Lebanon through her Maronite sect. Their existence matter in the Middle East is threatened since they are a minority. In addition to the religious speech, El-Hajj introduces an image of belief and its relation to political fanaticism, starting a war and justifying the killing. Moreover, its relation to committing a massacre was clear in the talk of the film's protagonist about Sabra and Shatila's massacre and how he justified it. This is a rare cinematic treatment in the Middle East of the controversial issue of beliefs. *Trêve: A Time To Rest* shows a different side of the minority community which is Christianity's extremism. It shows the effect of the Christian religious speech on the individuals in the Militias during the war as it shows the religious place in the daily life of the Christians.

when the film industry was abounding with treatments for the radical Islamist issues and the effect of the religious ideology in the Middle East on the emergence and the development of the violence in these groups as on their political practices, filmmakers in the Middle East rarely embark upon religious fanaticism within minorities and its relation to the politics.²⁵⁷

El-Hajj had not only documented the answers to her questions about the civil war and how it started, but she simultaneously also documented in her film *Trêve: A Time To*

²⁵⁷ (i.e., *Radical Islam: a historical perspective. Episode 2, Modernization and Middle Eastern revolutionary movements* film for Ronald C Meyer. 2015)

Rest the warriors' testimonies, their beliefs, prayers, how they seek healing with religious incantation, the religion's stature in their daily lives, their political stance and militias siding. *Trêve: A Time To Rest* presents religion as a belief, ritual, and political perspective, making it a profound identity triumph over the national identity towards a radical ideological identity. This had complicated progressing toward a secular state, civil laws and citizenship-based legislations. The film shows how the main character in the film and his comrades are yet ready to carry the weapons again to protect Christian identity in Lebanon in the confrontation of a conspiracy aiming to eliminate the existence of the Christian minorities in the Middle East. This case, which the old warriors still believe, is the truth and forms their political identity as a minority in Lebanon.

El-Hajj believes that filmmakers from minority groups in the Middle East are not the best to tackle a topic like secularism, criticize the religious effect, and interfere in the public sphere. On the contrary, she thinks they adopt an extreme stance closer to the sectarian and religious ideologies. Minorities strongly believe that their existence in the Middle East is in jeopardy. Moreover, filmmakers are worried about being accused of working against their sect's interests if they try to present secular values in their films. However, despite this, El-Hajj dared to criticise the sect she belonged to. The sect considers itself a minority in Lebanon. She also dared to criticise the religious speech used for the incitation of carrying weapons. El-Hajj said: "I pointed at the Maronite Christians, the sect I belong to, and I blamed them for being responsible for the civil war."

Despite the criticism filmmakers from a minority group in the Middle East might face when they treat the issues of their sects, religion, and ethnicity, which makes them subject

to be ostracised during their film screening, as what happened with El-Hajj when she screened her film *Trêve: A Time To Rest* which criticised the involvement of the Christianity as a religion in the civil war in Lebanon. El-Hajj found out it was more accessible and more acceptable to blame her own sect rather than her sect to be criticized by an outsider filmmaker. El-Hajj Said in this regard: “I am not their enemy. I am the daughter of this sect”. El-Hajj wanted to present a different narrative of the Christians's role as a minority in the Middle East from the point of view of a filmmaker who belongs to this minority. A filmmaker who wants to present and back their side of the story.

Making a film about the close circle of the filmmaker facilitated the smooth running of the questions and conversations about specific topics. In *A Time to Rest*, El-Hajj was filming with her family, which cut short many difficulties in the preparation and filming phases and also helped in the cinematic treatment of her film as the high spontaneity factor facilitated approaching such controversial issues in the conversation without filtering or limitations. In the film’s credits, which include a list of the cast and the crew appeared, Islamic names among the names like the cameraman and the director’s assistant. However, despite Riyadh, the films protagonist, spontaneity in his talk with Myriam as a member of the family during the film and answering and treating her in a friendly and familial way before the camera, El-Hajj mentioned in the interview that he sometimes seemed to be surprised with a stranger in a room, the cameraman who is not Christian and belongs to the others he is attacking in his talk. El-Hajj said: “He would be talking about Muslims in Lebanon, then suddenly comes to his attention that the cameraman is Muslim. He stops talking to me immediately and talk to the camera, saying: “No, but you are different” I like you!”.” El-Hajj carried on: “the contradiction before the camera was amazing!”

The efficiency is higher in the cinematic treatment of secularism issues when it is related to minorities in the Middle East; if the filmmaker belongs to the same minority group as they wouldn't be treated as an enemy despite criticism they might face for questioning or condemnation of their sect. The filmmakers seem braver and more profound in their treatment as they understand the nature of these groups and their problems better than an outsider as they have better access to resources that serve their film. El-Hajj said: "I Didn't become an enemy," even when individuals harshly criticised her from her sect after the screening of her film.

Zaccak Introduces himself as a secular, away from the sectarian identity. In his films, he had travelled between religions and sects in the Middle East as a researcher and a director. He reached Egypt and Iran, where he was inspired to make films about Qubt and Shi'a before going back to make two films about the most recognised Islamic sects in Lebanon: *Sunni Echoes* and *Shi'a Echoes*. Despite all these films he made about religions, Zaccak remained an unclassified filmmaker who doesn't belong to any particular religious group. This contradicts the rooted curiosity condition in people in the Middle East who like to know the identity of the person they deal with, especially his religious beliefs. Nevertheless, it is customary to question the filmmaker's religious beliefs in the process of judging his films in the Middle East. The judgments and the stances will vary after being answered about the filmmaker's religious identity.

In 2012 I chose *A History Lesson* as a study case for the Media students at the Jordanian Yarmouk University. After the film viewing in the lecture hall, one of the students asked: "What's Hady Zaccak's religion?" My answer was: "Filmmaking". Zaccak said that he

does not give an answer to personal questions about religions and sects and prefers to introduce himself as a secular. In the interview, Zaccak remembered a funny incident with an Egyptian lady who bitted to guess his religion and sect based on her experience and long years of previously living in Lebanon. She asked him about his full name. He answered: Hady Muses Zaccak. As the name is religiously neutral, she moved to the next question of where he works. He answered: Future TV. Future TV is a channel owned by the pre-prime minister Rafiq Al Hariri and then by his son Saa'd Al Hariri after the assassination of his father. Those two names are icons for Sunni Muslims in Lebanon. The Egyptian lady said then: "This is easy. I know." But Zaccak continued that he also works at St Joseph University. Here, the lady gave up and announced that she had lost the bit.

Zaccak's sectarian origin remained a mystery until he was "Exposed!" as he ironically articulated when he went with his film to his square. Zaccak had made two documentary films after *A History Lesson* related to him personally; *Honeymoon 58*, about his parent's marriage, and *Ya Omri*, about his grandmother. These two films were how the audience was introduced to Zaccak's sectarian and familial origins. In *Honeymoon 58*, Zaccak presents a part of Lebanon's history through the memories of his mother. The film is an Italian Lebanese co-production and talks about a love story celebrated with marriage and a honeymoon in Italy during the first Civil war right after independence.

About *Honeymoon 58* Mohammad Hamdar, the journalist in the Lebanese *Al Akhbar* newspaper, said:

Hady tells us a real romantic story in 1958, leading to matrimony after three years of love. The archive formed the main and only material of the film. The love story,

which steps accelerated, and chapters piled up, had been jostled against by the Arab unity images from Syria and Egypt, Abdel Nasser, Kamal Jumblatt, and Kamil Chamoun up to the peak of the event in July 1958 with the wedding ceremony and a Lebanese honeymoon in Italy. The newly married couple found themselves surrounded by the European media, waiting to know the news about the conflicts in Beirut where the revolutionaries led by Kamal Jumblatt collision with president Kamil Chamoun's supporters. Back then, Palestinians were not the excuse, not the fuel. It was a Lebanese Lebanese conflict. It was a first-degree conflict over political choices, which didn't endure not being dressed up with sectarianism.

Zaccak used rich archival material in *Honeymoon 58*²⁵⁸ in addition to the familial archive. He used writings from his mother's diary about her marriage and the honeymoon trip. She talked about how the church was overcrowded with the wedding party invitees despite the conflict between Christians and Muslims. This narrated script coincided with the visual images of the bride entering in her white dress and the churches' bells declaring the begging of the wedding ceremony according to Christian religious rituals. This scene in the film finalised the argument about Zaccak's religious background and sectarian belonging as a filmmaker, unlike all his previous films, which had not presented any indication or signal of his beliefs and sect and kept it neutral as a filmmaker. However, despite being uninterested in his films before *Honeymoon 58*, he didn't disown his roots and family; he

²⁵⁸ *Honeymoon 58*. Directed by Hady Zaccak. Independent Production. 2013

only preferred to choose his secular identity to be the one to represent and introduce himself. In Mercedes's film, he used the cars to present a part of Lebanon's history after being fed up with the people's sectarian reality in his surroundings. He used the German Mercedes car "El Mda'abaleh", a desired famous popular car in Lebanon and the Middle Eastern countries, as the main character of his film. He considered this particular car the nineteenth sect in Lebanon as Lebanon is known to have eighteen religious sects by law. Zaccak said:

Secularism in the Middle East was born amongst the minorities. The secular parties like the Syrian Nationalist Party, the Communist Party, and the Ba'ath Party tried to overrule all the sects. I find myself here cinematically. Instead of establishing a party or belonging to one of those parties, I don't believe I can be one day or party of a party. Still, I can be in the cinema party, where the cinematic state becomes a party itself without establishing a party and opening the door for affiliation. The members of my party are my films, and this party believes in secularism; furthermore, making a cinema about the region's history and its societies is the party's primary concern.

Zaccak had made several films about religions and sects in the Middle East before approaching secularism in his film *A History Lesson* ²⁵⁹. He presents the post-war generations in the Lebanese schools who didn't coincide with the war and wasn't born

²⁵⁹ i.e. Shiea Echos, Sunni Echos, Mercedes

during its years, yet is a new generation surrounded by sectarianism and forced to live it. This reality cannot separate Lebanese from religion and sects, regardless of their sects or parties. Zaccak interacted with all the Lebanese society's sectarian elements through his films. He studies them out of his interest in the region's history. He ran interviews and conversations with clergies from all sects and religions and made his films with them and about them. He also had discussions with sectarian political parties after his films were screened to the public. Some of those screenings were requested by these sects, according to the Zaccak.

Zaccak talked to the political parties before they depicted their reality in his films *Sunni Echoes* and *Shi'a Echoes*. The conversations were with individuals and parties representing Lebanon's Sunni and Shi'a sects. Hizbullah was one of the main Shi'a parties in the *Shi'a Echoes* film, which presented a part of Hizbullah and the Shi'a sect reality but left the rest of the image presentation incomplete. Zaccak Said: "It's like who says "La Elaha" without finishing the sentence with "Ella Allah", which is a common saying contradicted in Muslim circles which means that half of the truth is not the truth. In this context, it is infidelity. The Islamic group (Jamaa Islamiya), the Lebanese branch of Muslim Brotherhood movement, were bothered about Zaccak's stance toward the secular musician character in the *Sunni Echoes* film more than the other characters. Zaccak justified this as his right as a director to prejudice himself, his opinion and the character that looks like him. However, neither Zaccak himself nor his films experienced any aggressive reaction due to the calm approach he uses in the treatment of controversial issues in his films like sectarianism, religion, and secularism. Zaccak confirmed that he avoids provocation, which he believes will prohibit him from delivering his secular message. Politically, Zaccak believes that he

surpassed the political parties' concept as a filmmaker. He believes he is a secular party, and his films nourished with his secular belief are the members of the party.

Zaccak chose his film topics based on his obsession with history and his old research about religions, in addition to his early memory of the civil war. He presents himself as a secular filmmaker who doesn't belong to any party or sect. Zaccak is different from Azar and El-Hajj in how they view religion as an identity for the minorities in *The Parrot* film and as an identity and a belief in the *Trêve: A Time To Rest* film. Zaccak is not concerned with treating secularism in his film from the same angle it would be treated by a filmmaker who is concerned about the minority's right to have their own identity, nor the angle of a filmmaker who criticises the sectarian practices as a minority. Moreover, his calm approach to presenting and tackling controversial issues is not due to the fear of criticism by the majority nor to being accused of adopting secularism as a filmmaker because he belongs to a minority group nor the fear of being criticised. After all, he broke into the private areas of other sects and religions in Lebanon. Zaccak confirms that he chooses the topics of his films based on his thoughts and opinions as a leftist and secular. He treats the issue of his case with a calm approach which agrees with his personality and cinematic style and is not based on how the others classify him and put him in a minority or a sectarian frame in the Middle East. The only minority Zaccak belongs to, as he had articulated in the interview, is the "secular minority, " meaning he is at the same distance from all the religions, political parties, and sects in Lebanon.

4.3 Filmmakers and Militarism in The Middle East

Despite the clarity of secularism's initial stance on ruling by religion and its rejection of mixing politics with religion, the problematic relationship between seculars and "militarism" remains an underexamined area. The situation is still discussable and widely debatable about the elite's and intellectuals' stance in the region regarding military regimes and the military's interference in politics. Constantine Zureiq²⁶⁰, the influential historian Syrian intellectual, considers the relation between seculars and militarism a form of collusion between the scholars with the repressive regimes under the pretext of national security defence. On the other hand, Edward Said, the Palestinian academic, considers military authorities as responsible for prohibiting the Arab societies from developing, not only because they spent their fortunes on buying weapons which it will not use instead of investing them in construction, education, development, and renovation, but also by repressing freedoms and persecuting the civil law, it prevented forming and shaping the developmental movements.

The alliances of several secular intellectuals with the dictatorship in the Middle East contradicted with the civil state concept, freedoms protection and the rejection of repression presented by secularism values. Amr Hamzawi, the Egyptian liberal academic and politician, says:

²⁶⁰ Samir Kassir, *Soldiers against Whom?* 2004. Dar Al-Nahar, 2005

Seculars had ignored the long-term disruption in the military-civil relations, which had established an explicit authoritarianism state; they haven't resisted the extension of the military-security element power towards the public sphere, and the systematic violation of the intellectual and academic freedoms and the creativity freedom, although these freedoms are traditionally placed at the forefront of secular elites' interests.²⁶¹

Le Professeur by the Tunisian director Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud²⁶² presents a side of the political life in Tunisia in the seventies of the last century during Habib Bourguiba's ruling period. The love story of Khalil, the constitutional law professor at the public university of Tunis and his student Huda, a political activist, presents the controversial relationship between the intellectual academic and the system in the Middle East. Professor Khalil represents the ruling party in the human rights league in a period that witnessed tension between the Tunisian regime and the labour union (the worker's associations). Mahmoud, with his film, condemns the Tunisian secular elites' stance on practices like suppressing freedoms, political trials, and torture in prisons. The suppression reached all sorts of people; the politician, the artist, the union member, either a communist, an Islamist or an Arab nationals under the civil constitution umbrella. In a previous interview, Mahmoud talked about his film: "The film spoke about human rights, political trials,

²⁶¹ Amr Hamzawi, "Egyptian Secularists and Authoritarianism." *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 5 Aug. 2019, www.alquds.co.uk/عن-تبرير-العلمانيين-المصريين-للاستبد/.

²⁶² See Appendix Six: Figures, and Appendix Seven: Posters

torturing, the one party and the police state. The practices that Tunisia had witnessed during Bouguiba's ruling period continued and were exacerbated during Ben Ali's ruling.

Le Professeur starts with a scene in a lecture hall at the public university of Tunis in 1977. An elegant professor in a light suit and a tie with a black beard and smattering of some white hair in between stands in front of his students. Close-up shots at the student's faces who are staring at their professor and paying attention to his lecture about the constitutional law in Tunisia. In his lecture, Professor Khalil uses a confident, fluent academic French language: "Our country is privileged with a contemporary constitution that guarantees the basic freedoms starting from the freedom of expression, transport, and establishing political parties. The Tunisian constitution is dedicated to the separation of powers and judicial independence" he points up with his eyeglasses which he was holding in his left hand and smiles.

Tunisia is the most secular state in the Middle East after Turkey.²⁶³ The Tunisian model of secularism was developed by a group of Frankfurtian intellectuals influenced by the French model. Bourguiba promoted this model through the educational system in Tunisia. La professor film discusses these secular elite intellectuals' relationship with the government and their justification for the later repressive practices. President Bourguiba, the first president of the Tunisian republic after the independence who ruled from 1956 till 1987, had theorized at an early stage about a "contemporary national entity" that considers

²⁶³ Kamal Bin Younis, "Pioneers of the Secular Modernist Trend in Tunisia." *Arabi21*, 23 Jan. 2021, arabi21.com/story/1330631/.

the idyllic person to be the one who believes in the modern western values as in the Frankfurtian secular values. He launched the “secularizing the state” project and prioritized the foundation of a civilised Tunisian nation to be closer to the European culture and ethnicity rather than the Islamic and Arab nationalism. Bourguiba depended on the seculars in Tunisia and France to supervise the educational process in the country and to establish the public university of Tunis. He turned on the Tunisian intellectual Mahmoud Al Message to establish a modern educational system based on the rational European model of “Going toward the death of sacredness”. He also depended on the leftist French historian Charles-Andre’ Julien in establishing the faculty of humanities and social sciences and the “Ecole Normale Superiore” in the public university of Tunis²⁶⁴.

Tunisia’s modern state started with the personal status law after its independence. This law remains advanced compared to other family laws in the Middle East even after five decades since it was first legislated. It has protected the Tunisian woman and given her the right to give her children her nationality. It abolished polygyny, raised the marriage age, allowed abortion, and referred divorce to judicial review. Bourguiba’s famous quote is here²⁶⁵: “I will impose women's freedom and rights by the force of the law, and I will not wait for the democracy of a people duped by masculism in the name of religion.”²⁶⁶ Moreover, one of the Bourguiba’s mausoleum’s doors in his ancestral homeland Monastir

²⁶⁴ Ibid

²⁶⁵ “Habib Bourguiba.” Arageek, Accessed at: www.arageek.com/bio/habib-bourguiba. Accessed 3 July 2022.

²⁶⁶ “Habib Bourguiba...” 3 July 2022, Accessed at: <https://quotepark.com/quotes/2067881-habib-bourguiba-i-will-impose-womens-freedom-and-rights-by-the-fo/>

in Tunisia, has the following written on it: “The greatest Mujahid. Founder of modern Tunisia. Woman liberator”. Tunisia has unified the legal system within its secularism project, where all citizens referred to civil courts despite their religion. It modified the endowments legislations, reduced the religious institution's expenses, and made them governed by the state. It founded the higher institute of theology in Tunisia to emulate the university of Ez-Zitouna, which was accredited for religious education.

However, Bourguiba modified the constitution in 1974 and named himself the president for Tunisia for life to become the greatest leader of the country solely. Bourguiba’s epoch was not devoid of killing his competitors, torturing his opponents, and suppressing public protests. His presidency was terminated by a medical coup led by his Prime Minister Zine El Abidine, who served as the military intelligence chief and later Director-General of national security and was appointed Minister of Security during Bourguiba’s reign. Despite the continuity of secularism project during Ben Ali’s ruling period, which lasted twenty-three years, Tunisia had been classified as a police state with a despotism regime which continued to suppress the freedom of expression and practised torturing and repressed its opponents²⁶⁷. The former Tunisian political prisoner Al Salih Phlyss described this era, saying: “Bourguiba’s regime didn’t understand that intransigence was sort of pouring the oil on the fire which escalated the Tunisian conflict between the

²⁶⁷ “Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.” *BBC News Arabic*, 19 Sept. 2019, www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-49756788.

authority and the conscious society's components which are longing for freedoms and democracy"²⁶⁸.

The *Le Professeur* film documents the foundation of the first Arab human rights organisation, the Tunisian Human Right League LTDH, in 1976, which was established by collective efforts from democratic parties and human rights organisations. The director of the film outweighed that the Tunisian regime allowed to be found under pressure from the American government and assumed that the Tunisian authorities had included intellectuals who defended the regime within the new organisation structure to obstruct its work.

In a wide shot scene in the film, the Tunisian Human Right League holds a formal meeting around a circular table with a dark red cover. Professor Khalil is the head of the meeting. A close-up scene of him pointing at someone and threatening him, saying: "Shut your mouth! Don't forget that your party is panned! Thank your God that the authority is tolerant with you." Another member interferes: "This is a security discourse!". The regime supporters immediately and decisively answered him: "This is the only language that suits you!". Professor Khalil: "We are with the league's goals, but without jeopardising the national interests. A woman says in disapprobation: "and freedoms violations serve the national interests?"

In the film "Huda", the professor's girlfriend gets arrested and tortured for forced confessions because she helped Italian journalists to cover a political event in Tunisia. The

²⁶⁸ "How Did the 'Professor' Expose the Dictatorship of the Bourguiba Regime." *Aljazeera*, 9 Aug. 2020, www.aljazeera.net/programs/outside-the-text/2020/8/9/كيف-فضح-الأستاذ-ديكتاتورية-نظام.

film presents “a series of constitutional violations, individuals freedoms violations, torturing, security trials. A wide variety of violations of the ideal constitution that the professor introduced to his students at the beginning of the film”²⁶⁹. The film's political trial for “Huda” is a depot that shows the contradiction in the Tunisian political reality during Bourguiba’s ruling period. As is also shows the inner conflict within the professor himself; the conflict between the academic intellectual theory about a civil and secular constitution and the suppression practices against his girlfriend “Huda”. The suppression is performed internally by a police regime against its opponents.

In Huda’s trial, the judge ruled the Italian journalists to be imprisoned, same as “Huda” for leaking information to cause chaos in the public domain. The spectator's clamor with the disapproval of the cruel ruling. Journalists shout angrily before the judge: “you are condemning information freedom. This is a joke tribunal”. Huda shouts at the judge: “Where is the justice of the law? Why four years? And a police officer pulls her out of the court hall. Professor Khalil approaches the court’s partition and says to the judge in French: “Tunisia is not a banana republic... The president will be informed of what happened!” The scene presents the colliding state between secular values and reality.

But the Tunisian president, one of secularism pioneers in the Middle East, has not proposed democracy as one of the Tunisian Secularism project pillars. Democracy to Bourguiba was not a priority for the country’s modernism as mind superiority, religion, and

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

social hereditary neutralising. His speech to the Tunisians was realistic, clear, and direct about the governance pillars and his vision for the modern European-shaped secular state:

I don't think it is the right time to speak about democracy in its ultimate concept. The Arab societies had marginalised their creative intellectuals and scientists in favour of Sheikh, which time has stood still for them since fourteen hundred years ago.²⁷⁰ This is the time difference between them and us. Therefore, it is necessary to spread a more realistic culture where modern sciences have more space to expand.²⁷¹

Nevertheless, secularism reflected in *Laicite, Inch'Allah*, for the French Tunisian filmmaker Nadia El-Fani depends on two combined pillars. The first refuse the usage of religion in the ruling game and its effect on the daily life of the citizens, and the second rejects the despotism. The film's original name, which was modified due to a request from the production team, evidently reflects the rejection of both theocracy and dictatorship "Neither Allah Nor Master". El-Fani treated this in the parts of her film according to the filming time in Tunisia, while Zine El Abidine Ben Ali Was ruling, then during the public uprising known of "Jasmine revolution" requesting him to step down along with the Tunisian government.

²⁷⁰ "Habib Bourguiba." *Arageek*, accessed on 3 July 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.arageek.com/bio/habib-bourguiba>

²⁷¹ Wafaa Daasa, "Habib Bourguiba, 18 Years since His Death." *Turess*, 6 Apr. 2018, www.turess.com/aljarida/200255.

