The Disillusionment of "Home" in Abla Farhoud's *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles*

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Born in Lebanon, Abla Farhoud is recognized as a prolific author who, at the young age of five, immigrated to Quebec with her family in the early 1950s. Over the years, she has attracted considerable critical attention as a successful playwright, but is also celebrated for her prose works in which she explores the plight of migrants, often women, who find themselves opposed to traditional cultures and values in Canada.[1] Most notably, Farhoud concentrates on a Lebanese woman's struggle to adapt to life in Montreal in *Le Bonheur à la queue glissante* (1998), a seminal text that places many of her literary productions within the category of *écriture migrante*. It is Farhoud's focus on nomadism, identity, and problematic homecomings that establishes a connection to other migrant writers located in Montreal, such as Dany Laferrière, Régine Robin, Ying Chen, Marie-Célie Agnant, and Émile Ollivier. At a later stage of her career, Farhoud published *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015), an autofictional work in which the author's avatar, Aablè, moves to Montreal with her family as a young girl. But after fourteen years in Quebec, Aablè's family travels to Lebanon, which sets the stage for the second novel in this projected trilogy. Farhoud's *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017) reprises some key immigrant issues seen in the previous text, mainly the themes of disenfranchisement, nostalgic longing, and exile. In this work, the father of the Abdelnour clan makes the decision to repatriate the family to Lebanon, thus uprooting the children from their comfortable lifestyle in Montreal. As seen in *Toutes celles que j'étais*, this novel also channels many of Farhoud's actual experiences, for the narrative is situated in the pre-civil war period of the 1960s. In fact, Farhoud did return to Lebanon at the age of twenty in 1965 but fled to France before the onset of the Six-Day War in 1967.

Since the Abdelnour family's migration emphasizes travelling across significant geographical boundaries, the first part of this article examines the complex represen-

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tation of the homeland, a distant mirage on the horizon. At the nexus of the family's journey is the crisis of radical displacement, as they cross borders to arrive "over there," but struggle to establish roots to create a sense of "home" in this unfamiliar place. To delve into this intricate notion of returning "home," Salman Rushdie's perspective on imaginary homelands is interpolated into the discussion in concert with Edward Said's notion of imaginative geography. Although the narrative unfolds from the alternating viewpoints of several family members, the main part of this study focuses on the problem of disillusionment, stemming from the difficult experiences of the two older daughters, Ikram and Faïzah. Seen through a feminist lens, the overarching crisis of disillusionment is also manifested on a corporeal level. To clarify, the bodies of the two sisters demonstrate resistance, at times, to cultural traditions and norms in Lebanon. Most importantly, Farhoud concentrates on the two sisters' struggles to assimilate into the restrictive and foreign customs of Lebanese society, a challenge for independent women accustomed to mobility, freedom, and vast opportunities in Montreal. The concluding part of this article briefly considers Farhoud's perspective on the plight of immigrants who live in a perpetual state of exile in search of a place to call "home." According to Sara Ahmed, "home" can be defined as a place with fixed, stable boundaries, signifying the notion of belonging. However, in migrant narratives, this conception is unattainable, as immigrants are perpetually dislocated from a place or a space to call home (see Ahmed, "Home and Away" 339).

It is useful to begin this study by looking at the family's path of migration, a key component of Farhoud's textual production. At first glance, one of the most striking aspects of the novel is the author's reversal of the more traditional path, often seen in Québécois migrant narratives, in which immigrants move across borders in search of better lives in the new world, Canada. Within the context of these texts, Susan Ireland has studied narratives of return, with emphasis on the direction of the immigrant's trajectory. As she notes, "The outcomes of these backward journeys are equally diverse, ranging from disillusionment, feelings of guilt, and the inability to move beyond lamentation and mourning" (24). Most importantly, Ireland posits that the notion of returning to the homeland is problematic and ostensibly impossible (29). To amplify the complexity of these backward journeys, Ireland points out the generational tension at the locus of narratives of return in immigrant texts. This conflict plays a key role in the text, as is shown in the relationship between the two daughters and their parents. In any case, the Abdelnours leave contemporary Québécois society to travel to a more traditional culture, with specific role expectations assigned to men and women. For the parents, the return to Lebanon is fuelled by a nostalgic longing to rediscover their origins by reestablishing roots in their native country. But the parents' wish to reconnect with "home" poses numerous obstacles identified with the migrant position of exclusion and inclusion, thus creating a representation of the homeland as a mythical place. This fictional image of home merits closer examination, as it is linked to the overarching problem of disillusionment.

