

# Speaking Out Loud

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Not too long ago I had been reading **Lina Khatib's** book ["Lebanese Cinema: Imagining the Civil War and Beyond"](#) (2008) and was fascinated by her bold proposal: Modern Lebanese cinema is best explored in the context of the **Civil War**, partly because almost all Lebanese films since the outset of the Civil War in 1975 have been about the war. I was always fascinated by the history of the Lebanese civil war, if only because of how little it was history or a history.

Canonical films such as Ziad Doueiri's **"West Beirut"** (1998) and Jocelyn Saab's **"Once Upon a Time, Beirut"** (1995) are set against this background. Civil war films are an entire industry in **Lebanon** and titles become available each year, and though these films are somewhat critical, the truth remains that the history of the civil war has never been written, let alone spoken.

Without a history, you cannot tell a story. **Bernard Khoury** expressed this with utmost accuracy: "Local artists are undeniably prisoners of war. In the end, Beirut's image is a prisoner of the Other's gaze." But Lebanon is a country where living exacts a price that is dearly paid, and what is important always is precisely that, the living. This is the story that Samer Daboul's **"Out Loud"** (2011) is telling, with an uncanny sense for magic and daydreaming.

The film is an unusual tale of friendship and love in modern Lebanon in which five strangers are brought together in postwar Lebanese society in a struggle to break through the traditional boundaries imposed by society. That being said, this doesn't come as a surprise for the connoisseurs of the





emerging **Arab cinema** in which traditional films have become the benchmark of its identity and the battleground for cultural antinomies.



But “Out Loud” has little to do with tradition films. The colorful and bitter-sweet tale begins with the encounter between Nathalie – a random girl from the Internet – with this unlikely group of five friends, raised up in the openly violent tensions of Lebanon and struggling to find a way out of the vicious circle – the memories of the war, homophobia, corruption, hatred – in order to do what the Middle East deems impossible: To simply live as who you are.

After Rami and Ziad were found out to be a gay couple by their families, they have to run for their lives – and this part of the story is hardly a fiction in Lebanon – finding first temporary shelter in Jason’s house, where the five friends pledge loyalty to stay together and marry the one girl, and then at Nathalie’s chalet in Zahlé, where they plan to settle down, far away from a hostile world, which is alas, everybody’s world.

But we don’t need the movies to tell us that love is not like in the movies. **Hannah Arendt** reflects that even if you turn life into a story and tell beautiful stories about life, you cannot make life beautiful by telling a story, except at the expense of life playing tricks on you. The original plan is somewhat changed, but not altogether given up. After all, it is promises what constitutes the basic currency of the human world.

What is demanded here isn’t resignation or the acceptance of a certain sealed fate but the facing up to reality – that includes both of the orders of happiness and unhappiness. What is this world in which they want to live? That they want to create? Is it possible? Is it real? Old as those questions might be, they’re never irrelevant and for Lebanon, they’re the thread of silence that extends between one war and another.

Suffice it to say that there is no movie like “Out Loud” ever made in the **Middle East**. In Lebanon, the year 2009 saw the release of Marc Abi Rached’s film “**Help**” that also dealt with **homosexuality** – though in passing – together with other taboo topics such a delinquency and prostitution. The film was **banned** short of its release.



**Joanna Andraos**, who played the role of young prostitute Soraya in “Help” tells us about the film: “Many films talk about politics, war, conflict... but the singularity of this film is that it just tells a story”. “Out Loud” is also another story-telling film – which is somewhat rare in the Middle East – that also speaks about politics, war and conflict but in such a subtle – yet explicit – way that it doesn’t obscure what the film really wants to tell.

“Out Loud” – to put it in simple words – isn’t only challenging the taboos of a society but also telling a beautiful story and at that successfully. Unlike most films that tell linear stories with socially relevant content – and somehow evoke the format of the traditional novel – there’s hardly any **social realism** in it and the aesthetics of the film is somewhere between poetry and hope.

Director **Samer Daboul** wanted to plant a seed for the future, and this film is precisely it. It is a question mark and an exclamation mark for all those who want to live in tolerance and equality. This film – Romantic, epic, sardonic – being humble as it is, is a microcosm of the real Lebanon that lurks underneath the wars and the endless political diatribes. In this Lebanon, there’s just so much life, there’s just so much death; all at once. But it’s all in our hands. **Kierkegaard** writes: “Decision is

the eternal protest against fiction.”



In my next review, I will be speaking about [“Out Loud – The Documentary”](#) that was released together with the movie and that tells in detail about the ordeal of shooting a movie of this kind in Lebanon and the status of human rights in the country.

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