El-Fani insists on using the term “laicism” when referring to French secularism. The usage of the term exceeds the linguistics sequence to the political dimension. Tunisian Secularism is a French model with a rigorism approach toward the separation of the religion from the daily life. She argues that Ben Ali had twisted the Tunisian secularism from its track which was established by Bourguiba. In one of the scenes in her film, El-Fani is seen in conversations herself with Tunisians in coffee shops and in protesting sites stating that: “Ben Ali’s politics are the reason behind the duality in the Tunisian lives as he used the religion to create a foundation for his reign. He supported the Islamists to confront the leftists and supported the leftist to confront the Islamists. “El-Fani who resides in Paris in France remembers her childhood years she spent in Tunisia where being religious was a private and personal matter and not shown nor emphasized in the public sphere. Life details will continue normally in the holy month of Ramadan without special seasonal formal procedures added like closing the restaurants which push people to disguise if they want to have a cup of coffee. Also, there will not be any addition preaching and religious rituals nor an Imam on the national television. Despite that the Tunisian independence constitution which was written in Bourguiba’s time and promotes secularism hasn’t changed in the time of Ben Ali, El-Fani clearly refers to the predominant tyranny in Ben Ali ruling era. She used the term “Dictatorship” when she referred to it.

El-Fani’s camera moves around the Tunisian uprising while she moves between the protestors and discusses secularism with them. The camera in the film follows a group of women along with El-Fani who were trying to reach the revolution square in the Capital Tunisia as they pass by soldiers who prevents people from joining in. A question directed to the soldiers is heard in the Tunisian delicate: “Why are you stopping us? Why? Why? The

scene is accompanied with “My word is free” song in the background for the Tunisian singer Emel Mathlouthi. The song that later had become a revolutionary ode in Tunisia and the Middle East says:

I am those who are free and never fear

I am the secrets that will never die

I am the voice of those who would not give in

I am the meaning amid the chaos

I am the right of the oppressed

That is sold by these dogs (people who are dogs)

Who rob the people of their daily bread

And slam the door in the face of ideas

The film records scenes and slogans used by the protestors based in the squares and written on the building walls and on the street barriers. Some slogans demanded democracy and freedom and others refused the presidential system and requested a parliamentary system. In the hands of the Tunisian people shouting “le pourri Dégagé! Dégagé” with photos in their hands of tortured victims and their dead bodies with written slogans describes the security forces with terrorists: “The Minister of Internal Affairs is a Terrorist”.

One of the protestors shouts out in anger while he is lifted up high on the shoulders of others a poem for the communist Palestinian poet Muin Bseiso: “Yes we shall die, but we will uproot the oppression from our land”. El-Fani talks to protestors requesting “the Dictator to leave” and others quoted from Bourguiba, while the discussion remains concentrated about the Tunisian secularism and constitution which is considered a Tunisian treasure and has to be preserved even after the dictatorship leaves.

El-Fani tried to use the protesting scenes in *Laicite, Inch’Allah* to show the nature of the Tunisians issue with the suppressive regime and its police forces. She tried to distinguish between the Tunisian secularism and the dictatorship regime. The Tunisian revolution in January 2011 was not a revolution against the modern identity of Tunisia or its secularism, but it was as stated by El-Fani a revolution against suppression, torturing, and corruption performed by the police regime against the citizens. The regime which El-Fani had shown crowded protesters in opposition to and acclaiming it to leave. *Laicite, Inch’Allah* takes the audience toward the associations, and the movements that existed after Ben Ali was ousted, which was accompanied by a broad societal conversation about the nature of the revolution constitution which shall present an image of the secular’s consideration of the modern Tunisia’s identity where faith remains neutralised and separated from the society, the law, and the state. And at the same time, rejecting autocracy, the police state and the suppression, which contradicts secular values. The film documents slogans raised by protesting women, who seemed to be the most affected category in the society because of the Islamist, and the preservative parties’ effect on women’s rights which were endorsed by the Tunisian legislations at an early stage. Women of different ages raised signs say “Laicism” in French, chanting: “Equality, Freedom, National Dignity”, and others demanding

the Democratic Constitutional Rally, which is the ruling party in Tunisia, to be banned. Another scene in the film shows demonstrators chanting in the streets: “Tunisia towards freedom – No terrorism, no reactionary” and “Secular state – freedom – democracy”. Voices rise among the demonstration requesting not to chant for secularism and shout “Islamic State,” but the chant continues “Secular State”. El-Fani denounces in her film *Laicite, Inch’Allah* the dictatorship regime that used suppression and tyranny over decades and used religion to fixate itself in the society. This regime had distorted Tunisian secularism with its neutralized stance on the sacred, which is not a state’s concern. El-Fani defends secularism and believes that ousting Ben Ali in Tunisia will lead to free politics in Tunisia but also to free faith. Freedom and condemnation of suppression in all its forms seem to be a primary pillar for El-Fani as an artist and a creative filmmaker. This pillar which secularism could not be interpreted without, as it is the main component.

In *Même Pas Ma*²⁷² (*Not even bad*), El-Fani moves on to a new struggle that is no less furious than the dictatorships’ suppression as she presents her personal experience with breast cancer and compares it with fighting fundamentalist Islamism. The film’s camera chases El-Fani in the hospital’s corridors during her treatment period in the French Capital, Paris, before showing her following up on the Tunisian demonstration’s videos on the Facebook application. El-Fani said that the Tunisian’s uprising against the dictatorship was the cure for her cancer. Another scene in the film documents the Tunisian revolution supporting protests in Paris which request the ruling party “El Tajamo” to leave and shows Tunisian young women chanting in the streets: “Freedom, democracy, secularism”. El-Fani

²⁷² *Même Pas Ma*. Directed by Nadia El-Fani, 2012

restates her defence of the Tunisian secularism in the context of denouncing the police regime. She emphasizes on the importance of promoting freedoms in accompaniment to the freedom and democracy tracks along with secularism. El-Fani believes that she has an advanced role as an artist and filmmaker in the battle against suppression because the filmmaker creates a vast space for the audience to become free; about this she said: “Support creative people because only them can surpass the redline and the limitation to create a broad space for others to become free”²⁷³.

In 74 film, the Lebanese director Rania Rafei insists on connecting her understanding of secularism and her journey exploring it in the cinema with refusing suppression and tyranny. In her documentary film, she used the walls of the filming location to present the nature of the discussions about the civil status of the country and to refuse suppression by documenting the slogans, the ideas, and the demands of the unions’ movements. Protestor’s slogans in Arabic on the surrounding yellow walls are recognized in the film, one of these slogans is written in black and red at the centre of the wall stating “Authority is fascist” with smaller handwritings scattered around it by protestors. Some of these writings is related to their cause like “united we stand, divided we fall”. In addition to searing phrases which are essential to any Lebanese in his regular day in attempts to modify the statement and manipulate the terms is addressed by using the X sign or by adding phrases in different colours like “Fuck this shit”, “Shoo the fool away” as a metaphor to the rejection of the imbecile opinions which each party consider it coming from its opponent.

²⁷³ Nadia El-Fani speech at the Secular Conference 2017 in London. (video). Accessed on 30 Jan 2022. Accessed at: https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/نادية_الفاني

One of those slogans seen in the background of more than one scene in the 74 film says: "Askar! against who? Askar!" the slogan is handwritten in Arabic on the top of a poster is seen in the background of two of the interviews with the films characters. The poster which demonstrates the strike's demands has a sketch of a tank and a soldier carrying a baton facing the students demands. Above the poster a speech bubble which has something to say to the soldier in the poster: "tell your leaders Askar! Askar against who? Askar?" "Askar" is a word used by different languages in the Middle East. Some linguistics believes it is originally a Persian word and a plural of the word "soldier". At the present time in Turkey it is used to refer to the Army, moreover, it is used in the state visits to the presidential palace in Ankara. The State's guest according to the protocol greets the army and the soldiers in Turkish: "Merhaba Asker!" (Hello Soldier!). Hurriyet Daily News²⁷⁴ mentioned this Turkish protocol when the American president Obama visited Ankara in 2009: "President Abdullah Gül and his counterpart U.S. President Barack Obama made a gesture to each other by wearing ties that represented the color of the flag of the other's country. Gul wore a blue tie and Obama wore a red tie. Obama greeted soldiers at Çankaya Presidential Palace in Turkish, saying, "Merhaba Asker!" (Hello Soldier!)"

Despite the positive use of the word in Turkish, it has different indication when its used in Arabic. The word had entered the Arabic language from the Turkish language during the ottoman ruling era and it is used as a synonym for "Soldier of fortune"²⁷⁵ or

²⁷⁴ Hurriyet Daily News. "Highlights from Obama's Turkey Visit." *Www.hurriyet.com.tr*, 7 Apr. 2009, www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/highlights-from-obamas-turkey-visit-11378133.

²⁷⁵ Tanslation of Abdel Jawad Mujahid of Günther Vittmann book "Egypt in the first millennium, BC"

“Mercenaries” or the “Occupier”. The civilian protestors in the streets of Egypt and Sudan had used the slogan: “Down with the military (Askar) rule” during the Arab spring movements in 2011 and its reverberations. The word became a political term with negative semantics related to the military suppressive practices. The term has developed to indicate the interference of the think tank and the military authoritarianism in the politics and the ruling game, as in the development of the civil life. This contradicts with the purpose of the military forces in protecting the state’s borders from any external aggression or threat and managing the defense strategy for sustaining the state’s security. The use of the term became sensitive and problematic when referring to the military institution with “Askar” and considering it an insult for the army and its leaders. Ahmed Gabashi²⁷⁶ the Egyptian modern history professor says: “The word “Askar” itself is an insult to the Egyptian army, because it’s used to describe the occupation’s soldiers and it was used for the Janissary Ottoman soldiers, also for the French and English occupation soldiers [...]”

Rafei documented in her film 74 the moment when the students strike was terminating at dawn on the 24th of April 1974 by the security forces entering the university. Of the strikes leaders informs his protesting colleagues that the university is besieged by about a thousand soldiers. The following scene was for the president’s office empty with the office furniture and the mattresses scattered and chaos everywhere. The commentator’s voice accompanies the scene to document the details of the event: “24 April 1974, the American University has been broken into by armoured vehicles at dawn. Eight

²⁷⁶ Muhammad Al-Jali, “Researcher: The Word ‘Asker’ Is an Insult to the ‘Egyptian Army.’” *Youm7*, 25 Sept. 2013, www.youm7.com/story/2013/9/25/1266723/إهانة-ل-الجيش-المصري.

hundred authority soldiers attacked the students with punches and guns ends. Sixty-one students arrested". The film ends with the commentator voice saying: "13 April 1975". The date of the spark of the Lebanese civil war. Meaning that the civil movements had been killed.

The sentences used in the filming location as in the strikes leaders' meetings scenes are part of the documentation process conducted by the film in the search journey about Lebanon's secularism through the vital conversations about the state and citizenship. The slogan "Askar! Against who?" used in the film was one of the slogans used in the demanding demonstrations and the students movements in Lebanon in 1974 before the sectarian war that carried a civil dimension and citizenship questions that matter to all the Lebanese despite their political background or religious sect.

In an article with a similar title to the slogan: "Askar! against who?", the Palestinian Lebanese author and academic Samir Qusayr²⁷⁷ wrote: "My people are larger Askar!" the slogan said. It was handwritten by anonymous hand probably provoked by the military regime in the beginning of the war. But it wasn't from the war protocols. On the contrary, it was an echo of a civil phenomenon which is in the first place the students' demonstrations in the early seventies which Lebanese had lived its reality. Moreover, the slogan came from

²⁷⁷ Samir Kasir. "Aljazeera, 15 Oct. 2014, Accessed at: www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/icons/2014/10/15/سمير-قصير.

a chant which spread between students that said: “Where are your leaders, Askar? In Hamra drinking, Askar. Askar against who, Askar? Against farmers, Askar?”²⁷⁸

In her search for secularism platform along with the films characters, Rafei condemns all totalitarianism and suppressive ideologies which are obviously found in the slogans and the discussions of the strike leaders. The “Fascist Authority” according to the 74 does not only mean the political sectarianism, but it is much more beyond this, as it hides behind its cloak several forms of the social and political suppressive authorities. Rafei in the film stops at the military and security institutions’ roles as a part of the conservative and reactionary system that suppresses civil discussions by banning students’ movements and fight it by force and coercion and arrest the leaders. On the yellow aging walls in the film’s location, Rafei had presented in her film the famous slogan of the pre sectarian war time “Askar against who?”. The film refuses the police regimes and it’s suppressive approaches, which is in accompaniment of the film’s searches for secularism. Rafei mentioned in the research interview the period she spent in Cairo and gives an example of the Egyptian Army reigned supreme over the country in 2013 after the first democratic presidential election in Egypt:

Being secular, I am against all the suppressive authorities, either it is a Patriarchy system, a religious authority, feudalism, capitalism, and definitely the “Askar” rule.

Recently, the comparison in Egypt became depressing, people are comparing the

²⁷⁸ Kassir, Samir. *Soldiers against Whom?* 2004. Dar Al-Nahar, 2005.

bad to worse. They are comparing between the Muslim Brotherhood ruling and the Egyptian army ruling. It's an awful reality.

About the military rule, the Lebanese politician Ghassan Tueni²⁷⁹ says:

Militarism ideology didn't happen by chance in the Arab world. The logic of the civil democratic deterioration had paved for it and maybe pullulate it. The first related phenomenon came from Damascus when Husni Al Za'im the Syrian military officer declared that he is ousting Shukri al Quwatli the first president of post-independence Syria in revenge of the Arab league forces defeat in Palestine due to the droopy rule. Husni Al Za'im launched his rule by signing of a cease-fire agreement with Israel which the previous regime was reluctant to sign.

Tueni continues:

The historical research supported by uncovered documents and like documents confirms that "the logic of the military coups" was a fruit of an American theory which was born in "Washingtonian" desperate in the southeast of Asia and Vietnam. The written theory suggests that the third world is underdeveloped to the limit that

²⁷⁹ Ibid

democracy will definitely fail there. The only reign to fight the corruption and stop the leftism expanding is the military rule since the Military is the only “Clean institution” in these countries, and the military regularity is the only approach to unify the nations as they need a strict system. In a later stage of the American theorization when Militarism became alliance with the left and was open towards Marxism if not the Soviet Union, the American ideology stated: Only the Islam religion can, if it is politicized properly, eliminate the “communist atheism” especially if it allied with other religions to protect the army!!

However, several secular thinkers argue that there isn't any secular Arab state. When fundamentalists describe few regimes in the Middle East as secular regimes is nothing but connecting dictatorship with secularism “to justify the actual dictatorship with presumed secularism”²⁸⁰. Unlike the Arab states which haven't come out of the religion cloak yet, and play a direct role in imposing religion on the society, the other Arab countries which are described to be progressive, moderate and secular, “their constitutions collectively state that Islam is the state's religion, or that Islam is the State's presidents religion, or that Islam is the only or the main source of legislation”²⁸¹. If we surpassed the constitutions, the most known Arab regime described as a “secular dictator” regime was

²⁸⁰ Tarabichi, Georges. *Hartaqat 2: On Secularism as an Intra-Islamic Problematic*. 1st ed., Dar Al-Saqi, 2008. P

²⁸¹ Ibid

President Nasser's regime in Egypt since the monarchy has been toppled in 1952 and military ruled. Islam was a condition not only for the state's president only, but also the highest echelon of command of the army ²⁸². Adding to this the compulsory religious education in the Arab region which is assigned exclusively to theology institutions and universities graduates and not philosophy nor humanitarian studies graduates. "Religious topics exceeds merely religious education to be at the forefront of the "secular" books in the Arab schools like the reading, linguistic, literature, history and national education books... whereas the school become a reproduction unite to the religious fundamentalism, or disproportionately according to the secular level of the state"²⁸³ . Nonetheless, Islamic Sharea' remains the main and compulsory source in the personal matters field. ²⁸⁴

The Lebanese director Hady Zaccak refuses the model that uses the military authority and imposes the secular state by force. He suggested that there is a crisis in secularism experience imposed by the communist nationalist movements in the Arab region when it ruled for long decades. Zaccak believes that the experiences of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath party in Iraq and Syria, the communist party, and the Nasserism in Egypt had a secular national ideology, but they failed. He said:

Historically, the secular parties had failed in the Arab region. Secularism speech was strong, influencing and succeeded to reach its peak in the seventies of the last century, however, these parties had imposed secularism on the State by force using

²⁸² Ibid. p 108

²⁸³ Ibid p 110

²⁸⁴ Ibid

the military power. At the end this project had failed. Maybe except for Tunisia, but is there a secular model in Tunisia today?²⁸⁵

As a filmmaker, Zaccak believes that the Cinema is a successful method to present the humanitarian secularism which guarantee the civil rights, freedoms, and modernism. Moreover, it is a unique method to approach the audience away from the totalitarian ideology and parties' experiences in an attempt to rescue the seculars reputation as defenders of militarism and as an equal to the dictatorship. Zaccak said:

We have to avoid the ideological parties' mistakes. The military authoritarianism, and the suppressive approach had created a dictatorship secularism in the region which is decorated its names with communist and justice slogans, yet it is the new democratic German republic. Cinema might be the only method that can treat secularism and present it the audience in a light approach like the summer rain not the firehose.

4.4 Conclusion

The Middle East consist of include a diverse set of ethnic groups, religions, and cultures unlike what's known about it as the origin of Muslim Arabs only. Secularism was

²⁸⁵ Hady Zaccak. Interview with the author

promoted after colonialism period in the Middle East by intellectuals originated from minority groups in the region particularly the Christian minority. Secularism had promoted citizenship values which dissipated the minorities concerns of being subject to the majority's religion and regulation. Hence, secularism can also be considered a necessity for the Muslim majority in the middle East as its is for the minorities. The Muslim majority in the region is an inhomogeneous group as the literature provides a history filled with crises and serious conflicts between its sects from one side, and with the sub-identities groups living there from another side.

The filmmakers' discourses exceeded the expected superficial stance from secularism. They articulated about the relation between the minorities' issue and secularism and the special treatment of secularism in their films. Filmmakers who belong to a minority were interested in presenting the minorities identity, and the minorities stories which most of the cinema and the televisions production in the Middle East tended to blackout and discard. The filmmakers were also concerned to make films with questions about the minorities' roles in the major events in the Middle East. Their films are considered an addition as it presented a different narrative than the one presented by the public media. The films' narration might be considered sensitive as it could threaten the civil peace or agitate the minorities. This type of film treatment and narration was presented by El-Hajj in her film *Time to Rest, 2015*.

An interesting outcome resulted from studying the minorities relation with secularism, was in the discourse of the secular documentary filmmakers in the Middle East

referring to themselves as a minority in the society. Filmmakers believed that seculars form a new minority in the Middle East.

Despite of the problematic relation between the secular intellectuals and the military regime and the dictatorships in the Middle East region, the filmmakers who address secularism in their films agree with the secular intellectuals who refuse the military's rule and the police regimes and stand on the opposite side of those regimes. They refuse all the suppressive authorities in all its forms in the Middle East even the one that could be the only solution to eliminate the religious ruling and the religious power over the society. El-Fani and Rafei films condemn the dictatorship and the military regimes. While El-Fani used a direct approach in *Laicite*, *Inch'Allah* and requested to maintain the obtained secular values of the Tunisian States by rejecting the religious ruling represented by the Islamic parties and the police regime represented by the former regime of Ben Ali. Rafei in her film 74 condemn the police regime which interfered in a civil debate and parties matters by the symbolism used in the filming location and on the walls behind the activist students in their interviews before the camera. Rafei refuses the military rule aside several other suppressive authorities in the society.

Chapter Five: Television Screening Limitation and Self-Censorship

5.1 Introduction

The key point about Foucault's approach to power is that Power is an everyday, socialized and embodied phenomenon.²⁸⁶ Power for Foucault is what makes us what we are, and it is 'everywhere', and 'comes from everywhere'.²⁸⁷ Producing a documentary film for news channels in the Middle East requires to abide by the policies and formats set by these channels as they are the power source in the production equation. Those policies and protocols are general and renowned by the production companies selling to television channels; however, it directly and indirectly affects the production process and the treatment of a controversial topic like secularism in the film as it is considered a form of censorship and governance over the production and the filmmaker.

Filmmakers believe that the cinemas have the capacity to discuss the controversial issues like secularism away from the superficial treatment imposed by the televisions. This chapter discusses the screening limitations facing documentary filmmakers on satellite and television channels when addressing and treating secularism in the Middle East in their films. I will explore the characteristics of the documentary films made by independent filmmakers for festivals and elites screening sessions and compare it to films made

²⁸⁶ Penny Powers, *The Philosophical Foundations of Foucaultian Discourse Analysis*,

²⁸⁷ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison*.

specifically for television channels by analyzing the filmmakers' discourses and techniques in addition to analyzing a documentary film made in the Middle East that explicitly treats secularism.

In this chapter I will use the interviews I held with three producers from the Middle East: the first is Rawan Damen²⁸⁸ the former senior commissioning producer and director of documentaries at Al Jazeera Media Network, the second is Reem Bader the founding and director at Minaa and the Creative documentary platform, and the third is Jihad Abu Falah a news and television programs producer in Al Hiwar Satellite channel. I will use the interviews to investigate the producers' interpretations of secularism and their stance from it before exploring their views about producing documentary films about secularism. I will discuss the "Secular in Lebanon" film by Rami Kodeih²⁸⁹ as a case study of a documentary made for the television before presenting four documentary filmmakers' work experiences with television channels; Hady Zaccak, Rania Rafei, Jumana Saadeh and Miriam El-Hajj and how they compared it to their independent production experience.

In the second part of the chapter, I proceed with exploring the practices of self-censorship among the documentary filmmakers when addressing and treating secularism in their films. I argue that this limitation is imposed by the culture, the religion, the family and even by the self and consequently creates a new limitation for the filmmakers to take into consideration in their production.

²⁸⁸ See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

²⁸⁹ See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

5.2 Industry challenges: Television channels policy, limitation and work with journalists

Over decades, national television channels in the Middle East region presented official news and only the government's view to their audience and apply segmentation and total blackout on the events happening around the world. However, in 1996²⁹⁰ the Middle East witnessed the launch of news satellite channels which caused a revolution in the shape of the media and terminated the western channels monopoly in covering the region's hot events. Channels such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Cable News Network (CNN) as well as the end of the government's domination on the news. When Al Jazeera channels project funded by the Qatar government was launched followed by hundreds of the open channels, "like rain to a thirsty land"²⁹¹ the audience²⁹² in the region were introduced to a new shape of media that covered the news from all over the world and presented talk shows that discussed different political views and stances.

The importance of the documentary film as a media genre appears is in documenting history and events and its importance in forming self-awareness and the collective memory.

