



Home, homeland and exile have been at the forefront of every great piece of storytelling and literature, passed down from the Israelites in the Bible to Odysseus' journey home. I wanted to examine the extent to which cinema takes on this artistic heritage, and how these concepts permeate through cultural and cinematic convergence. In no filmography is this better expressed than Nadine Labaki. What I found was the cinematic myth of home is mapped through Labaki's thematic trilogy, where spaces of home or lack thereof are seen through the female gaze, mapping the own complex imaginary geography of modern day Beirut and Lebanon.

References:

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Caramel (Nadine Labaki, 2007) Image Courtesy of Sunnyland Films



Where do we go now? (Nadine Labaki, 2014) Image Courtesy of Les Films des Tournelles



Capernaum (Nadine Labaki, 2018) Image courtesy of Sony Pictures Classic

HOME

Home is expressed in a cinematic scope as "anyplace". (1) Home in Labaki's filmography is not confined to ideas of the "house", which is a literal material place, but rather exists as a place of family and friendships, which give the protagonists respite from the tumultuous events in their life. Home transcends societal rules and regulations, and is often portrayed as being somewhat eccentric; this can be best seen in her first feature, *Caramel* (2007), which takes place in a beauty salon (Si Belle), by which the love lives, career setbacks and family dramas of five friends meet and intersect.

Throughout the entire film, Si Belle is a female dominated and protected space, until Youssef (Adel Karram), is allowed in and this is only as a form of payment for his help. As Luma Balaa has noted, "there is no space for him in this women's space" as he has to shout to be heard over the din of hair dryers, radio and conversation. Therefore, the home in this context becomes "symbolic of feminine power". (2)

By situating sites of home in female dominated spaces, it recalibrates the woman's body as the national body. (3)

HOMELAND

Homeland in Labaki's second feature expresses the German concept of *Heimat*, i.e the home that is essentially public and collective, that "cannot belong to each of us as an individual". (4)

Where do we go now? (2014) Engages with concepts of nationality that extend beyond geographical territory. The fictional village exemplifies the German concept of *Heimat*; by focusing on the women of the village as a whole. As Spike Peterson has noted, "women... become the battleground of [national] group struggles". (5) It is the women that protect and enable the unification of the village against the warring outside, and it is the women who are hurt in the process; though the only person to be killed is a man, it is his mother, sister and female friends who are seen to be crying and grieving. The evocation of the gendered nation is somewhat obvious, and a continuation from *Caramel*, but is not unique to Lebanese cinema. The woman as the nation is mirrored in France (Marianne), England (Boadecia) and Ireland (Mother Ireland). This phenomenon is encapsulated in Deniz Kantiyobi's writing that "women bear the burden of being 'mothers of the nation'". (6)

EXILE

The cycle is complete with Labaki's most recent film, *Capernaum* (2018), which examines exile. Exile is the condition of having been banished from one's homeland.

Exile is experienced in *Capernaum* by many people-- but Zain (Zain Al Rafeaa) is the only one of the characters to self-impose his own exile. Zain, being a male retains some autonomy and can freely navigate between multiple homes. The women, however, are forced into exile-- by marriage, motherhood or 'duty'.

Labaki utilises Freud's seminal theory of the 'uncanny'; or the 'unheimlich', where the 'heimlich' (home/ homeland) becomes unfamiliar or 'unhomely'. (7) Once the uncanny has been realised, it can never revert back to the homely-- the heimlich is now and forever 'haunted' by what was or has occurred. His journey as a whole represents the wider "cinematic myth of home" (8) -- one which can never fully be realised purely due to the fact that 'home' is by nature so liminal and undefinable that it can never be safely and securely represented on screen without being 'haunted' by what is and is not represented.