In *Orientalism*, Said studies the dominance and power of the West over the East,

which recalls the days of colonialism and imperialism. At the same time, he also examines a specific view of the East in which others describe or speak for the Orient, positioned from an exterior and more distant perspective. Most importantly, Said uses the term *imaginative geography* to signify a historical reference to the Orient, which harks back to the past: "The Orient therefore alternated in the mind's geography between being an Old World to which one returned, as to Eden or Paradise, there to set up a new version of the old, and being a wholly new place to which one came" (*Orientalism* 58). As an exiled writer from India, Rushdie broadens the perspective on Said's notion of *imaginative geography*. From Rushdie's personal viewpoint, it is impossible to reclaim what has been lost; thus the writer "creates fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10). In harmony with Rushdie's concept of imaginary homelands, Avtar Brah observes: "On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'" (192). In an interview with Laila Maalouf, Farhoud echoes Brah's and Rushdie's ideas: "Aussitôt que tu pars, tu es déraciné. Et en vivant ailleurs, tu es déjà différent. Il n'y a pas de retour possible" (2). These various theories of the imaginary homeland mirror, to some extent, the perspective of the Abdelnour children. For them, the notion of returning home is problematic, as "home" refers to the city of Montreal. Since they were not raised in Lebanon, they do not know their country 'of origin'; thus, they are confronted by the challenge of living between two different cultures. Régine Robin refers to this concept as living in a space situated in the "in-between, inside-outside, between-languages" (176). For this second generation, the image of Lebanon is steeped in this perception, which is akin to Said's historical *imaginative geographical* representation and Rushdie's fictional homeland.

If Brah and Rushdie read the homeland as a mythical place, it can also be considered as a mirage, a deceptive façade on the horizon. As Mieke Bal observes, "A horizon, then, is a boundary, but one that cannot be crossed. The moment you approach it, it recedes" (415). Farhoud seems to apply Bal's concept to the text, as she draws the reader's attention to the representation of Lebanon as a mirage, resembling, at times, a *trompe-l'oeil* device seen in art, architecture, cinema, and the theatre. For the purposes of this analysis, Farhoud's use of the *trompe-l'oeil* mechanism is mainly identified with the idea of creating an optical illusion in which an image is seemingly deceptive to the gaze of the spectator. As Catherine Parayre explains, "the illusion of any *trompe-l'oeil* is only temporary, a first impression, as the realistic features of *trompe-l'oeil* works usually display details indicating that they are not reality" (107). Although Parayre's observations are focused on panoramic paintings, some of these key aspects of the *trompe-l'oeil* technique relate to the author's aesthetic style. At the nexus of her textual production, Farhoud creates a poetics of illusions, a most unique element of the narrative's architectonics. To clarify, she incorporates a sharp contrast between illusions and reality, revolving around the dominant image of the sun. Most

notably, the *trompe-l'oeil* or illusion is textually exemplified by Ikram's and Adib's (the older siblings') initial impression of Lebanon as a warm place, one that seems to welcome them home. From Ikram's perspective, "Le Liban, c'est la lumière" (Farhoud 50).[2] As Ikram observes, the homeland is also strikingly animated: "Ici, tout est excitant, tout est différent, tout est charmant, tout est ensoleillé, on ne s'ennuie jamais" (35).[3] However, Farhoud deviates from Ikram's positive reaction to her new environment by creating a fundamental opposition between Ikram and her sister, Faïzah. In sharp contrast to Ikram's joyful embrace of the sunny Lebanese landscape, Faïzah's impression reveals a more ominous image: "Le grand soleil est là pour nous rendre folles" (22).[4] This alternative perception of the sun also shows that Faïzah is not duped by the *trompe-l'oeil* effect, the luminous, inviting image of Lebanon. Beneath the superficial image of the warm sun, Faïzah alludes to a darker reality in which the sun is viewed as a menacing force, threatening to drive women to the brink of madness.