²⁹⁰ Howaida Taha, "Al-Hiwar Television." *Ahewar*, 22 Mar. 2007, www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=91829.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*

Documentaries present different visions and knowledge. Away from the direct speech and lecturing approach which is presented to the audience in the Middle East, documentary film aims to create debates in societies. Moreover, documentary film is considered a chance to surpass the news story technique which is overly presented on the television channels and present an incomplete image picturing the surface only according to Asaad Taha²⁹³. Reem Bader stated that documentary film production in the Middle East is still marginalized by the authorities and the public media streams that considers debate and “thinking a bitter enemy”²⁹⁴. Furthermore, the audience look at documentary film as an ambiguous genre compared to narrative films and drama production. Documentary filmmakers find documentary films to be unappreciated in the Middle East although it is closer to human reality in this region. Unlike the attention documentary film gets in the western media as it interacts with the human, treats issues deeply, provides a wider scope of knowledge and presents the lived reality in a better way. The Lebanese director Juan Chamoun states that there is a reactionary attitude towards documentary film in the Middle East which “led the public and private television channels to marginalize this genre in favor of the narrative films and ruined the audience’s taste”²⁹⁵. The Moroccan director Mohammad Belhaj

²⁹³ “Arab Documentary cinema... Marginalization looks for audience” edited by editing team. Published on 7 July 2019 published on noonpost website. Accessed at: <https://www.noonpost.com/content/28437> . (Translation by researcher)

²⁹⁴ Reem Bader. Interview with the author

²⁹⁵ “Arab Documentary cinema... Marginalization looks for audience”

confirms this as he states that the documentary film ethos is missing in the Middle East at the audience and the production institutions²⁹⁶.

This ambiguous visual production is considered problematic and challenging to the audience in the Middle East. However, television and satellite channel remain the main platform to screen this type of production to reach a wide cluster of the audience as screening chances in cinema theatres in the Middle East and especially the Arab countries is limited. In the Arab region, less than three people out of ten thousand has access to watch independent documentary films. And one out of one hundred creative documentary film is screened on the television or in a cinema house.²⁹⁷

About the audience's understanding of the documentary film as a genre in television production, Rawan Damen articulated:

Documentary is considered to be problematic to the majority of the audience. People do not understand the meaning of the documentary. If we go out to the streets in the middle of an Arab capital city and asked people about the meaning of a documentary film, we will find that most answers are related to the wildlife programs. As there is a problem in understanding the meaning of the documentary itself, the problem would be much bigger if secularism is associated with the

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ According to a study published on Minaa platform, Reem Bader stated that in the Arab region of the Middle East and north Africa, documentary films are screened in the cinema houses only in Lebanon and Tunisia.

documentary. Documentary film is a genre for the elite. It is used in all the Arab televisions in a long reportage form to bring the focus on a certain topic rather than creating a debate. Therefore, documentary in the Middle East did not reach the level to become a tool for cognition stimulation.²⁹⁸

Tod Gitlin stated in his book “Inside Prime Time” that it is not conspiracy theory or that networks are trying to indoctrinate the helpless masses rather than just generating an ideology by trying to read popular sentiment and tailoring their schedules towards “what they think the cardboard people they’ve conjured up wants to see and hear”.²⁹⁹ He restated Arnold Becker, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS’s) vice – president saying: “I’m not interested in culture, I am not interested in pro-social values. I have only one interest. That’s whether people watch the program. That’s my definition of good, that’s my definition of bad.”³⁰⁰ This notion is applicable to the Middle East television channels and their policies towards the production and screening of documentary films to the audiences as making an independent documentary film and having it broadcasted on the television without the channel and networks interference is something rare. Therefore, documentary filmmakers tend to develop self-discipline strategies to comply with channels policies and eventually satisfy the audience by using the television news values.

²⁹⁸ Rawan Damen. Interview with the author

²⁹⁹ Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983. pp 203

³⁰⁰ Ibid. pp 31

The policies imposed by the television channels in the Middle East had created challenges in making documentary films and altered it into the shape of a long television program seen by the public on the National Geographic channel about wildlife, space, or travelling. The documentary produced by the television's channels or screens by it in the Middle East is the safe documentary. A documentary that does not raise any issues and in accordance with the audience's values and news standards. As the televisions and documentary production managements has journalistic backgrounds, the executers of the television documentaries accordingly are either television journalists and reporters who indulge the journalistic approaches in the filmmaking industry and believe that documentaries are nothing but a long journalistic reportage³⁰¹ or filmmakers who work under the supervision of the televisions channels journalists and according to the news values limitations. This makes the final product adequate to be screened on the televisions in the Middle East a "safe documentary"³⁰² keeps the audience's satisfaction and does not contradict with it believes. Rawan Damen described the documentary films suitable for the television as: "Informative, historical, direct and clear"

Documentary films that treat secularism issue in a direct way and screened on television channels in the Middle East seems to be rare as most approached filmmaker and producers during the preparations phase of my research could not remembered any. In

³⁰¹ Rawan Damen. Interview with the author

³⁰² Reem Bader. Interview with the author

2011 I watched a film which not only treats secularism explicitly but also secularism is mentioned clearly in its title. *Seculars in Lebanon* is a film by the director Rami Kodeih³⁰³ produced and screened by Al Jazeera TV. The executive producer of the film is “Hot Spot” company for documentary production in Dubai. Hot Spot is managed by Asaad Taha the Egyptian journalist and director. He is one of the people I approached in January 2018 to recommend films that tackle secularism, and he did not remember *Seculars in Lebanon* film. According to Rawan Dame this indicates that the film hadn’t caused any problems for the television channel that screened it to be remembered by the executive production company. It is also an indication that the film hadn’t generate a debate about seculars or had been objected upon by the audience in the Middle East. I haven’t found any articles or news stories about the film on the wide world web except for a post on its executive producer company’s website referred to as a film that discusses seculars views and their ideological backgrounds³⁰⁴, and another post on Al Jazeera main channel- online website with the complete script of the film and the interviews within it. It also presents an introduction about the film: “This episode discusses secularism in Lebanon, secularism means the political ideology which indicates the states neutrality and separation from religions and the religious institutions”³⁰⁵. However, it is noticeable that both pages do not

³⁰³ I contacted Rami Kodeih to do an interview with him about his film but he declined to take part in this research without mentioning any reasons.

³⁰⁴ Hot Spot Films FB. “Seculars in Lebanon.” Facebook, 14 Dec. 2011. Accessed on 30 Jun 2020

³⁰⁵ “Seculars in Lebanon.” *Aljazeera*, 22 Feb. 2012, www.aljazeera.net/programs/point-of-view/2012/2/22/لبنان-في-العلمانيون-#L4.

have any interaction from the social media audience, as comments and discussions are disabled there. I will discuss in the following part of this chapter the *Seculars in Lebanon* film as a case study of films presenting secularism in the Middle East. I will use the film analysis methodology to show the characteristics of the film and the treatment approach of the director for a documentary film made for the television.

5.2.1 Secularism in documentary films made for television: Case Study

Seculars in Lebanon film starts with animation scenes that introduces the audience to the formation history of the great state of Lebanon. It presents a detailed image about Lebanon's history, the eighteen sects living in it and the main four religious teachings. The animation shows the secular solicitors' movements in Beirut requesting the civil law bill in 1951. In 120 minutes, the film present phases of Lebanon's history from its formation in 1921, and AL Taif agreement which terminated the civil war in 1989 up to the rejection of the civil law bill in 1998 which the film considers "the last attempt to secularize the state".

The film's main protagonists are Ghina Daw a female university student and an activist demanding the state to recognize the civil marriage law in Lebanon, and Ibrahim E'seli a male taxi driver who's against the sectarian quota in the state's institutions. Both characters define themselves as seculars who refuse to belong to the sectarian system. They are both proud of their nationalism and secularity. This was articulated by Gina Daw in the film: "I am Arab secular Lebanese. Maronite-Christian is assigned to my name which is

something I reject. I do not introduce myself this way.” The film gathers the audience’s opinions about secularism through the vox pops interviews from the Lebanese streets. This television news reconnaissance technique was conducted with people from different ages, genders, and backgrounds and collected disparate views. Some considered secularism “Not believing”, and referred it to the clerics, while others considered it “the separation of religions from the state”. Few said: “It’s very important”. Since this film treats secularism on Al Jazeera television channel which is the highest viewing satellite channel in the Middle East³⁰⁶ with its Islam oriented management and tendency to the Political Islam agenda³⁰⁷, the film presents the controversial term “secularism” directly and does not replace it. However, it only discusses secularism by presenting views from the street along with specialists’ views, with a stop at the civil marriage law and the political ideology of secularism by separating the religion from the State.

The film seems to provide a slight opportunity to its protagonists to articulate their views about secularism compared to the wide prospect given to the society and the members of the clergy to judge this ideology in an attempt to satisfy the audience by following the television news formats in the production which tends to always presents the

³⁰⁶ “More Al-Jazeera viewers than the other Pan-Arab news channels combined”. Published in: Middle East, News. On February 14, 2014 at 12:26 pm accessed at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140214-more-al-jazeera-viewers-than-the-other-pan-arab-news-channels-combined/>

³⁰⁷ Mehwar TV Channel. Interview with Hamad Ben Jassim the former Qatari Prime Minter in Black Box program. accessed on 15 March 2022 accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYeBUWx5HWg>

opposing views. However, the production company of the film considers is a space for freedom of expression and an unobtainable opportunity for secularism to articulate itself:

The films in this series enter worlds of those groups to give them a wider space of freedom to express their thoughts and beliefs without judgment or evaluation. It lives the reality of those groups holding on to their thoughts and beliefs and their relations with the surrounding society. It's an open space to "A point of View" which did not have a chance before to express itself out.³⁰⁸

The audience's satisfaction was obtained in the film by showing the public's views through the three vox pops segments dispersed though in the film. The vox pop segments allows the audience to express itself in the film, though it seemed like a forthright evaluation of secularism. For instance, these sentences were mentioned in the vox pop segments: "I am against the civil marriage, I am with the religious courts because its Sharia and religion", "A marriage that does not preserve women's rights". "It's a pleasure contract, it's an interest contract". Although the views from the public varied, it overtook the two secular protagonists' space of free expression and kept on judging their views unlike what the production company described the film with "without judgment or evaluation". This is what the television news values impose by presenting the opposing views. Moreover, a big part of the film is reserved for the "specialists" views who are interviewed to discuss

³⁰⁸ "Seculars in Lebanon." *Aljazeera*.

secularism, and the seculars demands in Lebanon which creates a new judgmental platform against the seculars. Those specialists are clergies and religious individuals from different sects, the Maronite Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch, the Sunni Fatwa Council, the Shi'a Scholars committee, a professor, and a journalist. As the specialists define their stance from secularism and seculars, the film agrees with the audience by giving the specialists, with what they represent as religious symbols, the right to judge the seculars' demands based on the supreme referential speech given to the religious institutions in the Middle East.

In addition to the wide scope of time granted to the religious specialists, the television news story visual style is used in the film to add to the glorification given to those individuals who are judging secularism and its values which adds a layer of formality, seriousness, and reverence to the interview. The interviews were held in worship houses and religious institutions and the interviewees were wearing their formal religious outfits. The sacred symbols, writings, and decorations of each sect in the camera frame provides an added value to these interviews. The director chose a cut away shot and the set up shot which are used by the journalists when making a television news story to increase the credibility of the interviews³⁰⁹. The film recorded the unfabricated actions of the interviewees in their natural environment which is the filming location as an introduction to the news story. The interviewees were filmed flipping a book, picking a book from the bookshelves, reading, signing papers, or while walking in the church while a parishioner lady

³⁰⁹ BBC News. "Writing to Television." *BBC News Arabic*, 27 Aug. 2010, www.bbc.com/arabic/learningenglish/2010/08/081016_cojo_arabic_guide_3.

tries to kiss the clergy's hand. Although the scenes of the two secular parasites of the film are much more vivid than the interviews scenes in the film, the other scene makes the religious individuals and clergies the center of the case and judgment in the film. This agrees with the audience's beliefs in the Middle East sees religious individuals and clergies as references when it comes to judging an ethical controversial issue as the society's relation with the individuals believing in secularism. The religious individuals and clergies seemed to be displeased with the seculars demands and blames them for wanting to be different of the others in the Middle East. A Sunni "Sheikh" articulated in the film: "There isn't a problem in Lebanon with secularism or the so-called seculars, but those people have a problem with themselves. They wanted to rebel all the religious teachings either Islamic or Christian. We cannot fight them as the Lebanese law secures the freedoms."

Rami Kodeih³¹⁰ is a director and writer who lives in Los Angeles in the United States. He was born in 1983 and completed his bachelor's and master's degrees from Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts. He is known for *Alina* (2019), *Maki and Zorro* (2017) and he directed corporate films and documentaries for Al Jazeera. Kodeih is a filmmaker and not a journalist. He also did not work in television journalism nor been an employee at Al Jazeera when he directed *Seculars in Lebanon* film. The film presents different directing style with the two seculars characters being the films protagonists. Daw who is one of the film's protagonists is a Maronite student who does not recognizes sects and believes in secularism. She lives a mixed religion relationship and wishes it to succeed despite her

³¹⁰ See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

family's disagreement and away from the church's blessings and the religious marriage rituals. Daw's talk to the camera about secularism is clear and different is her conversation with her grandmother about mixed marriages. She presents the solid stance of the society against one of the seculars demands in the Middle East. One of the scenes shows the grandmother is in the kitchen talking to Daw about her fans in the village when she was young and confirms that they all were Christians: "Of course they were Christians!". Another scene is for the grandmother in the balcony having a dessert with woods in the background and running a spontaneous conversation with her Christian grandchild rejecting her marriage from a Muslim before she gets angry and request the cameraman to stop shooting. Daw Says: "I entered a mixed relationship and a disaster happened in my family. What is a Christian and Shi'a. I was the first one in my family who does this, and the problem started."

Ghina Daw: Last summer I had a relationship with a man called Ahmad.

Grandmother: And this year with Mahmoud?

Ghina: No.

Grandmother: Then who?

Ghina: Jihad.

Grandmother: What does Jihad mean? (The name didn't give a sectarian indication for the grandmother).

Ghina: Jihad is the man I am in a relationship with right now.

Grandmother: You have a relationship with a Muslim now?

Ghina: Yes

Grandmother: And you are saying it like this? Why? What is it in the Islam? Why a Muslim?

What happened? What will happen? No! don't say any more..

Ghina: Why?

Grandmother: Don't say anymore. I will not accept this. No. No. Muslim?

Ghina: Maybe we want to get married.

Grandmother: Oh my God! Stop everything! I don't want to carry on. What are you talking about? Are you serious?

Although *Seculars in Lebanon* had vivid scenes with the secular characters of the films, it kept a balanced unbiased position in presenting the issue which is a cherished approach by the journalists in the production management and it remained compatible with the television news channels formats in most of its other scenes. The news story, the vox pop interviews, the graphic animation and the journalistic shots transferred the film from being about secularism and seculars into an evaluation for secularism and a judging court by the religious institutions. Which consequently made the religious individuals, and the clergies the protagonists of the film instead of the secular two characters.

A film made for Al Jazeera channel's audience about secularism should not contradict with its political orientation and conflict with its audience's views and taste which

can be studied with accordance to the Media system dependency theory³¹¹. Moreover, it should not create a debate. The documentary produced by a television channel in the Middle East should be suitable to be screened. It should be informative, historical, direct, and clear, and balanced in the views it presents according to Rawan Damen³¹². Television channels request the documentary films to include the opposing views as a condition to screen it. However, another approach has been used recently where the documentary may present one view, but it shall be followed by another film which present the opposing view like the BBC. *Seculars in Lebanon* is an example of the films produced in the Middle East about secularism which can “easily” find its way to be screened in the televisions despite having the term “secularism” explicitly in its title. The film had not faced any objections during its production journey till it was screened and even after because it was treated in accordance with the television formats and within its limitations imposed by the television channels managements in the Middle East.

Foucault said that “Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.”³¹³ *Seculars in Lebanon* can be the example of the effect of the television’s limitations power. However, For Hady Zaccak, *A History Lesson* film was the point of resistance to this television’s limitation power. His discourse and treatment approach of

³¹¹ Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, ML DeFleur, "A dependency model of mass-media effects". *Communication Research*. 1976). **3** (1): 3–21.

³¹² Rawan Damen. Interview with the author

³¹³ Foucault, M. *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. pp 101

secularism in the film can be considered the starting point for an opposing strategy against the television's power. Hady Zaccak's articulated that had been successful in screening four of his film which treats secularism on Al Jazeera channels. Hady in his film *A History Lesson*, 2009³¹⁴ produced by Al Jazeera treats secularism in an indirect approach to avoid falling in the trap of news making constraints as a condition for television documentaries. Though, in some parts of it, the journalistic approach is noticeable like the balance in the time given to each character to talk in the film, the presence of different and opposing sectarian views in addition to the shots size and type used for the interviews in the film. *A History Lesson* was able to generate a debate and create an interactive wave in the media means, the newscast, the cinema theatres, and even the Lebanese Parliament. The film can be classified as a Militant Cinema in its activist content rather its audio-visual directing techniques. The battle was of secularism against sectarianism. Zaccak used a calm narrative and disciplined sarcastic approach in criticizing the social and political systems in Lebanon in *A History Lesson* and was keen to use "Clean" language and unprovoking scenes out of respect to the majority's conservative nature in the Middle East.

Zaccak has a successful experience with Al Jazeera satellite channel in buying and screening his independent film *Mercedes*. Moreover, Zaccak's films *Mercedes*, *A History Lesson*, *Sunni Echoes*, and *Shi'a Echoes* had been screen on Al Jazeera main, Al Jazeera English, and Al Jazeera Documentary channels several times since 2010. Zaccak had developed his indirect approach of treating secularism in his films after several experiments in making documentaries for the television which helped him understand the television

³¹⁴ *A History Lesson* film is discussed in more details in chapter three of this thesis.

documentaries production limitations and overcome the news approach ascendency which Zaccak had been subject to in previous productions like *The war of Peace*³¹⁵ film which looks at the situation in Lebanon after the July 2006 war through several young Lebanese adults. Zaccak treats the topics of his films using the narrative film approach that tells a fictionalized story. He believes that this approach not only breaks the dull frame the documentary had been put into, but also finds it closer to the audience in the Middle East that enjoy the story telling technique. Zaccak sees the film's viewer as a partner to the filmmaker rather a recipient therefore he doesn't spoon feed the viewer with the information but let the information infiltrate to the viewer through the film's story. Zaccak also used the sarcastic technique instead of the direct denounced one in his treatment of secularism as he presented the irony sectarianism creates without colliding with the sacred icons in the society in *A History Lesson* film.

Journalists are present in the documentaries they make either in the camera's frame, with their voices or even with their attitude as directors which makes the interviewee feel the censorship power and consequently affect the authenticity of the interviews. After his film *The war of Peace*, Zaccak decided not to work with journalists because he senses the huge difference in the methods of production between a filmmaker and a journalist. Zaccak felt uncomfortable with the interviewing techniques of the journalists as they tend to blockade the interviewees and treat them in rival, while the people he chooses or meets for his films are the films protagonists despite their social or

³¹⁵ The war of Peace. Directed by Hady Zaccak, 2007

political backgrounds. He considers the films characters language, movements and body language are as important as the speech and the information they say:

As a filmmaker, I am before the film's protagonist. I am a person who knows nothing. I pay attention to what I listen to from the character. I try unpretentiously to analyze what happened before the camera based on my philosophy. Before the protagonist, I am completely not present. I let the character to take the whole frame. I allow the film and the characters to represent me and express my ideas as a filmmaker.³¹⁶

Both films *Seculars in Lebanon* and *A History Lesson* are produced by Al Jazeera channel and directed by documentary filmmakers, however, *Seculars in Lebanon* film was produced through a production company which executes the television films requests in accordance with the television formats and the news story techniques, while Zaccak had produced and directed his film *A History Lesson* without a mediator. Another joint factor between these two films is choosing Lebanon to treat secularism. Lebanon's situation where the State's regime was established based on the sectarian quota after the civil war make it unique in the Middle East region. It's noticed that documentary films which introduce or treat secularism are rare on televisions in the Middle East and seem to be concentrated in one society and in one country mostly which is Lebanon. In addition to the limitations of the television production policies and the audience's factor, confining secularism treatment in Lebanon is considered another limitation facing documentary

³¹⁶ Hady Zaccak. Interview with the author

production for the televisions. Lebanon's special political situation is due to the sectarian system and family feudalism in addition to the light weight the Political Islam representation compared to the Sunni majority in other countries in the region which makes secularism acceptable to be suggested as it does not contradict with majority beliefs in the society.

5.2.2 Secularism and documentary production for the TV: Producers' views

I will discuss in this section the television documentary films' representation of secularism in the Middle East by presenting and analysing the discourses of the producers I have interviewed for the purpose of this research. I had held a number of interviews with film producers in the Middle East: Deema Azar³¹⁷ a producer, a script specialist and the director and cofounder of Talebox production company whose interview was approached in more details in chapter four of this thesis. Rawan Damen the former senior commissioning producer and director of documentaries at Al Jazeera Media Network. Reem Bader the founding and director at Minaa and the Creative documentary platform, and Jihad Abu Falah a news and television programs producer in Al Hiwar satellite channel. The interviewed producers seemed less interactive than the filmmakers when articulating their understanding of secularism. Their answers were short, formal, and less personal. They gave direct definitions without any indications or examples of related issues in their lives, their personal experiences, family or even society. The filmmakers were more open when they answered secularism meaning in the interviews, and the term seemed more present in their lives as individuals in the Middle East in both the social and the political manners.

³¹⁷ See Chapter Four for interview details as it is relevant to the minorities' issues.

Rawan Damen

Rawan Damen the Palestinian documentary filmmaker who worked for Al Jazeera main channel for ten years from 2006 till 2016 had supervised many Middle Eastern and western independent director's productions through her work as a senior commissioner. She worked with the filmmakers from the ideas developing phase till they were screened on the television. She led a team who produced more than 250 documentaries and investigative TV episodes for Al Jazeera Network. Damen has a degree in journalism from Birzeit University in Palestine and Leeds University in the United Kingdom. She made her first documentary film in 2000 in Palestine and worked for different media institutions afterward. She produced for a Al Jazeera a few documentaries and episodes about the Israeli- Palestinian conflict like "The Price of Oslo" and "Homeland Owners" before she quit in 2016 to work on the educational "Palestine Remix" project which introduces the Palestinian cause internationally through the documentary film which she described as one of her dreams³¹⁸. Damen is the director general of The Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)³¹⁹, the first and leading media organisation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

³¹⁸ Interview with the author

³¹⁹ ARIJ. "Rawan Damen." Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), en.arij.net/arijteam/rawan-damen/. Accessed 3 July 2022.

I reached Rawan Damen during the Palestine-Expo conference in London in June 2019 as she presented her project “Palestine’s ambassador”³²⁰ which was launched through an alliance with several organisations supporting the Palestinians rights. Although Damen had to leave before I had a chance to do the interview with her, she showed a great interest in taking part in the research and we agreed on another appointment in August of the same year, but the interview’s location became Amman the Jordanian capital. As it was a holiday season in most of the Arab region especially with the Muslims majority at that time, I had to book a place in advance for the interview and I confirmed the appointment by email. Damen arrived on time looking bright and excited. Her hand movements reflected a spontaneous and active personality, and the way she opens her eyes at a certain point during the conversation as an indication that she is interested or to point out an important matter reflected a strong personality and an experience in the production especially at working with teams from different backgrounds along the Middle East region. The filmmaker personality was present during the interview as she checked the filming preparation procedures, for instance the camera and the mic, and she was also present as an executive producer and manager after the interview as she was keen on providing me with the films and the information links she mentioned during the interview.

In her definition of secularism Damen had adopted the television management point of view when producing a documentary film. she says: “Secularism is a positive term”. It is a theory and political enterprise to separate religion from the state in the Arab World.

