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Compiled by Dr. Bart Cammaerts and Dr. Nick Anstead

Sukkar Banat (Caramel)

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This chapter puts forth the most relevant viewpoints within each of the theories that this study is based on. First the perspective from which this study is being approached, a feminist perspective, is explained. Then the theories of cultural proximity, gender roles and active audiences are discussed respectively; Previous studies are also referenced all through out the literature review in order to support the relevance of this study. The chapter ends with a statement of the conceptual framework and the research questions and objectives of the study.

Feminist study of media encompasses a variety of media forms, each of which employs a distinct set of issues ascertained by the medium, how it is used, and by the various theoretical and methodological traditions through which scholars have studied the medium (Lotz and Ross, 2004). This study is situated in the theoretical framework of the cultural studies while taken from a feminist perspective. Lotz and Ross argued that theorists who approached the study of media thfmed24 3

As early as 1971, Pool observed that audiences prefer references to their own culture and that they would rather watch nationally produced fiction if it was up to the quality standard offered in North-American programs. Straubhaar also emphasized the importance of local television programming in the early 70s (In: Trepte, 2003). This preference that audiences have for locally produced media has been termed a longing for 'cultural proximity' (Straubhaar, 1991). Straubhaar argued that cultural proximity predicts that locally produced genres, programs that are closest or most directly relevant to the audience in cultural and linguistic terms, will be selected over imported programs.

While cultural proximity is based to a large degree in language, there are other levels of similarity or proximity based in cultural elements such as dress, ethnic types, gestures, body language, type of humor, story pacing, religion etc. (Straubhaar, 2003). There have been a number of studies that support this notion, a few include: Leila Abu-

Sukkar Banat

The development of gender studies was triggered by second wave feminism in the late 1960s. It developed critiques in gender inequalities in both personal relationships and social positioning. (Pitcher and Whelehan, 2004). The following is a discussion of the themes from gender studies that apply to Arab- Lebanese society and its relevance within the film.

Feminism has long been concerned with the existence of double standards. Feminists have argued that women should enjoy the same citizenship rights and rewards as men do. The concept of the double standards has more recently been associated with the analysis of informal norms and rules of behavior, particularly within sexual culture. (Pitcher and Whelehan, 2004). "The double standard of sexuality means that sexual behavior deemed inappropriate in a woman, and which she is shown social disapproval, may be regarded as appropriate and as praiseworthy in a man" (Pitcher and Whelehan, 2004, p. 34); this is most definitely rings true for Lebanese society. For example Beck and Keddie (1978) explain in their book that in Middle Eastern traditional family, tremendous importance is given to a bride's virginity and they don't usually experience freedom until they are not sexually vulnerable anymore- after menopause, whereas me

relations which allows for possibility of social change, criticism prevails which makes it less applicable to this society.

West (1989)

grown away from the simplistic notion of the stereotype, and into the way women as viewers can appropriate images to their own ends; that there are many meanings to be yielded and grasped by women. (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004).

Leila Rahbani (2010, p. 9) wrote in her paper that “misperceptions of women and representing them as sex objects [have been] seen in Arab media for decades”. She continued to write about how there has been much concentration either on female roles in media as sex objects or mothers and wives and other images inline with the patriarchal system in Arab society. According to a UNDP report that analyzed the main characteristics of 31 Arab films (mainly in Egyptian films as they produce the most widely received Arab films) produced between the 1990s and 2000. They found that there were major “shortcomings in the presentation and embodiment of the image of women and the confinement of the latter to a

interviewees according to the research questions and objectives. Furthermore, it works particularly well when the data to be collected is qualitative (Patton, 1990).

Criteria for the selection of the respondents were decided upon prior to the selection and had two principle aims. The first was "to ensure that all the key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are covered" (Ritchie et al, 2003, p.79). Therefore, all of the respondents selected had to be female and had watched whether they liked it or not. The women also had to be Lebanese and lived most of their lives in Lebanon to ensure that they understood the culture and women's issues and in essence were a part of it. Women from the age of 22 till 56 were interviewed; a total of 11 people were interviewed. While I was reluctant to stop data collection at 11 interviewees I was only able to fly to Lebanon to conduct the interviews for a limited amount of time and thus was constrained by this factor. However, a number of themes became recurrent throughout the interviews and therefore it was deemed ok to end collection then.

The second principle was "to ensure that, within each of the key criteria, some diversity is included so that the impact of the characteristic concerned [could] be explored" (Ritchie et al, 2003, p. 79). Thus, I made sure to select people from various religions, education and class statuses, although it was very difficult to reach lower class and poorly educated people and those who I did reach had not seen the film so the study was limited in this respect and only involved the middle and upper middle class's opinions. In order to find these women I employed convenience sampling, which is when people are selected based on their availability and willingness to respond. While it may be considered a weak form of sampling there are precautions that researchers can take to minimize limitations of reliability such as making sure the sample included all of the criteria I needed as well as eliminating bias in the selection. (Gravetter and Forzano, 2009). To do this I went to different areas in Lebanon (as the country is sectioned according to religion, and class) and went to various hair/ waxing salons and schools and chatted with the women there (mothers, teachers, clients, hairdressers). I also went to my parent's acquaintance's offices and spoke to them and their colleagues and those who showed interest allowed me to interview them in the office. Also acquaintances of friend's and family allowed me to go to their homes and interview them

The pilot study conducted not only supported the relevance of this study but it also produced

This chapter is structured into three sections, each one pertaining to a sub-question asked in this study. Within the first two sections the results and analysis are discussed simultaneously and the themes that arose are linked back to the theoretical framework that the study is based on to answer the two sub-questions. The third section combines the information gathered from the first two sections to answer the third and final sub-question.