If the *trompe-l'oeil* is a device that can be used in the theatre, the structure of the novel also incorporates other stylistic aspects that highlight Farhoud's signature style as a renowned dramatist. The story unfolds in a circular form, which is reminiscent of a theatrical chorus, composed of four voices that share a narrative function. On a structural level, this polyphonic fusion of voices creates a doubling effect within the fabric of the narrative, and is thus linked to the *trompe-l'oeil* mechanism, with emphasis on multiple illusions. These voices not only steer the narrative but offer a variety of personal perspectives in the form of alternating interior monologues, which are ostensibly addressed to the reader. With this innovative narrative technique, Farhoud allows the reader to study the central protagonists' reactions to their new environment, while gaining access to their inner thoughts and impressions. The chorus consists of four Abdelnour family members: their cousin Youssef, who resides in Beirut; the two daughters Ikram and Faïzah; and their brother Adib. It is important to note that Faïzah arrived earlier than Ikram and Adib. In fact, she has been living in Beirut for two years and has adapted well to the homeland's social norms, which, in turn, is facilitated by her mastery of Arabic. In the opening pages of the text, Ikram and Adib arrive to rejoin their mother and four of their siblings. With ambivalent feelings, they are the last of the Abdelnour children to leave Montreal to partake in this familial quest to discover their roots. Interestingly, Farhoud's character Ikram can be viewed as a fictional avatar of the author's professional experiences. In the early part of her career, Farhoud started out as an actress before she devoted herself to literary production. Ikram mirrors the author's devotion to the theatre, for she, too, has pursued a career as an actress in Montreal. Since Ikram has a passion for her craft, it is not surprising that she is determined to seek work on the stage in Beirut. But after her arrival, Ikram is confronted by the challenge of various cultural differences, which seem very foreign to her and her siblings. Positioned as an observer, Youssef comments on his cousins' struggles: "Leur adaptaion ne s'est pas faite sans peine. Pour eux, c'était un nouveau pays. La langue, les coutumes, tout" (15).[5]

Youssef's observation about the Abdelnours' struggle to assimilate not only dims

the idyllic ambiance of the brightness of the Lebanese landscape, but also seems to foreshadow their cultural challenges. While exploring the shops, Ikram meets a shopkeeper who speaks to her in French because her Arabic is weak. The woman's intention is to offer Ikram some useful advice, forewarning her of the potential danger of Lebanese men: "Le sourire est une invitation. Je dis ça pour votre bien, vous ne connaissez pas encore le pays, les hommes, vous savez, quand ils voient une jeune fille […] Si elle leur sourit une seconde, c'est une seconde de trop, ils pensent tout de suite que c'est une fille facile" (36).[6] With this candid truth, Ikram's initial impression of the homeland as a warm, welcoming place seems to abruptly fade into a distant mirage on the horizon. For Ikram, the merchant's warning suggests that her independent lifestyle, as a Québécois immigrant, might conflict with the cultural constraints of a patriarchal society. As Ghenwa Hayek observes, the cityscape of Beirut is "far from being the site of liberation and emancipation for women" (55).[7] In any case, it is interesting that the shopkeeper encourages Ikram to ask her mother about the cultural norms between the sexes in Lebanon, which she does in an unrelated context. Since the family is temporarily living in a house close to the sea, Ikram finds it odd that their mother does not accompany the children to the beach, especially as she enjoyed family swimming outings in Montreal. This scene is noteworthy because Farhoud enables the reader to closely observe the mother's character, while directing the reader's focus to the cultural restrictions imposed upon the female body in Lebanon. Ikram's mother prefaces the conversation by stating: "Ici, une femme de mon âge ne va pas nager" (79).[8] Ikram is stunned by her mother's remark, as she is only in her forties. Most of all, the mother subscribes to the cultural *veiling* of the female body, and, in so doing, sacrifices the corporeal freedom she enjoyed in Montreal. When Ikram asks her if she and her sisters are violating the rules for women in Lebanon, the mother replies: "Non, vous êtes des étrangères pour eux, des Américaines, on vous pardonne tout, vous n'êtes pas obligées de suivre les règles" (80).[9] Here, the mother highlights her daughters' "otherness" because they are regarded as *Américaines* by the Lebanese people. As the mother seems to suggest, the Abdelnour girls are viewed as foreigners because they are unfamiliar with conservative Lebanese customs. However, this remark only triggers Ikram's anger. She wonders where these rules are written, whereas her mother shows that she conforms to the norms in readjusting to the social customs of her native culture: "J'ai été élevée ici. Quand je vivais au Canada, je faisais comme les gens de là-bas, maintenant je suis ici, je fais comme les gens d'ici" (80).[10] In her willingness to comply with her country's norms, the mother respects the role expectations assigned by the culture, thus sacrificing the independence to which she was accustomed in Quebec. This sudden collision between two very different cultures is highlighted in this pivotal conversation between Ikram and her mother. At the same time, the reader can observe a tense moment between mother and daughter, one that underscores their generational conflicts.