³²⁰ “Palestinian Ambassador: An Initiative to Train Youth on Presenting the Palestinian Cause.” Alaraby, 20 Aug. 2019, www.alaraby.co.uk/%22الفلسطينية-القضية-طرح-الشباب-على-طرح-القضية-الفلسطينية%22 سفير-فلسطين-22-مبادرة-لتدريب-الشباب-على-طرح-القضية-الفلسطينية

However, as a filmmaker who knows the street, to the majority of the people secularism is a negative term.” She laughs and raises hands making a quotation sign before she adds:

On Twitter for instance, suddenly, you find an outrage and insults against secularism and the seculars as well as nationalism and nationals unexpectedly. I think this is due to the ignorance and relating secularism with atheism. If you chose to introduce yourself as a secular, then you are in trouble. Because wither you are a Christian or a Muslim, due to the religious status in the Arab world you will be labelled as an atheist.

Damen who is proud of her work experience with Al Jazeera channel had presented a view and an explanation of the nature of the production policies within this institution which is classified by the filmmakers as the largest documentary films producer and sponsor in the Middle East. Although she had referred to secularism as a positive term in the beginning of her talk, she believes that secularism should not be given a lot of attention in the documentary industry. She mentioned that secularism is rejected by the majority in the Middle East and those who believe in it as a solution for the region’s problems are just a few. Moreover, Damen believes that the documentary film is a reflection for the film’s characters who tell the film’s story and not the filmmaker’s ethos, which consequently means that secularism and the secular reality in the Middle East is what should be presented in the documentary film. The documentary film for Damen should deliver the truth and the reality without a projection from the filmmaker’s view. On the other hand, Damen choses her films based on her personal interest which is confined in the Palestinian case. Damen

presents herself as a Palestinian and believes that Palestinians should always introduce themselves as Palestinian regardless of where they were born or live or current nationality. She justified this saying: “For not losing our right in our homeland” referring to the occupation. She believes in Pan-Arabism and what connects Arabs are much more than what divides them: “There is a great similarity between Qatar and Morocco. When Kazim Al Sahir sings, the audience enjoys his Iraqi songs whether his concert was in Doha or Ribat, the east or the west of the Arab region”³²¹. Damen’s national belonging was reflected in the choice of her film topics as she chose the films which increase the solidarity and avoids the unagreed upon controversial issues like secularism. Damen considers that secularism in documentary film is a problematic topic which raises conflicts either as an idea or as a cinematic production.

Damen does not only have the same production views of the television channels and the media institutions managements, but her films’ treatment approach also follows the perfect characteristics of the television documentaries. She follows the television special formats which considers what is showed on its screen should reflect its policies. The films should be balanced and neutral and avoids presenting the filmmaker’s personal view as much as possible which consequently transfers the documentary film into a news material and the filmmaker becomes a television journalist.

The majority of the audience’s stance of the films topic appears to be another limitation of treating secularism in the documentary film in addition to the television channels policies. The audience seems to be the only one who has freedom of speech when

³²¹ Rawam Damen. Interview with the author

it comes to treat secularism in a documentary film screened on the television's channels. This freedom is automatically taken away from individuals and even groups if it is in opposition with the majority's beliefs and limitations. The majority in the Middle East has a religious and conservative stance against secularism and considers it negative in term and in application. Damen says:

The problem is not only with the religious people or the Islamists, seculars also have the same problem in rejecting the other. There is an unawareness of the differences which leads to exclusion and hatred as well as adverse degrading look. This attitude has been in increase recently due to the political events in the Middle East region also the social media mediums had played a vital role in this too.

Damen choses the safe documentary approach in her films' treatment which is not always a preferred approach by the filmmakers³²². She makes a film which is suitable to be screened on the television channels. These films are historical, informative, clear and unproblematic which mainly depends on the archive and the interviews in an equal timeframe within the film. For instance, her film *Al-Nakba*³²³ which does not discuss the future of the Palestinian cause and was produced in accordance with the television safe policies. Damen said that she avoids controversial issues and "her job is to summarize the

³²² Rawan Damen. Interview with the author.

³²³ *Al-Nakta*. Directed by Rawan Damen. Al Jazeera, 2008.

information provided in 100 books and documents into fifty minutes”³²⁴. Her films *Al-Nakba*³²⁵, *The Bitter Peace*³²⁶, “The Homeland Owners” 2013, and “Oslo’s Price” 2013 can all be classified as safe documentaries for television. She says moving her hands in a movement which meant that controversial issues are many in the Middle East: “In my professional life I always chose to stand on the safe side when it comes to controversial issues”. She adds:

I prefer to work on topics that unify rather than other topics which filmmakers consider hot and spicy. I only thought about secularism in film for the first time when you approached me for your research, and I thought that I won’t make this film as it will open the fire as it will raise a critical debate in the society. This topic will open wounds rather presenting a real vision. However, the term will not work for a documentary film, and treating secularism means talking about seculars and their mistakes.

Damen as a documentary director who worked for a television channel made peace with its policies related to the film production. She decided to stand in the traditional and safe space in directing and producing films and avoided the controversial issues completely

³²⁴Al Hiwar Television. Interview with Rawan Damen. 8 September 2013 accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yh9_G0XSfoY.

³²⁵ *Al-Nakta*. Directed by Rawan Damen. Al Jazeera, 2008

³²⁶ *The Bitter Peace*. Directed by Rawan Damen, Al Jazeera, 2009

even those within her specialty of the Palestinian cause. For instance, she avoided discussing issues related to drugs or violence in the Palestinian community and the issue of the Israeli occupation agents. On the other hand, Damen as a filmmaker and with her long practical experience with a news television channel the size of Al Jazeera network, she recognizes the negative effect of the news and journalistic approach in the production of documentary films and consequently the effect on treating controversial issues like secularism in them. The political journalists dominate the industry of documentary filmmaking in the television channels if not as directors, then as producers or supervisors. They presume documentary film is a nothing but a long news reportage about the latest news and the audience's satisfaction remains their main filter in choosing the topic as in executing the documentary. Therefore, they tend to avoid the controversial issues which affect the viewing rates of the channel and creates a conflict with its audience. The speed is another important factor in the television news making which makes television journalists have little acquaintance with the controversial issues. They take the speed element with them to the documentary film making in their compete for the scoop which leads to a superficial treatment of the issue unlike the independent filmmakers who refuse this approach. Secularism for television journalists "could be treated in a talk show in the context of expanding the news about a political assassination for example, but without a thoughtful vision"³²⁷.

³²⁷ Rawan Damen Interview with the author

As the news hold an important position in the Arab satellite channels, journalists managing them “look down”³²⁸ at the documentary film, yet they understand that the news story life span is short and will not live more than two days at most, unlike the film which lives for tens of years. In an interview for Yaser Abuhilalah³²⁹ with Aramram channel in 2012³³⁰ he speaks about his wish to make documentary films. Abuhilalah at that time was one of the most important reporters for Al Jazeera television in the Middle East and the manager of its offices in Jordan. Setting on a bench with Amman’s mountains in the background talking to the camera about his experience a reporter covers war stories, his political and ideological beliefs he adds laughing: “In the future I would like to leave covering hot news and go for documentary filmmaking before I move on the cinema then novels writing... And maybe I will not do any of this”. Abuhilalah had accomplished his wish of becoming a documentary film director for films produced by al Jazeera, however, these films remained about the hot news stories in the Middle East with the same news approach in the treatment. Examples of Abuhilalah’s films: “Abdulla Azzam, the first Arab Afghan” and “Kill him in silece” about the assassination’s attempt of Hamas’s leader Khaled Mashaal³³¹.

³²⁸ Rawan Damen Interview with the author

³²⁹ Yaser Abuhilalah is a journalist and the former manager Al Jazeera Network in the period between 2014 and 2018

³³⁰ Abuhilalah, Yasser. “Who Is Yasser Abuhilalah.” Yasser Abuhilalah, Accessed at: www.yaserabuhilalah.com/. Accessed 3 July 2022

³³¹ Yaser Abuhilalah website: Accessed at: <https://www.yaserabuhilalah.com/?الرئيسية/من-هو-ياسر-أبو-هلاله؟>

Damen had worked in the newsrooms twice, the first during the Israeli war in Lebanon in 2006, and the second during the 25th of January Egyptian revolution in 2011. Due to the importance of the events, AL Jazeera decided to cancel all the shows including the documentaries to maintain the live broadcasting round the clock. Damen who was the first to see “Qana’s” massacre footage with the editor before it was broadcasted describes the work in the newsrooms as a difficult and brutal experience. She also described the journalists working in the televisions newsrooms as superficial but justified this with the nature of the news making and due to the events pressure. She articulated:

Speed is the master of the place and the pressure. After working experience in the newsroom during Lebanon war, I used to burst in tears the moment I arrive my car. Issues are understood differently in these rooms. The concern about an event or a certain topic in the television channels usually is linked to this atmosphere rather than the assumed political agenda of the reporter, the editor or the channel. The issue is simpler than expected as it is related to the newsrooms dynamic movement which is hard on the viewer to understand. It is an incinerator. Journalists are professional who have the language and the skill to cover events, but they are not enlightened.

In 2008, when Damen moved to manage the documentary films production through “Under the Microscope” show broadcast on Al Jazeera main, she found that documentary filmmakers were the journalists and the field reporters who make 50 minutes films of talking heads. Therefore, she had replaced them with freelancer filmmakers from different

countries in the Middle East which she followed up their production over months and sometimes years. Those freelancers made their films depending on a personal view and an aesthetic cinematic style which the journalists who are contained in the newsroom are incapable to conquer as they mostly do not have any cultural, artistic or theatrical interests. They probably not keen on reading books as they read the newspapers. This consequently is seen in their direct and superficial treatment of the issues in the documentary film in addition to the balanced and neutral news approach. Damen described her experience saying:

The content became different and competing in the films' festivals. Our films were translated and screens on Al Jazeera English. It was a good chance for the filmmakers in the Middle East to deliver their films to the world. The films were aired in China, translated to Spanish, and screen on Al Jazeera Balkans and presented issues from the Middle East through filmmakers from the region who have their own views and with an artistic side that cannot be mastered by journalists. Journalists cannot make a documentary film that compete because they are living the news and think with its logic.

Filmmakers seem to be highly influenced by the news making approach and the television formats when making films for the satellite channels. The difference in the documentary treatment approaches between journalists and filmmakers is tangible. News journalists take into consideration television policies, the audience and newsroom's rules

as restrains to their work. This shall lead to the superficial treatment of their film. on the other hand, filmmakers are concerned mainly with the cinematic and aesthetic styles of the films. They deal with their films as an essential part of their lives and as a reflection of their personal views. The filmmakers' work with the television channels in the Middle East made them avoid suggesting a controversial issue like secularism to their supervisors because they are aware of the nature of the content screened on the channels and based on their experience of the contracts the television channels conduct with the production companies and what films they request. In addition to understanding the television channels stance and audience's taste, the filmmakers need to neutralize their visions and restrict the story and scenes of their films with the others' views and use the news camera shot. Having all these restrains, filmmakers will definitely avoid making or even suggesting a topic like secularism not only due to the uncertainty of approving the idea, but also due to the difficulty in treating it with accordance to the news values and the channels policies. Rawan Damen talked about the effect of replacing the team working on the documentary films from the television journalists to freelancer filmmakers and how this affected the content of the proposed film as well the treatment approach and the aesthetic style, however, "Secularism" was not suggested to her from any filmmaker despite their nationality or society in the Middle East. Damen said: "During the ten years of my work as a documentary producer in Al Jazeera main, I have produced 250 films. I used to receive 100 ideas from 100 filmmakers a month. But I haven't received any direct idea from any filmmaker about secularism."³³²

³³² Damen. Interview with the author

On the other hand, Damen's experience as a filmmaker and producer for Al Jazeera documentaries reflects an unrestricted space of freedom she touched personally as she articulated. She was able to screen few of her films without having them monitored by the channel. She was the only one who watched her films *Al-Nakba*³³³ and *The Bitter Peace*³³⁴ before they were aired for millions of views. At the end of *The Bitter Peace*³³⁵ film, although Damen had used a critique poem for an opposing Iraqi poet who describes the presidents and the leaders in the Arab countries with bulls in his comedy-political verses, yet, no one from the channel had questioned her after. About this she said:

My experience with Al Jazeera was extremely positive. No one interfered in my films or the films I have produced. I have never been asked about the guests or the topics. I understood back then one of Al Jazeera's secrets which is the producer is the chief editor with the given space of freedom. I had experienced this myself as I had a golden space of freedom. It could be due to my disciplined nature or because I have worked with an educated programs manager. Probably other colleagues had different experiences.³³⁶

³³³ *Al-Nakta*. Directed by RawanDamen. Al Jazeera, 2008

³³⁴ *The Bitter Peace*. Directed by Rawan Damen, Al Jazeera, 2009

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Damen. Interview with the author

Despite the level of freedom given by Al Jazeera channel to the media professionals working for it, which makes filmmakers and journalists believe they are their own chef editors according to Damen, but this freedom stops at the majorities' stance in the Middle East about the proposed issues, the audience's beliefs and the society's traditions. Therefore, freedom is protected only as long as it is in accordance with the majority's opinion and the filmmaker's view should not appear in the film especially if it represents a minority's view in the society which is the case of secularism despite of the positive or neutral stance of the film producers from it. A topic like secularism in the film for the televisions can only be treated within a comparison frame with the majority's views and stance and anything against that should be referred to as an anomaly stance in the society or the view of a small group. This treatment of secularism in the film like in *Seculars in Lebanon* could be considered a hidden censorship or prohibition under the attractive title of a documentary which is the truths and reality genre in the cinema. The film's description on the production company's Facebook page mentioned it presents the reality, however, the reality in this context is equivalent to the prevailing views of the majority in the society. The minority's views have less chances to be presented on the screens, and it cannot be presented in the same level of freedom as the majority's views as it should always be announced that it is an anomaly view to satisfy the audience. Although television channels do not have list of the forbidden topics for producing the documentaries, the channels producers and filmmakers who like to work the televisions develop a state of allegiance to the institution and to the audiences' stance which imposes an unannounced censorship and filtration processes on their production.

Private successful channels unlike public televisions might not have a monitoring department for the shows or films before its broadcasted which sequentially indicates a wider space of freedom given to its staff. However, filmmaker know that certain topics will not be accepted by the television without including it in a list. Damen didn't deny that a sense of self-censorship by the films' producers exist, for instance, Al Jazeera does not work on social topics related to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and "A topic about women's rights in The United Arab Emirates will not pass"³³⁷. Hence, filmmakers and production supervisors based on their understanding of the channels limitations and policies, add a filtering layer to surpass the controversial issues even before suggesting it to their managements³³⁸. Moreover, independent filmmakers who like their films to be screens on the televisions and reach their audience become reluctant to make suggestions about controversial issues to the television producers understanding what can be marketed and screened based on their observations of what the television's show on their screens. Making a film about secularism is kind of a risk for a filmmaker who is looking for professional chance or a financial profit with the television channels in the Middle East. This hidden censorship makes a topics like secularism not a preferred choice by either the filmmakers or the producers.

³³⁷ Damen. Interview with the author

³³⁸ Damen. Interview with the author

Reem Bader

Reem Bader³³⁹ is an independent documentary films distributor in addition to being the founder and director at Minaa and the Creative documentary platform. Bader worked with the Royal Film Commission from 2006 till 2012 as a manager for the filmmakers training and support programs. Bader who has a master's degree in visual studies from England, had worked in fields of using art in supporting human rights and children's development before establishing Minaa in 2012 which aims to support the independent documentary filmmakers in the Middle East and make their films reach a broad audience around the world. I met Bader in Minaa office in Amman Jordan in February 2018. The interview was relatively short as she decided to surpass some of the interview's questions saying they were out of her practical experience circles like the television production and the news story questions. Her answers were specific, direct and formal. The personal side was absent in her answers as well as examples. Bader as a distributor has a clear a brief stance from the proposed issues either the theoretical meaning of secularism or the treatment approach in the film and the media unlike the filmmakers' common answers.

Bader seemed completely neutral towards secularism, for her it was just a point of view. She believes that everyone has the right to adopt a stance or a belief or be neutral: "Recently in the Middle East, both antipodes are present, seculars and religious individuals.

³³⁹ See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

But some groups are “Neutrals” and seeks a normal life”. Secularism did not seem a priority neither on the personal nor the societal dimension. She articulated that the priority for the Middle East region is the political, humanitarian, and economic stability which have been missed for a long time. Bader considers the art in general and cinema in particular a good chance to change people, as varied thoughts and views is an important factor in the societal development. She has a goal of making independent documentary film reach audiences, especially creative documentaries which arouse debates in the society and have less chances to be seen due the television channels policies in the Middle East which disregard this form of production to avoid any conflict or criticism. The television channels are conservative institutions which avoid any analysis of the political and economic situations and prefer safe documentaries. They seek high viewing rates and selling commercials unlike independent film producers who seek bravery and thoughts stimulation.

Bader as a media professional and film distributor said that she didn't watch or hear a film that present secularism directly in the Middle East and refers this to the televisions' policies and the monitoring strategies used against the documentary production alleging that documentary genre does not have an audience. However, the case is different with the independent film producers who believe that documentary film has the elite audience and confined in festivals and private screenings. Bader as a manager of an independent film's platform, does not differentiate between the film topics and the filmmakers approaches when choosing a film, also she does not impose any sort of censorship on the films she distributes. She wants all stances to be present in the cinema. Bader believes that

filmmakers who are keen to make their films reach the audience and to be screened on the televisions perform an auto-censorship³⁴⁰ processes on their films. She articulated that independent documentary films which made with a wider scale of freedom remains locked in the bottom drawers. It might be screened in festivals in Europe, but its chances to reach the audience in the Middle East is very little and this is a great loss.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ Reem Bader. Interview with the author

³⁴¹ Reem Bader. Interview with the author

Jihad Abu Falah

Jihad Abu Falah³⁴² is a television producer who worked in the media field in the Middle East and England for over twenty years. He has worked in written journalism, radio and TV news, and TV production since 2007. Abu Falah showed an interest in the research topic when I first approached him based on a recommendation from a colleague. I interviewed him in his office in London in a building that contains several visual and documentary production companies including Al Hiwar satellite channel which classified as close to the Political Islam.

Abu Falah introduced secularism as a positive political and social ideology which respects religions but keeps it away from the political life. He confirmed that secular ideology preserves the freedom to believe and to practice worships and rituals in the society and referred to the Europe experience in separating the religion and its practices from the state and the democratic and parties' life. Abu Falah who finds in secularism a possible solution for the Middle Eastern issues, articulated that secularism remains one of the taboos in the Arab societies. He said: "It's almost an infidelity" like communism and other new ideologies. Introduce or treating it in the media is quite difficult and needs an indirect approach unlike the religious topics which can easily be marketed and discussed in a program or a film. Abu Falah recognizes that tackling secularism in the Middle East is like going against the current and those who work in media shall fear the audience and take their acceptance and desire to watch or listen to his production into consideration. He said

³⁴² See Appendix Six: Figures – Interviewees / Filmmakers.

that there are thousands of television channels targeting the Middle East audience, and hundreds of religious channels which divides society using religious speech. Targeting certain religious groups whether they are a majority or a minority, consequently, shall result in excluding other groups. Playing the sectarianism and the beliefs belongings card is very easy in the media unlike presenting a collective speech that does not divide the society and separates the religion from the politics.³⁴³

Abu Falah justifies the news channels policies in production describing it as professionalism. Presenting opposing views equally on the television in a balanced manner is considered a confirmation that free speech is a right for everyone. He said that professionalism in producing television programs and news is in imposing a balanced attitude where varied views and stances and guests should be represented equally. He continues that in the Middle East for instance there are Islamists, communists, liberals as many other political ideologies, there for the guests hosted in a program should represent these different views, moreover, a balance in the picture and the sound is necessary to be taken into consideration as well when producing a television reportage. He gave an example about a reportage made about the Egyptian presidential elections after the 25th of January 2012 and that he gave each candidate 15 seconds despite his party. He believes that professionalism in television is to show the diversity in society to encourage accepting the other in light of the various stances and ideologies in the Middle East. He deems that his job as a television producer oblige him to protect the right of free speech and to presents

³⁴³ Jihad Abu Falah. Interview with the author

different views as well as allowing new ideas with new insight to present itself to the audience.

Abu Falah considers documentary films a bold and efficient medium to present societal issues far from religious, because religion presence in any topic settles the argument in its favor. He said that people have become anesthetized before religions as they are driven creatures when it comes to the society's problems and rewarded with heaven if they were patient. This thought is used by the regimes especially the dictator ones to enforce its power over the society. Therefore, media should make shocks sometimes because shocks are more capable to make a change in the societies.³⁴⁴

Televisions treatment of secularism is superficial. It revolves around the ideas in general and doesn't dig deep. Abu Falah articulated:

Secularism is a culture just like democracy, and the environments which had been suppressive for decades cannot change into democratic over a night due to one event. Secularism is manifestations where you have to mention the democracy, the society, women, and children in a distance from the religious individuals and clergy's power. However, production companies in the Middle East fill in the event's follow up trap to expand the news. They cannot treat secularism ideology and handle the consequences of the debate it generates, therefore it failed in this industry as it pledged itself to the capital and what can be marketed to the audience.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ Abu Falah. Interview with the author

³⁴⁵ Abu Falah. Interview with the author

Abu Falah said that production companies look at the film as a product to sell not to store. Since the producer is the television channel, the filmmaker has to comply with its policies and limitations which are clear, and the alternative is making a film independently for the family and friends. Abu Falah said that televisions in the Middle East are not concerned in screening a film about secularism and their audience is not concerned as well to view it. The televisions' audience according to Abu Falah likes bubbly topics, the notable news events and to expand within the news. Their taste is formed by the news which successively affect the production decision. On the other hand, Abu Falah argued that televisions can be adventurous sometime and change their production and screen different material to their audience which consecutively shall change the audience's taste like what happened in the sixties and seventies of the last century, however, filmmakers keep the audience and the channels policies in their minds when they make a film for the television. Rawan Damen mentioned that during her 10 years work as a documentary producer at Al Jazeera channel, she hasn't received any film or a suggestion of film with a direct treatment for secularism which agrees Abu Falah's that filmmakers play a great role alongside the channels when dealing with the audience.

The producers I interviewed for the purpose of this research, seemed to have a positive stance on secularism. Their ideological backgrounds either agree with its concept either by identifying themselves as Arab nationals like Rawan Damen or by being close from the left ideologies like Jihad Abu Falah. However, their professional practices within the media institutions came in consistent with the television channels limitations and the

audience's beliefs. They have justified their professional approach once by describing it a necessity to explore the reality and the truth and to avoid exaggerating a lightweight view in the street, and another by saying it is their work's needs and that filmmakers live an internal conflict between their jobs and their personal beliefs. Television producers choose to comply with the channels policies and formats when presenting an issue like secularism and they perform a sort of self-censorship developed from their understanding of their works environment's needs. They tend to be professionally committed to comply the journalistic and news format and present the opposing views considering this the ultimate they can offer to treat an issue like secularism on the television. However, they admit that these limitation and formats used by the television channels lead to an unproper shallow product that doesn't discuss new ideas or create a debate among the audience which consequently shall not make a change in the society in the Middle East. The television formats and limitations make the documentary film a tool to serve the news and the political events in the news story's style with its cliches and noticeable bright colors that attracts the audience.

5.2.3 Secularism and documentary production for the TV: Filmmakers views

The majority and the audience are not in the centre of the independent filmmakers' interests unlike the television producers and filmmakers. Moreover, their films are not made to serve an event and in the context of expanding the news. Independent filmmakers are not confined by the channels' limitations and the televisions formats, on the contrary

they stand on a different ground when it comes to choose their films' story which is their personal lives. Their lived lives and personal stances and questions despite its consensual with the others or not are considered a cornerstone in the story and the treatment of the film. Their films are part of their souls and a personal point of view and not a press cut limited by the balance and unbiased values as well as the others' views.