In terms of both the actual Lebanese Arabic and the cultural references that come along with speaking in a certain language, the majority of the interviewees felt passionately about the need for this film to be in Lebanese Arabic for it to 'work'. Two trilingual interviewees explained that watching it in French was not as enjoyable an

there is no equivalent even if dubbed that could be as satisfying as it being wholly from their country. It was also common that women felt more prompted to watch this film due to nothing like it being produced from Lebanon or in Lebanese Arabic, this implies that there is a longing for these issues to be spoken of and in their native tongue. When asked about the importance of the film being in Lebanese Arabic, Fatima, who does not usually

Look it will always make you feel like you are watching a movie, you won't feel like it's your environment. Because already to begin with you are denying it and washing your hands free of these issues, it is not being brought to your attention that "no that might be you.

The film being produced in Lebanese Arabic to Dalal, and other women who said similar things in their interviews, was significant in that it made her feel involved and pay attention to the message of the film and to a certain extent a "lesson" from the film. To her, she could

Here, the film was received as a means to teach women to trick men and society into thinking they are following social norms and gender rules, when in fact they are living freely. The women that decoded

Sex before marriage is happening now in our society, they are trying to send a message, like look "if you get yourself in a don't worry girls there are ways around it, its not the end of the world, don't go commit suicide or something, you can fix it." (Dalal)

It could be said that the women who decoded the film in the manner that Maryela, Dakhelo and Dalal did felt it was a means to challenge patriarchal norms and the role of women as meant to be "obedient" (Minces, 1980). By seeing the film as teaching women how to trick society, it stipulates that society wont change and women recognize that but there are ways around it for women to have a happy fulfilling life. The second theme is similar to this reading in that social norms are

Unfortunately we have crimes of passion and all that stuff and I guess Nadine Labaki wanted to highlight this. So IT WAS CRUCIAL TO SHOW THAT.

This comment suggests a number of things: first she decided the film here in a critical-semantic fashion because she refers to the Director, Nadine Labaki, and what her intention was of showing that scene. Second, because she thought that a message was being delivered through this scene it suggests that Farah watches films in hopes of helping society progress into a more modern world. Third, it showed that her understanding was that Nisrine did not want the surgery and that the pressure of societies demands forced her into doing it, which shows her disagreement and anger with present social norms. Anger towards society's double standards was shown in almost all of the women's interviews however Abeer's comment is the best representative for how all the women felt on the matter:

I wish she could have been honest and just told her fiancé the truth but I know even if he really loved her, he wouldn't accept it because every Lebanese man, and I know this because I have brothers, EVERY Lebanese man wants to marry a virgin they want to be the only one who she has slept with. Even though he can have as much sex as he wants before marriage, its ok, he is a man [said with sarcasm]. That's how our society works.

Finally, some of the interviewees were happy that a lesbian character was put in the film however they were a little disappointed with the level of attention she was given in the film which supports the notion that they were looking to film as a tool for progression:

Homosexuality is huge in Lebanon. I would have liked actually Nadine to portray something more powerful with that character. But then again maybe she was afraid to be attacked, I don't know. I WANTED TO SEE THAT because I know how much my gay friends suffer in Lebanon. (Farah)

Although most of the women did want to see more for the character some were happy that it was finally being brought up at all:

With a lot of, courage from Nadine, hats off to her that she touched on the subject of homosexuality in Lebanon whether it is lesbian or gay or whatever. Good for her. It is

wedding and it was fine. No. This isn't enough. She had to continue this film. (Fatima).

Other women showed similar readings of the film such as Dalal, she said that she felt that Labaki was trying to say that “we should really study a situation before getting involved”. Speaking about Layal's affair she continued, “look today woman are going all the way [having sex] in relationships but you have to think of the end point. Where is this going?” Statements such as this one show that the film was viewed as a tool to show “the moral of the story”, to help women not make the same mistakes as women like Layal. Dakhelo makes this very clear in her critical semantic decoding of the scene:

The message from the whole thing is not just to show the stories, it was to enlighten other girls to not get themselves stuck in those situations. She [Labaki] shows how Layal

[despondent tone of voice] When I saw that scene when Jamale is at her friend's wedding and she goes to the bathroom and puts that dye on her pants to show that she still gets her period, it really really hurt me. I mean I felt bad for her because she needs to make a point to herself about her youth but at the same time I felt like she was so simple minded, so silly.

The scenes that dealt with 'social taboos' were decoded in three different ways and in turn presented three different level of empowerment that women experienced in watching the

they all interpreted it as a tool to change society. The third sub-question, how was the film interpreted in terms of empowerment, was answered by analyzing further the results from the first and second questions. This revealed that the viewers did find this film empowering on different levels- superficial, substantial and reversed, according to three different themes that emerged from the respondents' decoding of the scenes dealing with 'social taboo' and issues.

What all of this implies is that women in Lebanon are not just watching locally produced controversial films, such as _____, as a source of entertainment; these films become meaningful to them because they are used as a tool to safely voice their opinions about social norms, a safeguard from individual consequences of speaking or acting against social norms, and an instrument to help drive social change. Due to time, space and scope constraints I was forced to eliminate a number of other sections that would have made this study more comprehensive and further developed in terms of the themes established the results section. One of the most interesting aspects that I was not able to develop and hope that another researcher will is the opinions of the lower class women from more conservative families in Lebanon. It was a bit difficult for me to reach these women and those who I could reach had not watched the film, which is an interesting point in itself, it felt as though these women

Abu-Lughod, L.

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