This key scene merits a closer look to explore how Ikram and her mother view the

female body, with a focus on gender expectations. In her work on Asian-American immigrant mothers and daughters, Lisa Lowe has studied relationships between immigrant generations, with emphasis on how second-generation daughters grapple with these cultural differences. Despite the variance in cultural contexts, several aspects of these differences pertain to Ikram's situation. As Lowe posits, daughters often contest the more restrictive roles of their mothers' generations because they have different conceptions of gender roles. She also suggests that second-generation daughters can find traditional gender expectations to be confining and oppressive (134). Lowe's ideas are exemplified by Ikram's reaction to her mother's acceptance of designated roles for women in the homeland. Most importantly, it is the mother's acknowledgement of this cultural difference that resonates as a pivotal awakening experience for Ikram, shattering the illusion of living in this perpetual sunny landscape, evoking paradise. From the conversation with her mother, Ikram becomes acutely aware that women's bodies are subject to constant surveillance in a patriarchal society. To examine this from a third-world postcolonial perspective, Evelyne Accad notes the long history of patriarchal oppression and control of women in Lebanon, a problem which is grounded in the sexual politics of the Middle East (246). In Farhoud's novel, Faïzah initially becomes cognizant of widespread surveillance shortly after she arrives in Lebanon. As she describes it, "Ce pays est un sexe ambulant. Le sexe est imprimé dans le regard des hommes" (22).[11] The emphasis on male sexuality here tends to efface and objectify the feminine body, an important aspect that will particularly affect Faïzah's painful experience in forthcoming chapters. In noting her sister's evolving attitudes, Ikram is also aware of the change in Faïzah's character. Although it has only been two years since her departure from Montreal, Ikram notices that her sister has become a virtual stranger. Above all, Faïzah has not offered to ease Ikram's transition by guiding her through the adaptation period in Lebanon. This reference to Faïzah as a stranger underscores the growing disconnection between the two sisters.

As the narrative unfolds, Farhoud amplifies these various manifestations of familial tensions, which extend beyond the mother-daughter relationship. In another key scene, Ikram faces her parents to broach a potentially controversial subject: her professional opportunities in Beirut. As the time passes, she has become increasingly motivated to find work as an actress to distract her from the feeling of being "désadaptée" (94) in Lebanon. It is also her desire to gain access to the culture that motivates her to seek a job as an actress. After a few auditions, Ikram is hired to play the role of an immigrant who returns to her native country, but her inability to adequately speak the language impedes her from performing in Arabic, at least initially. Nonetheless, she succeeds in securing two roles: one on the stage and the other on television. When she shares the news with her parents, she unexpectedly confronts a major obstacle, one which also highlights the generational gap between Ikram and her parents. Here, Farhoud develops the previous conversation with Ikram's mother in which she explained some of the restrictions placed on women's

bodies in the homeland. In this scene, it is the father who imparts a key cultural difference to his daughter, which is connected to her chosen profession: "Tu sais, ma fille, nous sommes au Liban […] une fille de bonne famille ne joue pas au théâtre ni à la télévision" (109).[12] He adds: "je parle du Liban. Nous vivons au Liban, Ikram. Les règles ont changé" (109).[13] The word *règles* echoes the mother's rhetoric in the preceding scene with Ikram and, once again, ignites Ikram's rage. However, Ikram stands by her commitment to her craft and, in so doing, becomes increasingly confrontational with her father. She dares him to force her to leave the family by baiting him: "Dis-moi clairement: Je ne veux pas de toi dans ma maison. J'irai mendier ou faire la putain. Mais je jouerai au théâtre et à la télévision" (110).[14] With her angry declaration that she is so determined to work as an actress that she even threatens to resort to prostitution or wandering the streets to beg for food, Ikram launches a fearless revolt against her father's lesson on cultural differences. In sharp contrast to the contemporary Canadian perspective on the performing arts, the Lebanese view is strikingly devoid of esteem. For women, the pursuit of acting is not regarded as a respectable or appropriate career path. This narrow-minded judgement is particularly difficult for the Abdelnour children to accept because it is 1966. Ikram's brother interrupts the heated exchange by saying: "les gens sont arriérés ou quoi!" (112).[15] The two brothers, Adib and Daoud, concur that Lebanese society is ostensibly "en retard de deux siècles au moins" (112).[16]