Rania Rafei had made several films for Al Jazeera channel about students' movements in the Arab world in the form of the classic documentary before making her film 74. She said that the requested productions orders used written journalistic expressions: "They want Banner Headlines, with sensational titles. They wanted a Hollywood movie which stimulates the Arab's emotions."³⁴⁶ 74 is different from the previous television documentaries she made as it did not have to follow any news formats or television policies as she used to do before. She wanted to make a film that complies with a personal desire as a filmmaker about an internal question which keeps arising about Lebanon's secularism based on a student incident in the American University of Beirut. Rafei was introduced to the incident during her work on another film for the television about the students' movements which she was not entirely satisfied about its content. She expressed her indisposition to the content saying:

We were devastated knowing that there isn't a real question in the content of the film we were making of an actual controversial issue, and the details were superficial. The history was presented as a bedtime story for a child. Therefore, I

³⁴⁶ Rania Rafei. Interview with the author

decided to make a film about the student's movement but with a question raising from inside me about the secularity of Lebanon. I felt its useless to make a documentary for the television where it's not allowed to present a controversial issue and have to present a trivial tale with superficial treatment. Good guys and bad guys, a winning group and loosing group.³⁴⁷

The documentary filmmakers are subject to the television producers' requirements whence the subject, the content, and the techniques when making a film for the television. Despite the lack of demand on documentary film in the Middle East, and as the filmmakers aim to get involved in the media industry, they found an unprecedented opportunity with the gulf satellite channels which have a huge capital to buy or produce documentaries for the television to be screened in the Middle East. Although independent filmmakers were not entirely satisfied with their films made for the televisions, this was a dual golden opportunity for any director as they can make a decent income in addition to the opportunity to show their work to the public. These channels not only show their produced film on their own screens, but also has the tendency to translate it and screen it to other televisions and expand onto other audiences outside the Middle East Region. This opportunity enables the filmmaker to remain active in the industry or as Rafei articulated: "Keeps one's head above the water"³⁴⁸.

³⁴⁷ Rania Rafei. Interview with the author

³⁴⁸ Rania Rafei. Interview with the author

Documentary filmmakers in the Middle East are facing difficulties not only with the television channels, but also the executive producers in the private local production companies who are contracted or in partnership with the television channels and have similar philosophies and principles as their production satellite channel. They as well have conservative views regarding the controversial issues which limit the independent filmmaker's creativity work. The filmmakers who mostly have a diverse and open-minded views from the collective ones in the society are subject to the conservative and superficial treatment approach which aims to stimulate the audiences feeling rather creating a debate in the society. Rafei gave two examples of the censorship imposed by the production companies. She said that after the filmmakers submit their work, the companies give their comments for a compulsory modification as a condition to accept the film. In her experience with an Egyptian production company for a production made for *Al Jazeera*, Rafei made a film about the Syrian performing dance group "Inanna" and filmed their practices and dances. The production company returned the film and requested her to delete the Russian dancer's scenes with a comment saying: "Please delete the instructors' scenes with the sexual indications". Her second experience was in a film about the Lebanese artists Ayman Baalbki which she executed from the research phase till the editing. The executive producer requested her to delete the artists earring from all the films frames. The artist wears an earring and known with his look which is shown in all his photos. However, Rafei was told that: "This is against our Islamic values and morals"³⁴⁹ and that she needs to treat the scenes which show the earring if she wishes her film to be screened.

³⁴⁹ Rafei. Interview with the author

However, Rafei for her first independent film decided to make a film for the elite which does not comply with the television production policies and limitation. Her film is a mixture of genres: narrative, documentary, and theatre. She used improvised conversations between the film's characters and spontaneous answers given direct to the camera in a confrontation with the viewer. These terrifying scenes are entirely refused by the television producers. The film reenacted the students strike of the American University of Beirut in 1974 as it presents questioning scenes by the films characters to their roles, where their real personalities are mixed up with the characters they play. Rafei decided to raise secularism question through an experimental documentary film rather a television documentary as she believes it's not the place for the filmmakers to show their views or search for secularism³⁵⁰.

Filmmakers believe in the cinema's capacity to discuss the controversial issues away from the superficial treatment imposed by the televisions for the audience. Secularism cannot be treated fairly and directly on televisions because televisions are one of regimes medium and arms in the societies, and secularism is considered dangerous on the regimes in the Middle East. Introducing and treating secularism on television using the television formats and the journalistic approach is a form of a hidden censorship on the filmmakers which makes the documentary film a trivial indoctrination show if not a trial against secularism by the authorities. Filmmakers believe in that making a film independently provides a broad scale freedom and creative atmosphere which allows a mature treatment of secularism and free the documentary film from the tedious frame imposed by the

³⁵⁰ Rafei. Interview with the author

television channels. However, they recognize the crucial problem with the independent film audience which make a film with a different vision and a cinematic approach become like the one who speaks to himself. This type of films is confined to the intellectual elites of the audience and its screening chances are limited which makes the whole process of making it as articulated by Rafei "Tasteless!".

Televisions in Lebanon are sectarian channels where secularism is harmful to the sects influence and interests. Secularism can be allowed on talk shows on television to give vent, but the treatment is dishonest and superficial.³⁵¹

Televisions are the regimes voices. Regimes hate secularism. Regimes protect different aspects which guarantee its continuity and dominance like the sectarianism, feudalism, and social stratification. Televisions will not allow you to present your research about secularism because it is against the regime's dedicated speech. The films presented to the televisions are comedian films rather documentaries. These films make everything superficial and trivial. It "lies" when presenting history. It makes it look trivial like when it is presenting it to children.

³⁵¹ Rafei. Interview with the author

Therefore, it is hard to present a film to this platform. Televisions in the Arab regions to me recently are suppressive.³⁵²

Jumana Saadeh talked about her experience working with a production company in Istanbul managed by a journalist who used to work for Al Jazeera. Saadeh said that she shocked at the approach she was requested to use when making the documentaries. She was asked to use the televisions' formats and to present the opposing views in the society in the film but not the filmmaker's view. She said that the productions companies seek a flat rich report without a depth: "Journalists do not understand the cinema making. They request a news reportage from a film director... Documentaries are made with layers and tell stories." Saadeh had noticed the regional alliances which creates political limitation in the production. These alliances suggested topics that feed the majority's emotions in the Middle East like the strong relations between Ankara and Doha and the political Islam with the Turkish government which consider Turkey an Islamic historical reference associated with the ottoman ruling. Films like "Jerusalem in Ottoman eyes" and "Arabic Handwriting in Istanbul" are the type of films that do not escalate any debates. Conversely, Saadeh said that proposing a topic which needs a deeper intellectual treatment like teaching the Arabic handwriting in Istanbul as an Ottoman writing shall be refused by the production companies

³⁵² Rafei. Interview with the author

under the pretext of these topics will not be purchased by the television: “Will not work for Al Jazeera”³⁵³.

³⁵³ Jumana Saadeh. Interview with the author

5.3 Self-censorship

5.3.1 Family and Society: limitations created by the cultural and its effect on the filmmakers' treatments approaches

Limitations exist in response to different sources of power which can be found in society. Foucault stated that "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."³⁵⁴ Few filmmakers exercise an emotional instinctive form of censorship connected with their close surroundings which are their family and friends. These surroundings are present in the minds of the filmmakers during their cinematic work either due to the influence of these people on the filmmaker or due to the filmmaker's respect and appreciation ethos towards the family and parents precisely which is admired and highly valued in the eastern societies. The family's influence in these societies is extended and interferes in the individuals' lives and their personal choices like increasing the age average for living in the family house.

Saadeh talked confidently about her freedom as a filmmaker in choosing what she presents in her films. The films' story, its humanitarian dimension and how attached she is to it are her main concerns. However, she said that she always tries to deliver her thoughts

³⁵⁴ Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. pp 93

and criticism without provoking the conservative majority in the society. She seemed thinking and reviewing stories and relations in the filmmaking industry's atmosphere before she drew a smile in her face clarifying: "Honestly, I don't have the guts to present something against the Arab society's beliefs. I say what I want but without provoking them. there are much braver filmmakers who live in their own bubble and don't care!".³⁵⁵ Saadeh's reluctance stopped me. I asked her about the size of society's sphere she's keen not to provoke. She articulated that the audience and the conservative society are not within her circles of interests as a filmmaker. The party she cares about precisely is her mother. Saadeh has a strong relationship with her mother although she does not agree with her intellectually. This relationship seems present in all Saadeh films as she imposes a form of censorship when she makes a film to avoid any clashes with her mother's references. This strong emotional relation and her mother's love and respect is reflected in secularism treatment in her films.

I have a strong relation with my mother, and I cannot be disconnected from her for a moment. When I make a film, I think about mother. My mother is a conservative religious lady, but this does not contradict with her being very clever. My mother knows that I am not religious, and she accepts me as I am. She is always present in my subconscious, when I treat an issue in my films, I imagine the conversation I might have with her later about my treatment approach. I don't want to provoke

³⁵⁵ Jumana Saadeh. Interview with the author

her. It's like a make the film for her to watch it. I discuss any topics with my mother but the special approach. The approach is what I use in my films.³⁵⁶

Saadeh said that she discussed secularism with her mother openly before and she that had expressed her rejection of the religious state and criticized the religious ruling and conservative views, but the conversations usually ended up with laughs. The family's positive and warm presence in the filmmakers' lives became a reference when treating secularism with Saadeh as she avoids criticizing the religion and its sacred institutions. This form of censorship which is applied out of respect and without pressure, fear, or direct guidance remains classified as a sort of power on the filmmaker. The filmmaker might choose or eliminate certain topics or scenes in the film based on this power and might choose to treat it directly or indirectly in his or her film. In *Trêve: A Time To Rest* film by Miriam El-Hajj, she denied considering her treatment for certain scenes in the film as self-censorship on the film. She said this treatment came out of the source's protection ethos and not because she was under the family's influence. In the scene where Miriam discusses Sabra and Shatela's massacres with the film's protagonist (Her uncle Rhyad) and her father, and as the discussions heated mentioning details with sectarian indications, Miriam's father leaves the locations and requests the camera man to stop filming immediately. Miriam responded to her father's request and stopped filming, but she didn't delete the scene. However, she admitted eliminating a few scenes and deleted certain stories mentioned in

³⁵⁶ Saadeh. Interview with the author

the film's characters testimonies justifying this that these stories might hurt them or make them look like monsters in the eyes of the audience. She considers that the filmmakers have the duty of protecting their resources. She said that her film about condemning sectarianism and the religious war and that she is not looking for a hit story like in the news making, as she is not in a position to judge the characters deeds. Miriam said that freedom is the source of all art subject including the documentary, however, boldness might be harmful. She believes that documentary film shouldn't be taken towards the feeling provoking direction as in the Hollywoodian style which superficially classifies people either good or bad.

El-Hajj's film was about the civil war and sectarianism in Lebanon, and the films characters were her close circle of family member. She considers her family's sect which she belongs to mainly responsible of the starting the civil war in Lebanon and its later consequences, which gave her more confidence saying that her treatment of the films' scenes in the editing phases was based on protecting her resources ethos as any journalist and denying the self-censorship practice there. She said: "My cause in *Trêve: A Time To Rest* was about the sectarian ideology which made a war. It was about the veterans who got involved in an ambiguous case which led them to nowhere". El-Hajj articulated that she was not concerned or familiar with the censorship scheme in Lebanon or the issues filmmakers usually stop at when she made her film *Trêve: A Time To Rest* as it was made in the beginnings of her career path in the filmmaking industry. Miriam's film was screened in the cinema in Beirut and was discussed with the audience, which is an indicator that filmmakers sometime create their own limits and impose certain censorship practices on their film

presuming that the audience or the society shall reject their film if included or treated certain topics in a certain way.

On the other hand, producers at the television channels and in production companies are affected by social media stances when choosing the film's topics unlike the independent filmmakers who chose their films based on their personal interests not concerned about the hot topics or the hits like news reporters. Rawan Damen mentioned this point when she defined secularism and how she immediately thought about the feedback on twitter and said "labeled" referring to the filmmaker if chose to introduce secularism in the film in the Middle East. Independent filmmakers don't seem to be concerned about the audience and majority's stance from the issues they are interested in. Conversely, television producers are affected by audiences' stances. They look at the documentary film as a ballot box and the cinema industry as democratic process. The democracy as the term and the centralized political debate in the Middle East between all parties; the authorities and the opposition and between the different ideologies. The Middle Eastern democracy version limited to an unguaranteed impartial election process with unequal opportunities. Consequently, the cinema making to the television channels is not a personal point of view of the filmmaker rather is what the democracy accepts. Therefore, the different and controversial views like secularism are looked at as a view of a minority or subgroup in the society which has no chance to reach the screens' audience. The only chance for these films with the distinct views is to be in consistent with the television channels limitations where it can be evaluated and judged immediately within

itself of the audience's acceptance and to be presented superficially in order not to generate any debates in the society after its screened. This "election" and open voting on the issues and films ideas had increased in the recent twenty years as the social media mediums became a pressure power in the Middle East societies especially after the Arab spring revolutions and appraisals. Studies suggests that social media has a negative effect on the film's success.³⁵⁷

The social media applications had witnessed campaigns demanding films to be withdrawn and requesting to penalize the filmmaker.³⁵⁸ These campaigns are monitored by the television producers and managements and became their focus of attention and concern sometimes. In 2021 *Amira*³⁵⁹ a drama film directed by the Egyptian filmmaker Mohammed Diab was withdrawn from the Oscar nomination³⁶⁰ after being targeted on the social media in the hashtag "#Pull_Out_Amira"³⁶¹ which became a trend and the director

³⁵⁷ Julianne Treme & Zoe VanDerPloeg. "The Twitter Effect: Social Media Usage as a Contributor to Movie Success," *Economics Bulletin, AccessEcon*, 2014vol. 34(2), pages 793-809.

³⁵⁸ "Hashtag: "Withdraw Amira film" take the lead in the social media" Article on France24 website. 10 December 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/ar/-/هاشتاغ-اسحبوا-فيلم-20211210/برامج/باب-الويب/20211210-هاشتاغ-اسحبوا-فيلم-20211210>
[أميرة-بتصدر-مواقع-التواصل](#)

³⁵⁹ *Amira*. Directed by Mohammad Diab. Independent. 2020

³⁶⁰ "Amira film: Withdrawn from the Oscars nominations and its cast react toward the accusations of offending the "freedom ambassadors" and the Palestinian captives in the Israeli prisons" Article on BBC news Arabic. 8th December 2021. Accessed at:

³⁶¹ "Hashtag: "Withdraw Amira film" take the lead in the social media" Article on France24 website. 10 December 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/ar/-/هاشتاغ-اسحبوا-فيلم-20211210/برامج/باب-الويب/20211210-هاشتاغ-اسحبوا-فيلم-20211210>
[أميرة-بتصدر-مواقع-التواصل](#)

and cast were accused with treachery. The film was alleged with offending the Palestinian captives in the Israeli Prisons. *Amira* was filmed in Jordan and revolves about sperms smuggling of the Palestinian captives in the Israeli prisons and how it reaches the captive's family and wife and how the intrauterine insemination process happens.³⁶² The film tackles "the freedom children" story as it's called in Palestine by telling the story of adolescent Amira who were born through smuggled sperm from her captivate father. It is a story accompanied with pride in the Palestinian society as the girl is the daughter of a champion. Later on in the film, the girl knows that her real father was the Israeli prison guard rather than the Palestinian prisoner who turned to be sterile.

Although the film presents one of the Palestinian captives matters and show their struggle in a cinematic style and it was announced by the director that the tale is fictional, yet the film and the crew were subject to a public backlash before it was screened. They were accused by undermining the Palestinian cause and question the captives' honor. Women's honor and decent questioning is a critical and sensitive social issue in the Middle East; therefore, *Amira* film is a fit example of looking at the cinema as a democratic act. The majority in the society used its power against an artwork by an election process that took place on Twitter. The film's producers took a decision to stop the screening of the film and to withdraw it from the Oscars nomination submissions even before it was screened on any television channel or platform under the public's pressure which started when few

³⁶² Hrb, Hajar. "Amira Film." *Al-Quds Al-Arabi Newspaper*, 8 Dec. 2012, www.alquds.co.uk/-فيلم-أميرة-يطعن-خاصة-/.
/الأسرى-الفلسطيني

journalists condemned it after a private screening in Al Karameh festival for human rights
in Amman -Jordan.

5.3.2 Superficial and safe description of secularism as a form of censorship:

Replacement of secularism term and Audience's Taste

Jihad Abu Falah used the term "Democracy" repeatedly and almost in most of his answers to my questions in the interview which was about documentary and secularism. He was replacing the term in a spontaneous manner in his speech as he was treating the controversial term for the audience as a television journalist and producer. The recorded interview seemed to be about democracy rather than secularism. However, Abu Falah considers both ideologies as one, as he sees it is impossible to change into democracy over a night after years of suppression. Moreover, he talked about democracy and its ideology as vital consequence of the change in the society. He believes that democracy is part of the secular system.

The political Palestinian intellectual Azmi Bishara, in a Lecture from Carthage presidential palace in Tunisia in 2012,³⁶³ talked about replacing "Secularism" as a term with "Democracy" to avoid the negative spark the term lights in the Islamic atmosphere, he said:

The American democracy, the European enlightenment movement and the scientific revolutions all passed without using secularism term. The issue not a prejudice to

³⁶³ Azmi Bishara. Lecture from Carthage presidential palace in Tunisia before Muncéf Marzouki the first elected president of Tunisia after Ben Ali's regime was overthrown, in the presence of Tunisian politicians. In the forefront Rached Ghannouchi, the cofounder of the Islamic Ennahda Party. Lecture title: "The historical contexts for secularism emergence".

the term. Therefore, let's talk about the democracy today since there is a negative charge released by the term "Secularism" in the Islamic atmosphere due to the ambiguous relation between the west and the Islamic civilization caused by the colonialization. If a polarization happened between a secular and religious individual in the evening of the democratic transformation, this could be a recipe for a civil war rather the democratic pluralism.³⁶⁴

Avoid treating secularism in the media and documentary film is a part of the attempts made to avoid clashing with the political Islam and the conservative Sunni Muslim majority in the Middle East. This majority considers secularism as a western project in feud with Islam or an outsider theory different from the regions culture and only represents a minor group view. hence the alteration of secularism with democracy which appeared as a result right after the Arab Spring by national and secular intellectuals in a frame of allying with the Political Islam that enforced itself in the course of the revolutions and its candidates took over the political seen and the election in many counties in the region.

Television producers like Jihad Abu Falah and Rawan Damen recognizes within the frame of their profession which they are accustomed to the nature of the television and satellite channels policies and the audience's stances which have the biggest weight in the production equation. Therefore, they apply the self-censorship on every direct or deep

³⁶⁴ Residence TN. "Dr Azmi Bishara." *www.youtube.com*, 21 May 2012, Accessed on 30 Jun 2022 Accessed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7c5reX2H94

treatment for secularism issues in the film despite their personal stance from secularism. This automatic self-censorship technique became automatic and present in the work and even the speech of the television producers.

On the other hand, the interviewed independent filmmakers were able to distinguish between secularism and democracy and considered them two different ideologies with different outcomes. They don't see in the general practices of the democracy in the public sphere a solution for the problems in the societies and countries in the Middle East. El-Hajj for instance refuses to replace secularism's debate with a debate about democracy or using an indirect approach in treating secularism issues in the film. She said: "In the revolutions in 2005 in Lebanon we demanded secularism and faced the same issue as we were asked to replace it with the democracy as it shall increase the participation intensity in the streets unlike secularism which scares everybody". Yet, she believes that the change in the speech shall not change the poor real rather than a continuity of the old speech which was responsible of the civil war and sectarianism in the society. She adds stressing on the letters and enunciate the words before the camera: "We are tired of the blackout and the terminology. We must present the stories as they are."

Hady Zaccak who succeeded in his indirect approach in treating secularism in his documentary films and to screen it on the satellite channels with its excessive limitations and conservative audience, agree with El-Hajj on the point of turning around secularism and replace it with the democracy in the documentary film. Zaccak seemed displeased when I suggested the democracy as an alternative for secularism and an intermediate solution to overcome the conflict with the conservative majority of the audience. He articulated that

relates the democracy with the western colonial plan in the Middle East which started with occupying Iraq in 2003 under what was called by the former United States president George W. Bush spreading the democracy project up to the Arab Spring and its successive reflections, as the democracy wave increased, and the result was a expanding the Lebanese sectarian model over the region's countries and an acute retreat of secularism. Zaccak doesn't refer to secularism in his film in a way which provoke the television's audience, however, he is keen to use quotes of eastern and western intellectuals about secularism in the opening scenes. Zaccak considers secularism and democracy completely different ideologies and projects and presenting democracy in his films shall not generate the deliberate debate about secularism in the society.

5.4 Conclusion

Foucault summarized the negative effect of the power on individuals saying: "We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'." ³⁶⁵ Producing a documentary film for news channels in the Middle East requires to abide by the policies and formats set by these channels. Those policies and protocols are general and renowned by the production companies selling to television channels; however, it directly and indirectly affects the production process and the treatment of a topic like secularism in the film as it

³⁶⁵ Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison*. London, Penguin. 1991. P 194

is considered a form of censorship and governance over the production and the filmmaker. Television channels look at the documentary film as a long news story and a form of journalism rather a cinematic genre that belongs to fine arts. Foucault recognizes that power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces people to do things against their wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society.³⁶⁶ Therefore, filmmakers find themselves under pressure to comply with channels' visions supervised by the journalists to overcome this power limitation if they wish their films to be screened on the television. They are also obliged to make huge efforts and treat their films cleverly in case they desire to present vital issues with different views on a controversial issue to the majority like secularism in the Middle East. They should use the indirect approach in their films treatment and stay away from any conflicts with the channels' limitations and the majority of the audience's beliefs. They are also required to find solutions to protect their films' cinematic and aesthetic styles while keeping the news formats.

Filmmakers in the Middle East are trying to make films which understands the human and the history from their perspective different from the prevailing media approach. They believe documentaries with its cinematic techniques provide them with a broader scale of freedom away from the truth centralization, the subjectivity values, and final cut answers in the news. These values make an unrealistic superficial product. Filmmakers are

³⁶⁶ John Gaventa, *Power after Lukes: a review of the literature*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. 2003

keen to make films that document their views and won't die unlike the authorities, the regulations and the censorship that change by time. The filmmakers were able to make their films about secularism reach the televisions audience after years of experience despite of the television formats and channels policies limitations by using the clever cinematic techniques and the indirect treatment which can embrace the news style and the conservative television policies.

Films live for tens of years, while news stories last for couple of days only. The soviet pioneer documentary film director Dziga Vertov's film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) has lived for tens of years and remains a unique experiment in the filmmaking industry and one of the greatest films of all time. Despite this, the film was criticized at its time of release because of its revolutionised editing approaches, its content and the self-reflection and for considering Vertov's films part of the communist party propaganda. Television news on the other hand burns before it cools down. The audience might remember the news story when the journalist is the subject of the news like Frank Gardner the BBC reporter who was critically injured in an attack in Riyadh in 2004. or Tareq Ayyoub, Al Jazeera TV correspondent who was killed by the US air force targeted Al Jazeera offices in Baghdad in 2003, but mostly nobody remembers their reportages.

Foucault's approach to power transcends politics and sees it as an everyday, socialized and embodied phenomenon. He is pointing to the ways that "norms can be so embedded as to be beyond our perception – causing us to discipline ourselves without any willful coercion from others". The self-censorship the producers impose on the documentary production on television is mainly obtained from the work environment

limitation. The chances that television channels may develop its policies into accepting the cinematic documentary film instead of the journalistic approach are not promising despite that the television producers seemed reconciled with secularism ideology and are unrestrained by the religious believes. Although documentary film reflects its filmmakers' point of view but making a film for the television remains a challenging process for the filmmakers as they need to comply with the television production formats, channels policies, the journalistic style and news values which all create layers of limitations. Moreover, Damen talked about a new approach the television and satellite channels internationally find more interesting and became a new trend in the media production industry which is the investigative documentary films. This type of documentary is a solidifying move towards making documentaries with news values and formats which makes the documentaries treating social and political issues in the society in a cinematic approach retreat in the industry. Al Jazeera channel which is considered by the filmmakers the biggest documentary producer in the Middle East became interested in the new form of the investigative documentary film with its political dimensions since 2014.

Away from the industry's limitations represented in television channels and production companies' censorship upon their screening policies, I have noticed another form of limitation the filmmakers are subject to which is the societal governance. This power is imposed by the culture, the religion, the family and even by the self. Although many filmmakers refused the concept of the censorship or denied being subject to the influence and power of the culture, the family, or the audience, their film's treatment reflect a different truth. They call the self-censorship they apply on their films differently. "Foucault believed in possibilities for action and resistance. [...] Therefore, power and resistance can

be sited within the discourse.”³⁶⁷ Deema Azar the Jordanian producer believes that documentary filmmakers do not need to impose any kind of censorship on their films because documentary is a different genre from the television programs and contradict with the purpose of making it. She said:

Talking about censorship and self- Censorship is rejected in principle as it contradicts with the question of why are we making our films? Every film is an idea and message. Although there is societal and cultural closure toward many topics, there is quite wide openness toward other many issues. Filmmakers don't say things directly because the documentary film is unlike any other genres in media and TV. Filmmakers are not like news journalists. “We have a wide space for manoeuvres which news story journalists don't have for example [...] The filmmakers should find viewers and audience to their films, and this is part of their success, however, to apply a censorship on my thought in order to sell to the televisions, this is not film making.”³⁶⁸

Powers³⁶⁹ argues that Foucault points out that norms are so embedded in ways that are beyond individuals' perception which causes them to discipline themselves without any

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Deema Azar. Interview with the author 2018

³⁶⁹ Penny Powers, “The Philosophical Foundations of Foucaultian Discourse Analysis”.

willful coercion from others. Filmmakers and television producers seem to practice this kind of self-censorship when choosing, treating, or accepting the films.

Documentary film in the Middle East can be said to be the elites' genre considering the limited audience compared to the other cinematic genres probably due to its nature as an ambiguous debatable visual production. However, Zaccak refuses to only present his documentary film to the elites as there is no point of treating secularism in a film if the filmmaker doesn't want his voice to be heard by most of the audience which is the television audience. He said:

Why would I make a film about secularism for 200 people from the elite who agree with my opinion? I wouldn't have done anything then! I want to reach the taxi driver in the city's streets, and the farmer in his land. I want my voice to reach everybody through my films. I don't want to create a new isolated sect of the intellectuals who believes it supersedes the other.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the definition of secularism from the point of view of documentary filmmakers and media professionals in the Middle East, as well as their approaches to secularism as a controversial issue in the region. I discussed this by examining the discourses of Middle Eastern documentary filmmakers and analysing their films. The study aimed to determine how, in their work, the filmmakers and the producer's articulate secularism and the approach they use to address and treat related issues to secularism. The study also explored the limitations facing filmmakers who address secularism in their films. In this conclusion, I will summarise the main findings of the research questions before outlining the contribution of the research in the literature and identifying possible future fruitful research areas. Finally, I will link the overall findings to the research's aims.

The Camera-recorded Academic Interviews as Research Methodology

I argue that video-recorded face-to-face interviews as a qualitative methodology tool in the research added a severe atmosphere to the interview setting, assuring the relativeness of the interviewees' answers to the research questions. Filmmakers are familiar with working with cameras as it is part of their daily lives. Therefore, video-recorded interviews generated a consistent and professional atmosphere for the filmmaker. In the

analysis phase, going back to the facial expressions and the body language the filmmakers used while answering the interview questions helped see the images and scenes the filmmakers illustrated with their narrative, providing deeper analysis and leading to vivid outcomes. Also, the documentary interview's method used instead of investigation or journalistic style, in addition to the open-ended questions of the research, allowed the interviewees the freedom to expand with their answers where they felt they needed to add more which granted the study with further data about the interviewee's views and how their perspectives had been formed. However, the language and translation remained a limitation in accurately transferring the wording and expressions related to the society's cultures.

In addition to the theoretical definition and treatment of secularism in the literature, approaching filmmakers in the Middle East and interviewing them to ask about their views of secularism was a genuine approach and an intact experiment for them as they articulated. The personal accounts of the filmmakers on secularism were the incite and the essence of the research.

Definition of Secularism in the Media Sector

Over centuries, secular meant "of or belonging to the world, concerned in earthly more than in spiritual life".³⁷⁰ Secularism appeared in scholars' and intellectuals' writing as

³⁷⁰ "Secularism." *Etymonline*, www.etymonline.com/search?q=secularism. Accessed 29 Jun 2022.

a discussion about the state's relations with the sacred and the struggle of separating the "lifespan" from religion. They wrote about the state and the laws' neutrality and the disengagement of religious institutions in political matters. On the other hand, secularism is denied as being classified as a practice related to faith or atheism. It can be considered an identity and an ideology without attaching it to another. Secular intellectuals like Azmi Bishara³⁷¹ had refused to consider secularism a personal identity without adding it to another ideology or philosophy like a national secular, a liberal secular, or a totalitarian secular. Therefore, secularism as an identity remained unrealistic, and the relation of the state with the sacred remained at the core of the secularism definition. Political Islam promoted this approach, and the Islamist movements in the Middle East region used sentences like: "Islam is the solution"³⁷² and "Islam is an ideology and worship, country and nation, religion as well as government"³⁷³, which was stored in the collective minds in the Middle East and became sacred, although it is not mentioned in *Shari'ah's* regulations.

Filmmakers' understanding of secularism was developed from personal experiences, forming their stances on secularism. They considered it an identity and ideology that secures their freedoms and existence within society and the media industry. Filmmakers

³⁷¹ Presidency TN. "Dr Azmi Bishara." *www.youtube.com*, 21 May 2012, Accessed on 30 Jun 2022 Accessed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7c5reX2H94.

³⁷² A slogan used by the Islamic movements in political election programs in the Middle East.

³⁷³ Camille Mulcaire. "Hasan al-Banna and the Political Ideologisation of Islam in the 20th Century" Feb 2, 2016, Accessed on 30 Jun 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/02/02/hasan-al-banna-and-the-political-ideologisation-of-islam-in-the-20th-century/>

Cross-reference: al-Banna, H. (1999c) 'Fifth Conference' in *Selected Writings of Hasan al-Banna Shaheed*, trans. Qureshi, S.A. (New Delhi: Wajih Uddin)

are influenced by their interactions with their surrounding environments. The particularity of their views of secularism is observed through their discourses. Their definitions emerged as a film scene, with the filmmaker being its protagonist. Unlike academic, theoretical, and hypothetical, their definitions reflected their lives and realities. Secularism, to them, is the umbrella that personal freedoms and civil law rights lay. Secularism is refusing the suppression imposed by the authorities, and its power structures, whether it is feudalism, oligarchy, religion, family, or tribe.

Depiction of Secularism in Film

I investigated the discourse and films of Middle Eastern filmmakers and producers to explore their willingness to introduce secularism in their production and the approaches they used or prefer to use to tackle secularism as a controversial issue in the Middle East. I have argued that filmmakers' eagerness to treat secularism in their films depends on their stance and belief that secularism is the solution to regional problems. More profound and insightful treatment was found in the films in which their directors or producers were personally concerned about secularism.

I argue that secularism is a familiar term in the Middle East despite its indications; however, it has rarely been considered for depiction in documentary films. Treating secularism in a documentary film is a double dilemma, not only because the documentary film is classified as a genre for the elite of the audience but also because of the problematic nature of the term in the Middle East. Foucault argues that social problems are complicated

and require complex solutions³⁷⁴; a long process of changes and introducing modifications was the approach the filmmakers used to overcome the limitation of making documentary films treating secularism.

Therefore, the approach of filmmakers living out of the Middle East region was different from those living there, as they tended to use the shock factor and tackle secularism issues directly in their films and collide with fundamentalism ideology. However, filmmakers and producers in the Middle East felt the need to avoid the direct approach and use calm and unprovocative techniques as their aim is not only to promote their production to the television channels in the Middle East, which impose limitations and constraints on them but also to deliver their voices and secular messages to the audience in a cinematic aesthetic style. Filmmakers with better experience dealing with production companies and television channels have better chances to promote and screen their films that treat controversial issues on television channels in the Middle East. They have developed their treatment approach without being constrained to the television format and the news story techniques when tackling controversial issues. Using the journalistic and the news format when making the documentary film shall lead to a superficial treatment of secularism. This approach which might satisfy the audience who become used to the news story techniques shall refrain from triggering a debate and establishing a change in society.

³⁷⁴ Tarnovskaya, Ekaterina, *Class, gender and cultural work in British documentary film production: Experiences, subjectivities and policy discourses*.

Minorities and Militarism

This research discussed the treatment of minorities and militarism as controversial issues in the film. First, I interviewed filmmakers from minority groups in the region to explore their views on secularism. Second, I analysed films addressing militarism to explore the relationship between the army's role in the middle east and seculars.

The research examined filmmakers' discourses about the relationship between minorities and secularism, the filmmakers' stance on the minorities issue, and the treatment approach to tackle these issues. As cinema and televisions production in the Middle East tended to blackout and discarded the sub-identities issue in the Middle East to support the collective national identity, filmmakers who belong to minorities seemed interested in referring to the minority's identity in their films, presenting their stories, and address their existence and roles in the Middle East significant events. Although such films like *Trêve: A Time To Rest (2015)* by El-Hajj might contain sensitive narratives and it could threaten "civil peace" or agitate minorities, they are considered an addition to the film literature as they presented a different narrative than the one proposed by the mass media.

As the Middle East consist of a diverse set of ethnic groups, religions, and cultures, the literature provides a history filled with severe conflicts between these inhomogeneous groups. Therefore, it is suggested that secularism can also be considered a necessity for the Muslim majority in the Middle East as it is for minorities.³⁷⁵ The research explored how the filmmakers condemn the dictatorship and the military regimes in treating secularism in

³⁷⁵ Tarabichi, Georges. Hartaqaat

their films. *Laicite, Inch'Allah!* (2011) by El-Fani and *74* (2012) by Rafei are examples of how the filmmakers address the suppressive authorities' issues in society to deliver their messages about the necessity of secularism as a solution.

Self-Censorship as a Limitation

The research explored the challenges facing filmmakers in the Middle East when addressing secularism in documentary films. I investigated these challenges from the views of filmmakers and television producers. I explored how filmmakers who want their films to reach the audience are pressured to comply with television channels' policies which consider the documentary film a long news story and require a journalistic approach in the treatment. I argued that filmmakers and television producers had developed a sense of self-censorship in the films treating secularism issues to fit within the television format's policies. Television producers and production companies are affected by the work environment limitation; however, they seem to apply self-censorship on documentary films without wilful coercion from the television channels, which are considered conservative institutions. Television channels do not have policies prohibiting producing documentary films treating secularism. However, this type of production is rare and restrained by hidden censorship caused by the power structures of the television format and the majority's values, with Islam's stance on controversial societal issues on top of it.

The research explored how filmmakers find themselves obliged to make considerable efforts to treat their films cleverly to find solutions to protect their films' cinematic and aesthetic styles while embracing the news style and conservative television

policies. They used the indirect approach to avoid conflicts with the channels' limitations and most of the audience's beliefs. Zaccak said: "I want to reach the taxi driver in the city's streets and the farmer on his land. I want my voice to reach everybody through my films."³⁷⁶

In addition to the self-censorships generated due to the industry's limitations, the research investigated the filmmakers' discourses and films to discover other power factors the filmmakers were subject to in their film treatment of secularism. The power structures like the culture, the family, and the religion caused them to implement more self-censorship practices in their film and constrain their freedom of speech. However, the independent documentary films reflected a more profound treatment of secularism with more freedom and less response to the power of the religious authorities and society than the prevailing approach in the media.

³⁷⁶ Hady Zaccak. Interview with the author

Research Contribution

This research contributes to many fields of literature on the Middle East and Media. It contributes firstly to secularism and media literature as it shows how filmmakers and media professionals had developed their unique definitions of secularism built on their lived experiences and consistent with the Middle East identity and do not strip it of its particularity. This research also contributes to film and documentary film literature in the Middle East. The researcher used the film analysis methodology to analyse fifteen films chosen for this research. Part of these films is independent production films that have yet to be studied academically. Therefore, it also contributed to the research methodology literature. The thesis showed the benefit of using video-recorded face-to-face interviews as a qualitative methodology to gather and generate rich data in an empirical field like film and media. The research also contributes to the studies of censorship. I explored how filmmakers and television producers implement self-censorship practices to regulate cinema content, addressing controversial issues like secularism. Additionally, this research contributes to the Foucauldian power studies. It investigated the filmmakers' discourses and subjectivities against the power structures in the filmmaking industry and their surrounding environments.

Recommendations for Potential Research Work

During this research, many questions were raised and require further investigation. For example, it would be beneficial to study the treatment of secularism in documentary films in regions other than the Middle East, like the Balkan region or Southeast Asia, where Islam is the majority belief. Also, studying the treatment of secularism in documentary films in societies where secularism is not considered a controversial issue shall provide a better understanding of the filmmaker's approaches in tackling the topic with different constraints and limitations if it existed under different political regimes where people have different lifestyles.

More research is necessary to understand the negative effect of enforcing the television format and the journalistic approach on documentary films' treatment when addressing controversial issues. Learning more about this shall allow a better understanding of the necessity to allow more freedom for the filmmakers to present a different story and treat their films' topics considering the aesthetic and cinematic styles rather than the news values required by the television channels whose policies are affected by the authorities' agendas in the societies.

The Efficiency of Documentary Film in Depicting Secularism in the Middle East

Ultimately, filmmakers in the Middle East are aware of the particularity of their region and prefer to adopt a Middle Eastern model of secularism compatible with their

society's variety. They refuse to import the exact western model of secularism and drop it on their culture. Nevertheless, they pursue a tolerated Middle Eastern secularism version closer to the Anglo-American model instead the complex model applied in France and known in the Middle East in the former Turkish institutions. This version of secularism respects all freedoms and protects individuals' right to choose. It forbids the beliefs and sacred texts to interfere in political and legal matters, the state's ruling, and personal freedoms. It also prohibits the authorities from using religion to serve their interests and administrate public affairs. Filmmakers believe that applying the western secularism model in a direct and colliding way shall not be successful. The secular intellectuals and nationalist parties adopting secularism had failed this approach before and found no echoes to their views.

Filmmakers reserve their right to express their views of secularism against the conservative authorities, the religions, the capital, and the society. Secular filmmakers feel they are a minority in society and different from the majority. They seek a place in their homelands, communities, and the media and cinema industry without being marginalised and subject to suppression and prohibition. This research explored the documentary film's efficiency in addressing secularism if treated in a cinematic style rather than the television channels' production regulated by the journalistic style and the news values.

Filmmakers' treatment of secularism in the Middle East opens a critical debate and presents a different narrative. They use a creative cinematic style and a mixture of several genres to overcome the documentary's limited audience. Filmmakers who work with television channels succeeded in reaching the audience by using a narrative style and clever

techniques to create an indirect and less provocative approach to religious figures. As Foucault argued in the research, the notion of power relations implies that filmmakers impose themselves as resisting the power relations within the cinema industry and society. Therefore, their discourse and treatment would be considered a move towards changing these power relations.

Filmography

- *74 - the Reconstitution of a Struggle*. Directed by Rania Rafei and Raed Rafei, Orjouane Productions, 2012.
- *104 Wrinkles*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, ZAC Films, 2017.
- *A History Lesson*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, Al-Jazeera, 2009.
- *Al-Nakba*. Directed by Rawan Damen, Al-Jazeera, 2008.
- *Amira*. Directed by Mohammad Diab, 2020.
- *Bicycle Thieves*. Directed by Vittorio De Sica, Produzioni De Sica, 1948.
- *Bil-Arabi*. Vice Arabia, 2017.
- *Here and Elsewhere*. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, Gaumont, 1976.
- *Honeymoon 58*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, Istituto Luce Cinecittà, ASIATICA Film Mediale and ZAC Films, 2013.
- *It Doesn't Even Hurt*. Directed by Nadia El-Fani and Alina Isabel Pérez, 2012.
- *Kamal Joumblatt, Witness and Martyr*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, 2015.
- *Laicite, Inch'Allah*. Directed by Nadia El-Fani, 2011.
- *Le Professeur*. Directed by Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud, 2012.
- *Man with a Movie Camera*. Directed by Dziga Vertov, 1929.
- *Mercedes*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, France 3 Corse and AlJazeera Documentary, 2011.
- *Moana*. Directed by Robert J. Flaherty, 1926.
- *Nanook of the North*. Directed by Robert J. Flaherty, 1922.

- *No Kids Land*. Directed by Jumana Saadeh, 2017.
- *No Kids Land No Mothers Either*. Directed by Jumana Saadeh, 2017.
- *Second Hand Refugees*. Directed by Jumana Saadeh, 2014.
- *Seculars in Lebanon*. Directed by Rami Kodeih, Al-Jazeera, 2011.
- *Shi'a Echoes*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, GulfTrend Productions and Darkside Film & TV Production, 2007.
- *Sunni Echoes*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, GulfTrend Productions and Darkside Film & TV Production, 2008.
- *The Parrot*. Directed by Amjad Rasheed and Darin Sallam, Monokel and Tale Box Production, 2016.
- *The Price of Oslo*. Directed by Rawan Damen, Al-Jazeera, 2013.
- *The War of Peace*. Directed by Hady Zaccak, GulfTrend Production, 2007.
- *Trêve: A Time To Rest*. Directed by Myriam El-Hajj, About Production, 2015.
- *West Beirut*. Directed by Ziad Doueiri, 1998.

Bibliography

Books:

- Al Azmeh, Aziz. *Secularism from a different approach*. Beirut: Center for Arab unity studies, 1992.
- 'Azmah, 'Aziz, and Bond, David. *Secularism in the Arab World : Contexts, Ideas and Consequences*. Edinburgh University Press, 2019.
- Bourdieu, P. *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (trans. R. Nice). London: Routledge, 1984.
- Calhoun, Craig. *Habermas and the public sphere*. MIT 1992. P3
- Cardwell, John Thornton, *Production Culture*, Duke University Press: Durham and London 2008.
- Deacon D., Pickering M., Golding P. & Murdock G. *Researching Communications: A practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder Arnold. 2007
- El-Messiri, Abdel Wahab. *Jews, Judaism, and Zionism encyclopedia*, Dar Shorouq, 1999. (Translation by researcher)
- Feldman, Noah. *The Arab Winter tragedy*. Princeton University Press 2020
- Fontana, Andrea and Frey, James H. *From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text Handbook of qualitative research.*" In Handbook of qualitative research edited by Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 645-672. 2nd ed. London: Sage publication (2000).
- Foucault M. *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books. 1978.
- Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison*. London, Penguin. 1991
- Foucault, M. *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon. 1972.
- Foucault, M. *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Ham- monsworth: Penguin. 1978.

- Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, London, Penguin. 1998.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York:Pantheon,1972)
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books. 1977.
- Gaventa, John *Power after Lukes: a review of the literature*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2003.
- Gaventa, John. *Power after Lukes: a review of the literature*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. 2003
- George Jacob Holyoake, *Christianity and secularism. Report of a public discussion between Brewin Grant and George Jacob Holyoake*, Ward, London,1953
- Gitlin, Todd *Inside Prime Time*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983.
- Grierson, J. *Grierson on Documentary*, London: Collins, (1946)
- Habermas, Jürgen ,*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.
- Hutcheon, L. *Discourse, power, ideology: Humanism and postmodernism*. New York: Routledge. 1991
- Jureidini, McLaurin, and Price, *Military operations in selected Lebanese built-up areas*.1979, Appendix B, B-2.
- Khatib, Lina. *Filming the modern Middle East: Politics in the cinema of Hollywood and the Arab world*. I.B.Tauris&Co Ltd, 2006
- Khatib, Lina. *Lebanese cinema – imagining the civil war and beyond*, I.B. Tauris, 2008
- Kuhn, Annette. & Westwell, Guy. *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, Oxford University Press. 2012. eBook Oxford reference , accessed at: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199587261.001.0001/acref-9780199587261-e-0208>
- Lewis, Bernard. *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*. Harper Perennial, 2003.
- Locke, T. *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum. 2004.

- Lofland, John and. Lofland, Lyn H *Analyzing Social Settings : A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Belmont, Calif. : Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1984.
- Norman, R., Baggini, J., Blackburn, S. and others. *The Case for Secularism: A Neutral State in an Open Society*. British Humanist Association, 2007
- Phillips, L. and Jorgensen M. W. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage, 2002.
- Rabinow, Paul (editor) *The Foucault Reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought*, London, Penguin. 1991
- Rubin H & Rubin I *Qualitative Interviewing: The art of hearing data*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. 2005
- Schwandt, T. A. *Qualitative inquiry: A dictionary of terms* . second ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001
- Shohini, Chaudhuri. *Contemporary world cinema : Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005
- Silverman, D. *Interpreting Qualitative Data* 3rd ed. (Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction). London: Sage. 2006
- Tamimi Azzam, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*. C. Hurst & Co. Publishers 2000, p190
- Tarabichi, Georges. *Hartaqat 2: On Secularism as an Intra-Islamic Problematic*. 1st ed., Dar Al-Saqi, 2008.
- Tarabichi, Georges. *Hartaqat: On Democracy, Secularism, Modernism and Arab Resistance*. 2006. Dar Al-Saqi, 2011.
- Tarnovskaya, Ekaterina. *Class, gender and cultural work in British documentary film production: Experiences, subjectivities and policy discourses*. 2021. PhD thesis, University of Essex.
- Titscher, S. et al. *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage. 2000
- Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983.
- Van de Peer, Stefanie E. *The aesthetics of moderation in documentaries by North African women*. University of Sterling, 2011
- Weedon, Chris. *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell. 1987.

- Wetherell, M., S. Taylor and S. J. Yates, *Discourse as Data*. London: Sage. 2001
- Willis, Sharon 'Disputed territories: masculinity and social space', in Penley, Constance and Sharon Willis (eds), *Male Trouble*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Wilson, B. R. *Religion in Secular Society: A sociological comment*. London: Watts, 1966.
- Winston, B., *Claiming the Real*, British Film Institute. London (1995)
- Wodak, R., de Cillia, R., Reisigl M. and Liebhart K. *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (A. Hirsch and R. Mitten, trans.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1999

Journal Articles:

- Austin, John. "Plea for Excuses" *philosophical papers* (London: Oxford University Press,) pp. 180, 189, 204
- Ball-Rokeach, Sandra J; DeFleur, ML "A dependency model of mass-media effects". *Communication Research*. 1976). **3** (1): 3–21.
- Barbier, Maurice. "Pour une définition de la laïcité française" *initialement dans la revue Le Débat*, no.134, March-April 20. Translation by Gregory Elliott
- Burke, Alison and Innes, Paul. "Interviews as a Methodology for Performance Research: Academic Interviews - an Invitation for Discussion", *Classical Receptions in Late Twentieth Century Drama and Poetry in English Essays on Documenting and Researching Modern Productions of Greek Drama: The Sources*, 2007. url: <http://www2.open.ac.uk/ClassicalStudies/GreekPlays/essays/burkeacademic.htm>.
- Flaherty, Robert (Joseph)., *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.) Helicon. Credo Reference: https://search-credoreference-com.uea.idm.oclc.org/content/entry/heliconhe/flaherty_robert_joseph/0?institutionId=128
- Gaventa, John *Power after Lukes: a review of the literature*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. 2003

- Gilbert-Sleiman, Betty "L'unification du manuel d'histoire au Liban : enjeux et contraintes", in Mermier Franck et Varin Christophe (dir.), *Mémoires de guerres au Liban*, Arles, Actes-Sud collection Sinbad, 2012 p. 95-107.
- Haw, Kaye and Hadfield, Mark. "Research Method in the Postmodern James J. Scheurich," *British Educational Research Journal*, no. 5 (1998): 637.
- Hayward, Clarissa Rile, 'De-Facing Power', *Polity* (1998) 31(1).
- Julianne Treme & Zoe VanDerPloeg. "The Twitter Effect: Social Media Usage as a Contributor to Movie Success," *Economics Bulletin, AccessEcon*, 2014vol. 34(2), pages 793-809.
- Jürgen Habermas, Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research, *Communication Theory*, Volume 16, Issue 4, November 2006, Pages 411–426
- Kerrigan, Susan; McIntyre, Phillip. "The 'creative treatment of actuality': Rationalizing and reconceptualizing the notion of creativity for documentary practice", In: *Journal of Media Practice*. Aug 01, 2010 11(2):111-130
- Lewis, Bernard. "Secularism in the Middle East." *Revue De Métaphysique Et De Morale* 100, no. 2 (1995): 151-64. Accessed January 6, 2021. Accessed at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40903409>.
- Maurice Barbier, *la laïcité*, l'Harmattan, Paris, 1995. (Translation by researcher)
- McClure, John A. "Postmodern/Post-Secular: Contemporary Fiction and Spirituality." *Modern Fiction Studies* 41 (1): 1995 p 141–63
- McClure, John A. "Post-Secular Culture: The Return of Religion in Contemporary Theory and Literature." *CrossCurrents* 47 (3): 1997 p 332–47.
- Michael J. Shapiro, "language and political understanding , the politics of discursive practice", *Yale University Press*: New Haven and London 1981. pp. 127-129
- Myers and Newman, Myers, Michael D.and Newman, Michael. *The Qualitative Interview in IS Research: Examining the Craft*, Information and Organization 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 2–26, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2006.11.001>.
- Oifi, Mohammed. " L'effet al-Jazeera ", *Politique étrangère* 2004, 3, p. 650.
- Park, Y. 'Constructing immigrants. A historical discourse analysis of the representations of Immigrants in US Social Work, 1882–1952' *Journal of Social Work*,2006. 6(2): 169–203.

- Pitsoe, Victor. And Letseka, Moeketsi. *Foucault's Discourse and Power: Implications for Instructionist Classroom Management*. Open Journal of Philosophy 2013. Vol.3, No.1, 23-28 Published Online February 2013 in SciRes (<http://www.scirp.org/journal/ojpp>)
- Polkinghorne Donald E., "Language and Meaning: Data Collection in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, no. 2 (2005): 137.
- Powers, Penny. "The Philosophical Foundations of Foucaultian Discourse Analysis" in; *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines* 1(2): 18-34.PDF (2007)
- Schultze, Ulrike and Avital, Michel "Designing Interviews to Generate Rich Data for Information Systems Research", *Information and Organization* 21, no. 1 (January 2011): 1–16, url: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2010.11.001>.
- Tabet Michel, "Le documentaire libanais contemporain à travers l'étude de trois films sur l'identité, la nation et la transmission", *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 134 | 2013, 183-194.

Online Articles and News

- A History Lesson Film and the Lebanese Society. *RT Arabic*, arabic.rt.com/news/35973-. Accessed 3 July 2022.
- A History Lesson, New Production for Al-Jazeera Documentary. *Aljazeera Documenatry*, accessed at: doc.aljazeera.net/cinema/الوثائقية-درس-في-التاريخ/. Accessed 3 July 2022.
- A History Lesson, New Production for Al-Jazeera Documentary. *Aljazeera Documenatry*, doc.aljazeera.net/cinema/الوثائقية-درس-في-التاريخ/. Accessed 3 July 2022.
- About Productions. n.d. *Rami Kodeih*. Online image. *About Productions*. Accessed July 2, 2022. <http://www.aboutproductions.com/viewDirectorA?id=56>.
- Abu-Mualla, Saeed. "الترا فلسطين | Ultra Palestine." *Ultra Palestine*, 15 Dec. 2016, ultrapal.ultrasawt.com/ببغاء-فيلم-يحكي-الوجع-الفلسطيني/سعيد-أبو-معلا/ثقافة-وفن/منوعات/

- Abuhilalah, Yasser. "Who Is Yasser Abuhilalah." Yasser Abuhilalah, Accessed at: www.yaserabuhilalah.com/. Accessed 3 July 2022
- African woman in cinema blog, *Nadia El-Fani, Laureate of the International Secular Award 2011*, translated by Beti Ellerson, 29 June 2011, Accessed on 9 Jun 2022. Accessed at: <https://africanwomenincinema.blogspot.com/2011/06/nadia-el-fani-laureate-of-international.html?m=1>
- Ajlouni, Adam. *Arab Christian Nationalist Thinkers and Arab Christian Nationalism in the Levant*. Honors Theses (Bachelor's) University of Michigan. 2009 Accessed on 25 Jun 2022. Accessed at: http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/2027.42/63948/1/ajlouni_adam_2009.pdf
- Al Rasheed, Amjad, and Darin J. Sallam. "The Parrot." IMDb, December 10, 2016. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6389618/>.
- Al Taher Labeeb, foreword to Al Azmeh, *secularism from a different approach*, 1992 (from kitab fe jareda) issue no. 121, date 3 sept 2008.
- Al-Jali, Muhammad. "Researcher: The Word 'Asker' Is an Insult to the 'Egyptian Army.'" *Youm7*, 25 Sept. 2013, www.youm7.com/story/2013/9/25/باحث-تاريخي-كلمة-عسكر-إهانة-ل-الجيش-المصري-1266723.
- Aljazeera. "El Messiri: Human or Darwinian Modernity." Edited by Abdel Wahab El Messiri. aljazeera.net, October 10, 2009. www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2009/10/10/حادثة-داروينية-أم-حادثة-إنسانية. (My translation).
- Aljazeera. "El-Messiri: Partial Secularism." Edited by Abdel Wahab El-Messiri. aljazeera.net, February 8, 2007. www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2007/2/8/بين-العلمانية-والجزئية-والعلمانية-2. (My translation).
- Alshakikh Faisal Al Kazimi, *Baqiatollah* magazine, 21 Apr 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.baqiatollah.net/article.php?id=8849>

- ana. n.d. *Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud*. Online image. *Ana Contemporary Arab Cinema*. Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://www.anaarabcinema.com/directors13/mahmoud-ben-mahmoud>.
- AP. 2017. *Ziad Doueiri*. Online image. *The Seattle Times*. <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/palestinian-festival-drops-film-over-directors-israel-trips/>.
- Arab Documentary cinema... Marginalization looks for audience. edited by editing team. Published on 7 July 2019 published on noonpost website. Accessed at: <https://www.noonpost.com/content/28437> . (Translation by researcher).
- ArbeiterIn, Gast. "The Turkish Hand-Kissing Tradition." *Renk.*, 26 Nov. 2017, renk-magazin.de/en/seyda-explains-the-turkish-hand-kissing-tradition/
- Bazzi, Emad. "The Hustle behind the Walls of Beiruts Busiest Prostitution Houses during the War Years." *Raseef22*, 25 Jan. 2019, raseef22.net/article/95986-.
- BBC News Arabic . Cinema Badila - Interview with Darin Salam, YouTube, 15 Jul 2018. Accessed 20 Jan 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Shvk1yePqYU>
- BBC News. "Writing to Television." *BBC News Arabic*, 27 Aug. 2010, www.bbc.com/arabic/learningenglish/2010/08/081016_cojo_arabic_guide_3.
- Ben Mahmoud, Mahmoud. "Le Professeur." IMDb, November 16, 2012. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3099378/>.
- Bin Younis, Kamal. "Pioneers of the Secular Modernist Trend in Tunisia." *Arabi21*, 23 Jan. 2021, arabi21.com/story/1330631/.
- Camille Mulcaire. "Hasan al-Banna and the Political Ideologisation of Islam in the 20th Century" feb 2 2016 Accessed on 30 Jun 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/02/02/hasan-al-banna-and-the-political-ideologisation-of-islam-in-the-20th-century/>

- Chalala, Elie. *Jalal Khoury (1933-2017): Brechtian Realist Forged by 1967 War, and the Birth of Modern Lebanese Theater*, Accessed at: <https://www.aljadid.com/node/2103> Retrieved 2022-01-17
- Cooper, Rob. "Forcing a Religion on Your Children Is as Bad as Child Abuse, Claims Atheist Professor Richard Dawkins." *Mail Online*, 22 Apr. 2013, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2312813/Richard-Dawkins-Forcing-religion-children-child-abuse-claims-atheist-professor.html.
- Daasa, Wafaa. "Habib Bourguiba, 18 Years since His Death." *Turess*, 6 Apr. 2018, www.turess.com/aljarida/200255.
- Dib, Roy. "Beirut 2013: Where Are Students?" *Al-Akhbar*, 20 May 2013, al-akhbar.com/Literature_Arts/51119/.
- Doueiri, Ziad. "West Beirut (West Beyrouth)." IMDb, October 30, 1998. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0157183/?ref=tt_mv_close.
- Dreher, Rod. "Secular Liberalism as Consensus." *Real Clear Politics*, 6 Apr. 2009, www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2009/04/secular_liberalism_as_consensu.html.
- El Fani, Nadia. "Laïcité, Inch'Allah!" IMDb, September 21, 2011. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1987601/>.
- El Hajj, Myriam. "Trêve." IMDb, April 20, 2015. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4805606/>.
- Fahs, Badia. Daraj Video. 15 October 2019 accessed at: <https://daraj.com/22724/>
- Forum Des Images. n.d. *Nadia El Fani*. Online image. Forum Des Images. Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://un-etat-du-monde-webdoc.forumdesimages.fr/entretien/nadia-el-fani/>.
- Genet, Jean. *Four hours in Shatila/ et al. أربع ساعات في شاتيلا / Arba' Sā'āt Fī Shātīlā*. Tanger Morocco, Librairie Des Colonnes Éditions, 2015
- Gitlin, Todd, "Jurgen Habermas". *Time Magazine*. (April 26, 2004). Archived from the original on March 6, 2008. Retrieved 2023-02-01 accessed at: https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1970858_19709_09_1971707,00.html

- Habib Bourguiba. 3 July 2022, Accessed at: <https://quotepark.com/quotes/2067881-habib-bourguiba-i-will-impose-womens-freedom-and-rights-by-the-fo/>
- Habib Bourguiba. Arageek, Accessed at: www.arageek.com/bio/habib-bourguiba. Accessed 3 July 2022.
- Hamzawi, Amr. "Egyptian Secularists and Authoritarianism." *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 5 Aug. 2019, www.alquds.co.uk/عن-تبرير-العلمانيين-المصريين-للاستبد.
- Hashtag: "Withdraw Amira film" take the lead in the social media" Article on France24 website. 10 December 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/ar/برامج/باب-الويب/20211210-هاشتاغ-اسحبوا-فيلم-أميرة-يتصدر-مواقع-التواصل>
- How Did the 'Professor' Expose the Dictatorship of the Bourguiba Regime. *Aljazeera*, 9 Aug. 2020, www.aljazeera.net/programs/outside-the-text/2020/8/9-كيف-فضح-الأستاذ-ديكتاتورية-نظام.
- Hrb, Hajar. "Amira Film." *Al-Quds Al-Arabi Newspaper*, 8 Dec. 2012, www.alquds.co.uk/فيلم-أميرة-يطعن-خاصة-الأسرى-الفلسطيني.
- Hurriyet Daily News. "Highlights from Obama's Turkey Visit." *Www.hurriyet.com.tr*, 7 Apr. 2009, www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/highlights-from-obamas-turkey-visit-11378133.
- International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF). n.d. "Georges Tarabichi." *Arabicfiction.org*. Accessed June 20, 2020. <https://arabicfiction.org/en/Georges-Tarabichi>.
- Interview Cinema: Myriam El Hajj. *Www.institutfrancais.com*, 2 Mar. 2021, Accessed at: www.institutfrancais.com/en/interview/myriam-el-hajj.
- JALAL KHOURY. *One Fine Art*, Accessed at: www.onefineart.com/artists/actors/Jalal-Khoury. Accessed 17 Jan. 2022.
- Jeries, Samir. Reviewed by Ghanim, Imad. Cenemic days in Colonia with "No Fear after today" slogan. *Deutsche Welle* 9th October 2011. Accessed at: <https://www.dw.com/ar/علمانية-إن-شاء-الله/a-15447111> and <https://ar.qantara.de/content/ym-synmyy-fy-kwlwny-tht-shr-l-khwhf-bd-lywm-lmny-n-sh-llh>

- Kasir, Samir. *Aljazeera*, 15 Oct. 2014, Accessed at: www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/icons/2014/10/15/سمير-قصير.
- Kassir, Samir. *Soldiers against Whom?* 2004. Dar Al-Nahar, 2005.
- Madina Channel. "Interview with Rania Rafei." *Www.youtube.com*, 3 Apr. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxPXbZ3YODw
- Mansour, Eskandar. "Tarabichi, Rooting of Secularization." *Ahewar*, 15 Oct. 2010, www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=232104.
- More Al-Jazeera viewers than the other Pan-Arab news channels combined. Published in: Middle East, News. On February 14, 2014 at 12:26 pm accessed at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140214-more-al-jazeera-viewers-than-the-other-pan-arab-news-channels-combined/>
- Nadia El-Fani speech at the Secular Conference 2017 in London. (video). Accessed on 30 Jan 2022. Accessed at: https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/نادية_الغاني
- Newman, Andrew J. 'Āshūrā'. Britannica. Accessed on 21 Apr. 2022 Accessed at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ashura-Islamic-holy-day>
- Noon, Eleej. "Hand Kissing Meanings." *Raseef22*, 3 July 2018, raseef22.net/article/153885-.
- Palestinian Ambassador: An Initiative to Train Youth on Presenting the Palestinian Cause. Alaraby, 20 Aug. 2019, www.alaraby.co.uk/%22مبادرة-لتدريب-22%فلسطين-سفير-الشباب-على-طرح-القضية-الفلسطينية.
- Parveen, Nazia and Wintour, Patrick, "Matthew Hedges: British academic accused of spying jailed for life in UAE". *the Guardian*, November 21, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/21/british-academic-matthew-hedges-accused-of-spying-jailed-for-life-in-uae>
- Pinkus, Jenny, "Foucault". Massey University. Aug 1996 Accessed at: <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/theory/foucault.htm>. Accessed: 2 Mar 2022

- Powercube. *Foucault: power is everywhere*. Accessed at: <https://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/foucault-power-is-everywhere/>
- Rafei, Raed, and Rania Rafei. "74 (La Reconstitution d'Une Lutte)." IMDb, July 8, 2012. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2356374/>.
- Rawan Damen. Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), en.arij.net/arijteam/rawan-damen/. Accessed 3 July 2022.
- Secularism and religious freedom. Government France. Accessed on 9 of January 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/en/secularism-and-religious-freedom#:~:text=The%20Law%20of%201905&text=It%20abolished%20the%20Concordat%20of,the%20freedom%20to%20practice%20religion.>
- Secularism. *Etymonline*, www.etymonline.com/search?q=secularism. Accessed 29 Jun 2022.
- Seculars in Lebanon. *Aljazeera*, 22 Feb. 2012, www.aljazeera.net/programs/point-of-view/2012/2/22/لبنان-في-العلمانيون-#L4.
- Stille, Alexander, "Who Murdered Giulio Regeni" *the Guardian*, October 4, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/04/egypt-murder-giulio-regeni>
- Taha, Howaida. "Al-Hiwar Television." *Ahewar*, 22 Mar. 2007, www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=91829.
- Tanious, Said. "The Funeral of Jalal Khoury in Lebanon." *RT*, 4 Dec. 2017, Accessed at: arabic.rt.com/culture/913565-لبنان-يشيع-الكاتب-المسرحي-جلال-خوري-صاحبجحا-في-الخطوط-الأمامية. <https://arabic.rt.com/culture/913565-لبنان-يشيع-الكاتب-المسرحي-جلال-خوري-صاحبجحا-في-الخطوط-الأمامية>.
- Tunisia - Unity Government. Encyclopedia Britannica, www.britannica.com/place/Tunisia/Unity-government.
- Tunisian Constitution 1959, Accessed at: www.wipo.int and at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2008.pdf?lang=ar
- Waoja, Ayoub. "Ziad Douri: Why a Lebanese Should Fight for Palestine." *Aljazeera Documentary*, 7 June 2021, doc.aljazeera.net/discussion/المخرج-اللبناني-العالمي-زياد-دويري-لم

- What has been accomplished from the “Arab Spring” dreams. (ما الذي تحقق من أحلام) الربيع العربي, France24, published at: 17/12/2020 accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/ar/الأخبار-المغربية/20201217-ما-الذي-تحقق-من-أحلام-الربيع-العربي-بعد-مرور-عشر-سنوات-على-انطلاقه>
- What Is Ashura? *BBC News*, 6 Dec. 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16047713.
- Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. *BBC News Arabic*, 19 Sept. 2019, www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-49756788
- فرانس. النهضة “ تفوز بـ 41,47 بالمئة من مقاعد المجلس التأسيسي و”العريضة الشعبية” تسحب قوائمها 24 / France 24, 28 Oct. 2011, www.france24.com/ar/20111028-tunisia-elections-ennahda-winner-islamist-new-constitution.

Seminars:

- Pounds, Gabrina. 2018. “Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool in the Humanities.” In-Person. Presented at the UEA’ Research Training Seminar.

Youtube and social media:

- Al Hiwar Television. Interview with Rawan Damen. 8 September 2013 accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yh9_GOXSFoY
- Alwerwary, Mahmoud. “Al-Arabyia TV: Interview with Dr Ahmad Madi.” www.youtube.com, January 14, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztwLFbM2kBc>. (My translation).
- BBC News Arabic. Ziad Doueiri in Al-Mash’had with Giselle Khoury. 26 Sep 2017, on www.youtube.com Accessed on 26 Sept 2017 accessed at <https://youtu.be/6nebHoALV9s>.
- Hot Spot Films FB. “Seculars in Lebanon.” Facebook, 14 Dec. 2011. Accessed on 30 Jun 2020

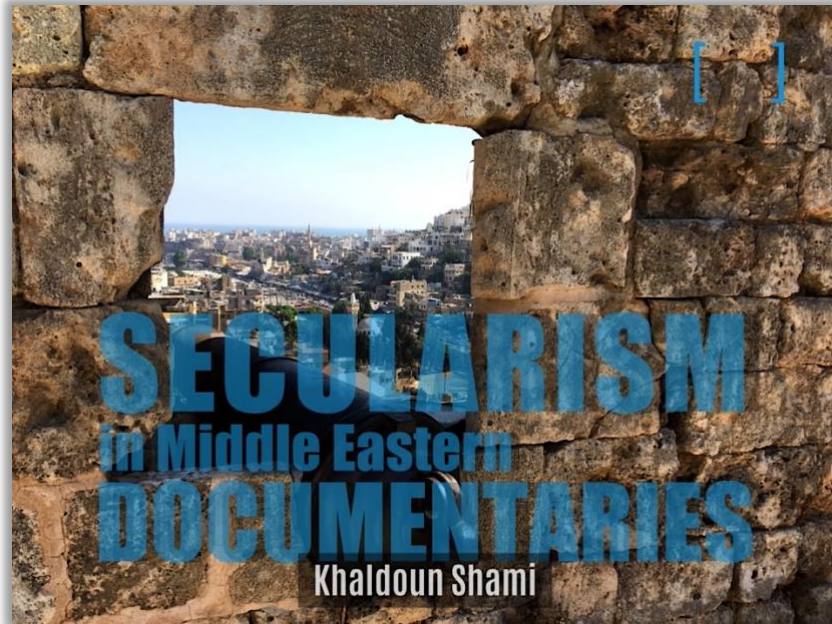
- Mehwar TV Channel. Interview with Hamad Ben Jassim the former Qatari Prime Minter in Black Box program. accessed on 15 March 2022 accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYeBUWx5HWg>
- Shami, Khaldoun. 2022. "Secularism in Middle Eastern Documentaries." Screenshot, Camera Interview. <https://youtu.be/wdBq8cPGKdl>.
- Presidency TN. "Dr Azmi Bishara." *Www.youtube.com*, 21 May 2012, Accessed on 30 Jun 2022 Accessed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7c5reX2H94.

Interviews

- Abu-Falah, Jihad. *Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East*. Interview by Khaldoun Shami, 4 Apr. 2019.
- Azar, Deema. *Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East*. Interview by Khaldoun Shami, 26 Feb. 2018.
- Bader, Reem. *Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East*. Interview by Khaldoun Shami, 27 Feb. 2018.
- Damen, Rawan. *Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East*. Interview by Khaldoun Shami, 17 Aug. 2019.
- El-Hajj, Myriam. *Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East*. Interview by Khaldoun Shami, 31 July 2019.
- Massad, Mahmoud. *Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East*. Interview by Khaldoun Shami, 28 Feb. 2018.
- Rafei, Rania. *Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East*. Interview by Khaldoun Shami, 29 July 2019.
- Saadeh, Jumana. *Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East*. Interview by Khaldoun Shami, 24 Feb. 2018.
- Zaccak, Hady. *Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East*. Interview by Khaldoun Shami, 5 Aug. 2019.

Appendices

Appendix One: The Research Documentary



Research Documentary by the author.

How do you define Secularism?

How do you depict Secularism in the film?

Filmmakers, TV producers across the MENA region speak openly to the camera on secular values, religion, authorities, majority & minority, industrial challenges, and censorship.

- YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/wdBq8cPGKdI>

Appendix Two: Table - Information of the research camera interviews.

Name	Occupation	Employment Type	Gender	Date of Interview
Deema Azar	Film Producer	Tale Box	Female	26 Feb 2018
Hassan Hijazi	Producer / Voice Talent	Freelancer	Male	27 Feb 2018
Mahmoud Massad	Film Director	Freelancer	Male	28 Feb 2018
Reem Bader	Documentary Film Distributor	Minaa Documentary Platform	Female	27 Feb 2018
Jihad Abu-Falah	TV and News Producer	Al-Hiwar TV Channel (London)	Male	04 Apr 2019
Hady Zaccak	Documentary Film Director	Freelancer	Male	05 Aug 2019
Lara Abou Saifan	Film Producer	Freelancer	Female	31 Jul 2019

Myriam El-Hajj	Documentary Film Director	Freelancer	Female	31 Jul 2019
Rania Rafei	Documentary Film Director	Freelancer	Female	29 Jul 2019
Rawan Damen	Documentary Film Producer/Director	Al-Jazeera TV Channel	Female	17 Aug 2019
Jumana Saadeh	Documentary Film Director	Freelancer	Female	24 Feb 2018

Appendix Three: Table - Information of films in the research.

Film	Production	Year of Production	Director	Genre
<i>A History Lesson</i>	Al-Jazeera TV Network (Qatar)	2009	Hady Zaccak Lebanon	Documentary
<i>The Parrot</i>	Monokel (Germany)/ TaleBox Production (Jordan)	2016	Amjad Rasheed / Darin Sallam Jordan	Drama
<i>The war of peace</i>	GulfTrend Production (Dubai)	2007	Hady Zaccak Lebanon	Documentary
<i>Al-Nakba</i>	Al-Jazeera (Qatar)	2008	Rawan Damen Palestine	Documentary
<i>Trêve: A Time To Rest</i>	Independent-About Production (Lebanon)	2015	Myriam El-Hajj Lebanon	Documentary
<i>No Kids Land</i>	Independent (Jordan)	2017	Jumana Saadeh Palestine / Jordan	Documentary

<i>74: the Reconstitution of a Struggle</i>	Independent (Lebanon)	2012	Rania Rafei Lebanon	Docu-Drama
<i>Seculars in Lebanon</i>	Al-Jazeera Network (Qatar)	2011	Rami Kodeih Lebanon	Documentary
<i>Bil-Arabi</i>	Vice Arabia (Abu Dhabi)	2017	Vice Team Emirates	Documentary
<i>West Beirut</i>	Lebanon	1998	Ziad Doueiri Lebanon - USA	Drama
<i>Le Professeur</i>	Tunisia	2012	Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud Tunisia	Drama
<i>Laicite, Inch'Allah (Neither Allah nor Master)</i>	Independent (France - Tunisia)	2011	Nadia El-Fani Tunisia - France	Documentary
<i>Amira</i>	Independent	2021	Mohammad Diab Egypt	Drama
<i>Mercedes</i>	Independent (Lebanon)	2011	Hady Zaccak Lebanon	Documentary
<i>Honeymoon 58</i>	Independent	2013	Hady Zaccak Lebanon	Documentary

	(Italy – Lebanon)			
<i>The Price of Oslo</i>	Aljazeera (Qatar)	2013	Rawan Damen Palestine	Documentary
<i>Sunni Echoes</i>	GulfTrend Productions and Darkside Film & TV Production	2008	Hady Zaccak Lebanon	Documentary
<i>Shi'a Echoes</i>	GulfTrend Productions and Darkside Film & TV Production	2007	Hady Zaccak Lebanon	Documentary
<i>No Kids Land No Mothers Either</i>	BBC	2017	Jumana Saadeh Palestine - Jordan	Documentary
<i>Second Hand Refugees</i>	Independent	2014	Jumana Saadeh Palestine - Jordan	Documentary
<i>Here and Elsewhere</i>		1976	Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville France	Documentary
<i>Man with a Movie Camera</i>		1929	Dziga Vertov	Documentary

			USSR	
<i>Nanook of the North</i>		1922	Robert J. Flaherty USA	Documentary
<i>Moana</i>		1926	Robert J. Flaherty USA	Documentary

Appendix Four: General Research Ethics Committee Letter of Approval.



Research and Innovation Services

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 1603 591574
Email: grec@uea.ac.uk
<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/ren/research-integrity>

Khalidoun Shami
School of Art, Media & America Studies
UEA

Wednesday 22 November 2017

Dear Khalidoun,

Our reference: GREC 17-814

I am writing to you on behalf of the University of East Anglia's General Research Ethics Committee, in response to your request for ethical approval for your project 'Secularism and Minority Groups in Alternative Documentary Film in the Middle East'

Having considered the information that you have provided in your correspondence I am pleased to confirm that your project has been approved on behalf of the Committee.

You should let us know if there are any significant changes to the proposal which raise any further ethical issues.

Please let us have a brief final report to confirm the research has been completed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Polly Harrison', is written over a thin horizontal line.

**pp. Polly Harrison, Secretary
General Research Ethics Committee**

Appendix Five: Consent form, Research Information sheet, and Interviewee / Interview information sheet

PHD RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Title of Research: **Secularism in Documentary Film in the Middle East**

Name of Researcher: **Khaldoun Shami**

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided to me for the above study/project and have had the opportunity to ask questions. 1

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. 2

3. I understand that if I do withdraw, any data already collected about me will continue to be used in the study. 3

4. I understand that the research data generated in this research will be used in academic publications, reports, weblogs, video/audio, film and other outputs as appropriate to an academic research project. 4

5. I agree to take part in this study. 5

Name of Participant	Date	Signature

Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

PhD Research Project Participant Information Sheet

Dear Madam/Sir,

You are being invited to take part in the research project “Secularism in Independent Documentary Film in The Middle East”. This study is a PhD research study by Khaldoun Shami, and with academic supervision by Dr. Eylem Atakav and Prof. Dr. Richard Hand, School of Arts, Media and American Studies at University of East Anglia, Norwich (UK). It began in September 2017. The research is being carried out in line with the University of East Anglia Research Ethics Framework and has ethical approval from UEA’s Research Ethics Committee.

The research aims to study: (i) how does the independent documentary film present secularism in middle (ii) how to make the audience more interested in watching controversial issues in independent documentary film, (iii) does this type of films make an effect in rising up debates to change the audience orientation toward secularism in middle east and how. This will be done via a series of interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, film screening and filming. You are being asked to comment on these or related questions to camera. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form and to complete a participant questionnaire. All of the data we collect will be kept securely in accordance with the University of East Anglia research ethics framework.

Our ambition is to present and publish findings from our research in a range of academic and non-academic forums including journals, conferences, film festivals, websites, and policy reports.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. We hope you will participate in this research. If you have any further questions, please contact the research supervisors or the researcher himself by email or telephone.

Supervisor: **Eylem Atakav**: E.Atakav@uea.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0) 1603 592 972

Supervisor: **Richard Hand**: R.Hand@uea.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0) 1603 592 967

Researcher: **Khaldoun Shami**: K.Shami@uea.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0) 2035 193 498

Yours Faithfully,

Khaldoun Shami



³⁷⁷ Shami, Khaldoun. 2022. "Secularism in Middle Eastern Documentaries." Screenshot, Camera Interview. <https://youtu.be/wdBq8cPGKdl>.

Appendix Six: Figures - Interviewees / Filmmakers

a. Rania Rafei (Filmmaker) ³⁷⁸



b. Jihad Abu-Falah (TV Producer) ³⁷⁹



³⁷⁸ Shami, Khaldoun. 2022. "Secularism in Middle Eastern Documentaries." Screenshot, Camera Interview.
<https://youtu.be/wdBq8cPGkdl>.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

c. Hady Zaccak (Filmmaker) ³⁸⁰



d. Rawan Damen (Filmmaker and Producer) ³⁸¹



³⁸⁰ Shami, Khaldoun. 2022. "Secularism in Middle Eastern Documentaries." Screenshot, Camera Interview.

<https://youtu.be/wdBq8cPGKdl>.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

e. Myriam El-Hajj (Filmmaker) ³⁸²



f. Deema Azar (Film Producer) ³⁸³



³⁸² Shami, Khaldoun. 2022. "Secularism in Middle Eastern Documentaries." Screenshot, Camera Interview.

<https://youtu.be/wdBq8cPGKdl>.

³⁸³ Ibid.

g. Reem Bader (Film Distributor) ³⁸⁴



h. Jumana Saadeh (Filmmaker) ³⁸⁵



³⁸⁴ Shami, Khaldoun. 2022. "Secularism in Middle Eastern Documentaries." Screenshot, Camera Interview.

<https://youtu.be/wdBq8cPGKdl>.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

i. Ziad Doueiri (Filmmaker) ³⁸⁶



j. Nadia El-Fani (Filmmaker) ³⁸⁷



³⁸⁶ AP. 2017. *Ziad Doueiri*. Online image. *The Seattle Times*. Accessed February 21, 2023.

<https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/palestinian-festival-drops-film-over-directors-israel-trips/>.

³⁸⁷ Forum Des Images. n.d. *Nadia El Fani*. Online image. Forum Des Images. Accessed February 21, 2023.

<https://un-etat-du-monde-webdoc.forumdesimages.fr/entretien/nadia-el-fani/>.

k. Rami Kodeih (Filmmaker) ³⁸⁸



l. Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud (Film Producer and Director) ³⁸⁹

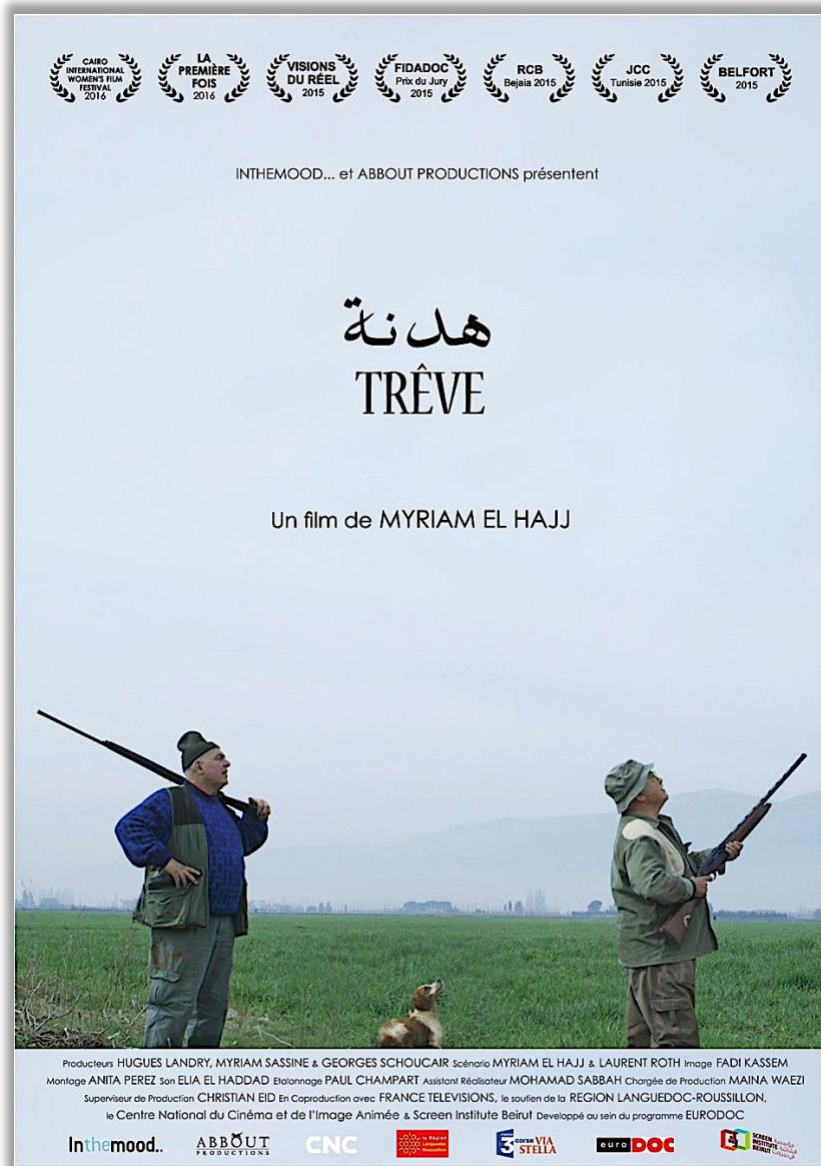


³⁸⁸ About Productions. n.d. *Rami Kodeih*. Online image. *About Productions*. Accessed July 2, 2022.
<http://www.abboutproductions.com/viewDirectorA?id=56>.

³⁸⁹ ana. n.d. *Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud*. Online image. *Ana Contemporary Arab Cinema*. Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://www.anaarabcinema.com/directors13/mahmoud-ben-mahmoud>.

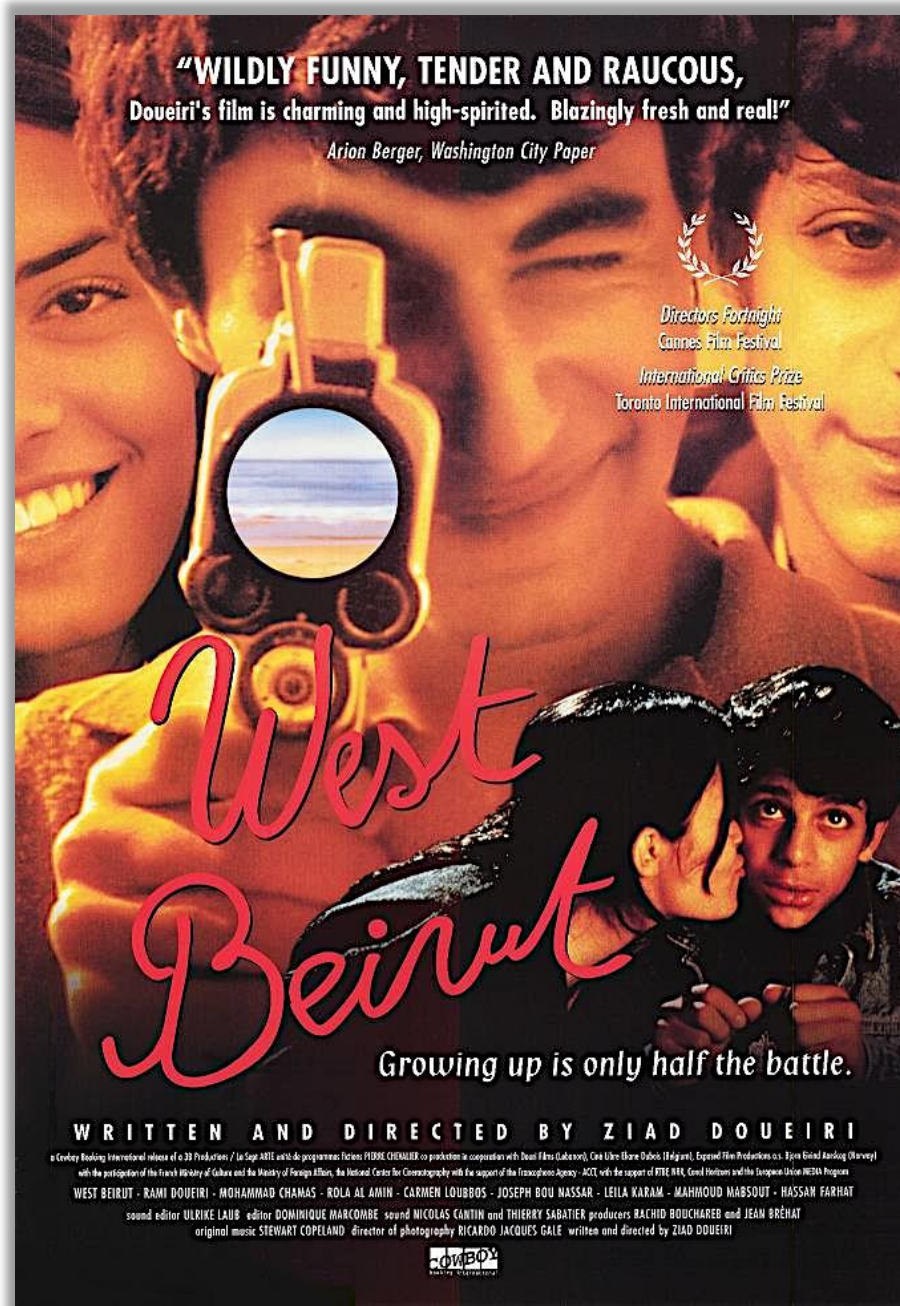
Appendix Seven: Figures – Film Posters

- a. *Trêve: A Time To Rest* (2015). Film by Myriam El-Hajj ³⁹⁰



³⁹⁰ El Hajj, Myriam. "Trêve." IMDb, April 20, 2015. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4805606/>.

b. *West Beirut* (1998). Directed by Ziad Doueiri ³⁹¹



³⁹¹ Doueiri, Ziad. "West Beirut (West Beyrouth)." IMDb, October 30, 1998.

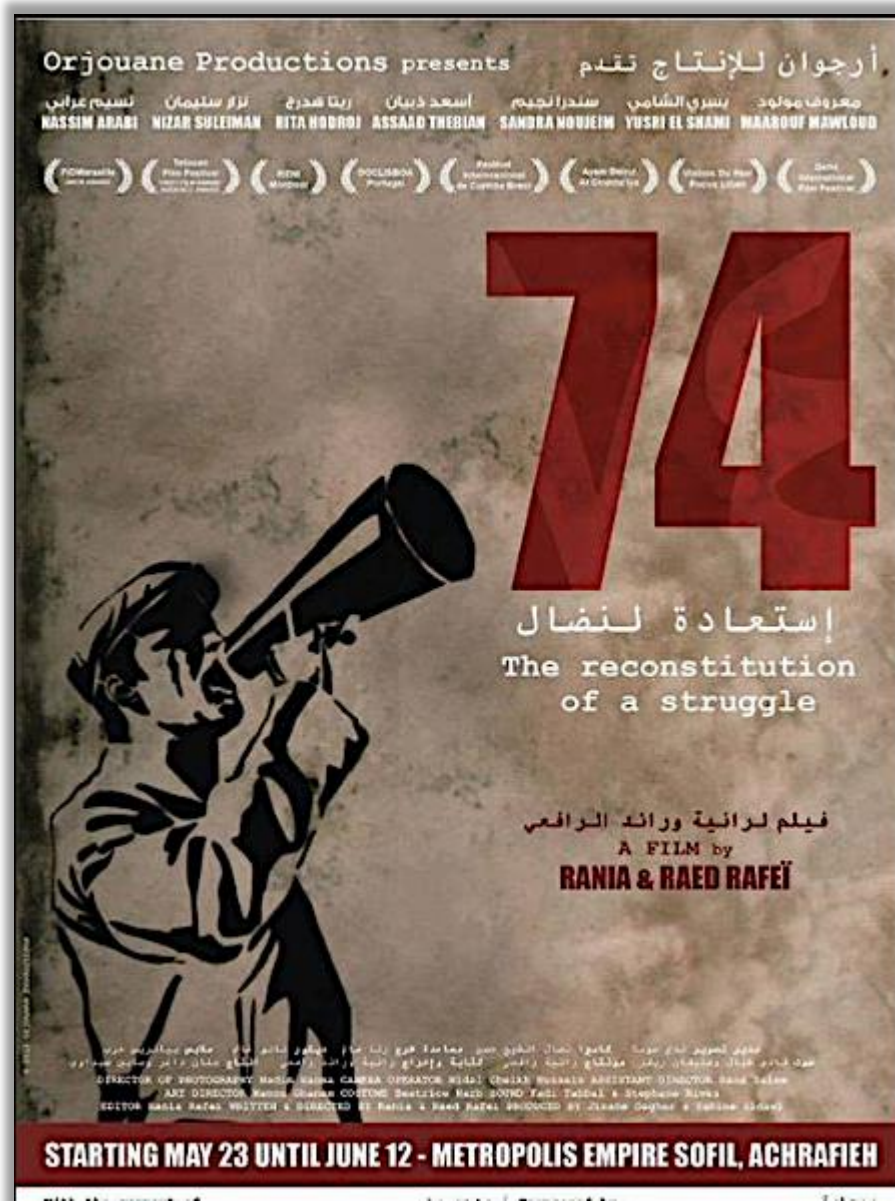
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0157183/?ref_=tt_mv_close.

d. *Laïcité, Inch'Allah!* (2011). Film by: Nadia El-Fani ³⁹³



³⁹³ El Fani, Nadia. "Laïcité, Inch'Allah!" IMDb, September 21, 2011. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1987601/>.

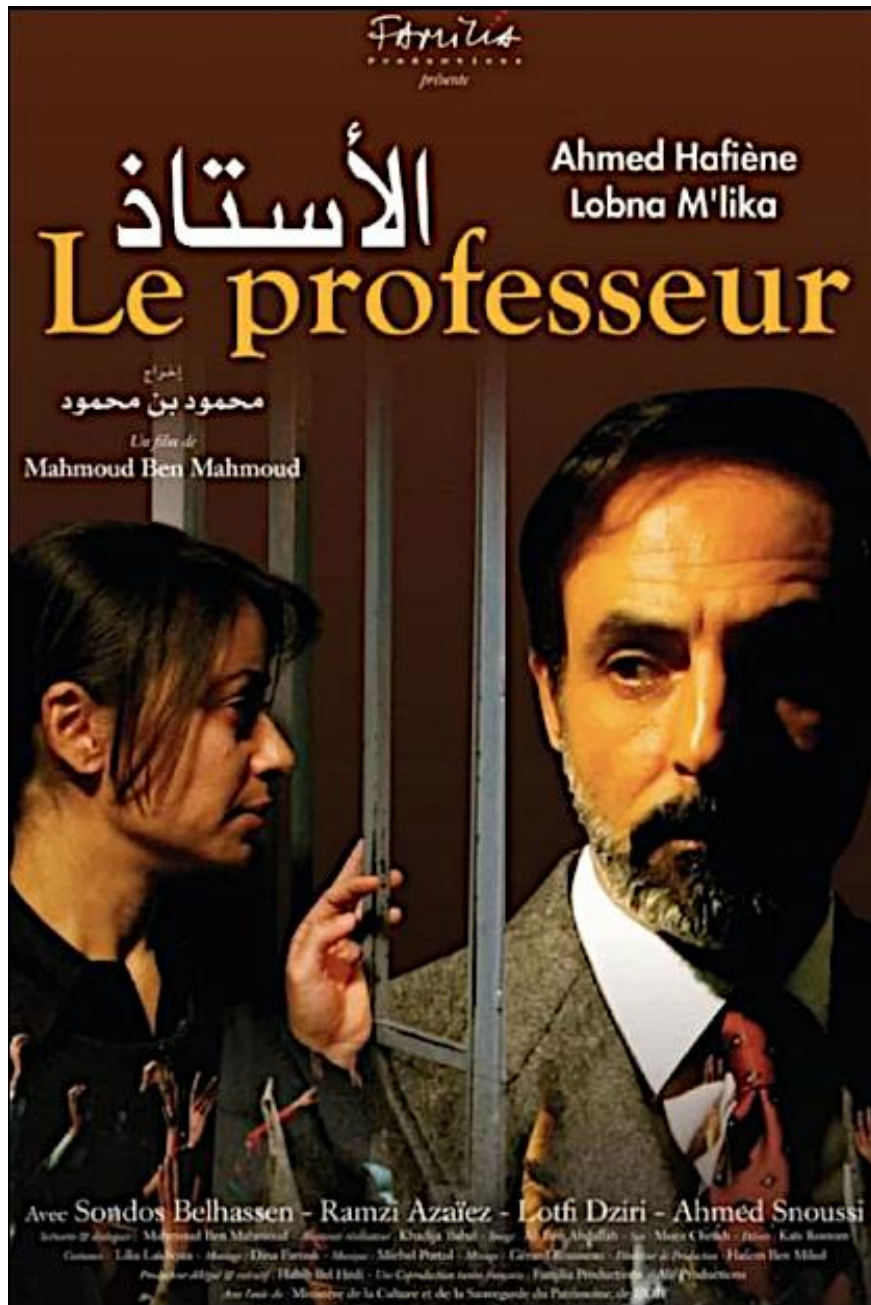
e. 74: *The Reconstitution of A Struggle* (2012). Film by: Rania Rafei and Raed Rafei ³⁹⁴



³⁹⁴ Rafei, Raed, and Rania Rafei. "74 (La Reconstitution d'Une Lutte)." IMDb, July 8, 2012.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2356374/>.

f. *Le Professeur* (2012), Directed by Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud ³⁹⁵



³⁹⁵ Ben Mahmoud, Mahmoud. "Le Professeur." IMDb, November 16, 2012.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3099378/>.