Adib's and Daoud's observations about Lebanese society allude to an important social point, one which adds dimension to Ikram's disillusionment related to her professional opportunities in Beirut. In her study of the urban/rural dichotomy in Lebanese literature, Ghenwa Hayek sheds light on this image of a "backwards" society; in some texts, the cityscape of Beirut is depicted as a site of "backwardness," containing elements of intolerance and even violence (53-55). In the passage cited above, the Abdelnour brothers' criticism points to Hayek's explanation of "backwardness," highlighting the collision between two disparate cultures. Nevertheless, Ikram remains steadfast and ambitious in achieving her artistic goals, refusing to sacrifice her love of acting. At the close of this tense conversation, Farhoud shifts the focus back to Ikram, as she concludes the exchange: "Je ne veux pas vendre mon âme. Faire ce que mon père et sa société veulent que je fasse, céder, abandonner ce que j'aime, devenir ce que je ne suis pas, ce serait vendre mon art et mon âme" (114).[17] In the aftermath of this clash, Farhoud interpolates another reference to the sun, but this time, it is not Faïzah who reflects on the darker image of the sun. Ikram questions the luminosity emanating from the sun that she felt upon arrival: "je me disais qu'au Liban il y a trop de soleil, impossible de déprimer ou d'angoisser. Justement, le soleil commence à me peser, je ne le supporte plus, je le fuis" (125).[18] In the passage, the verb *peser* seems to signal a shift from the illusion of warmth, the *trompe-l'oeil,* to a dim representation of the sun's rays. Here, Ikram's now ominous impression reflects Faïzah's bleaker view of Lebanon, mainly on a sociocultural level. She also asks herself a deeper question, as she wonders what her life will be like in this foreign culture.

To put these issues into perspective with the concept of the homeland, it appears to be a distant mirage on the horizon. Ikram questions the problematic notion of whether it is truly possible to come "home," as the customs are so radically different from her adopted country's practices in Canada. To add depth to this disheartening view of the homeland, Said notes that "homecoming is out of the question" (*Reflections* 85). To apply Said's idea to Farhoud's text, the perpetual sun that hovers over the beauty of Lebanon is inherently deceptive. It is as if the sun, the primary *trompe-l'oeil*, tricks the sisters (as foreigners), for it veils a sombre truth related to Lebanese cultural practices. Ikram has just been forced to confront a new reality: women are not free in a conservative culture that imposes multiple cultural constraints on their lives. Above all, women's bodies are subject to constant control and surveillance by the patriarchy.

If Ikram's resistance to following the rules underscores her audacious character, her sister's personal experience reveals a striking difference, pointing to another instance of profound disillusionment. For the most part, Farhoud portrays Faïzah as a conformist to Lebanon's social conventions, as she seems to adhere to many traditions and customs. Most importantly, Faïzah longs for the day she can wed and give up her job. With this wish, Faïzah shows that she seems to be subscribing to more traditional gender expectations assigned to women in Lebanese culture. At the same time, her dream of finding a husband points to a gradual transformation of her cultural identity, as she has, to some extent, separated herself from her independent life in Quebec to perhaps accept the customs of the host country. It is not long before she becomes enamoured of an upper-class lawyer named Azziz, who courts her in a traditional way, which leads to a proper marriage proposal. As an integral part of social conventions, the husband's family bestows gifts upon the bride's family. However, this is not the only visit from the groom's family. Farhoud intensifies the dramatic aspect of the text by creating a shocking incident that occurs prior to the wedding. In fact, a melodramatic atmosphere, infused with turmoil, characterizes the unexpected turn of events, highlighting Faïzah's excessive display of emotion. As Ikram watches the episode unfold, she observes that her sister expresses a desire to die, which she associates with the intrigue of a classically scripted tragic play. The groom and his father confront Faïzah's father to demand that he return their gifts because they have discovered Faïzah is impure. Ikram reflects on the tense confrontation between the two fathers: "Impure, ça veut dire souillée, dévirginisée, tout le monde sait ça. Ma soeur n'est plus vierge, et c'est la cause de la rupture des fiançailles" (149).[19] Here again, the power of the patriarchy appears to police the female body, deeming Faïzah's body unacceptable because she is not a virgin. From a third-world feminist perspective, Accad notes that "Lebanon is a Mediterranean country dominated by Islamo-Arab influences. As such, it carries the codes of honor and women's oppression, as well as masculine-macho values, to the furthest limits" (246). In this scene, Faïzah is cast as a victim of this traditional code of honour. Most importantly, the groom's father's declaration of Faïzah's body as impure suggests that she is stripped of the right to control her own body and its pleasures; thus, her previous indepen-

dent lifestyle in Montreal collides violently with the conservative social norms of Lebanese culture, steeped in religious convictions and moral constraints.

Farhoud heightens the theatrical aspect of the narrative by sustaining the focus on Ikram's perspective of this family drama. Unlike Faïzah, who regards the outcome as tragic, Ikram views it as a farce. As she puts it, "Je suis fatiguée de cette mentalité, de cette farce grossière qui se joue avec nos corps. J'en ai marre. Je ne veux plus être vierge. Ne serait-ce que pour faire un pied de nez à cette mascarade" (149).[20] As noted in a previous scene with her mother, Ikram rejects some key cultural norms; in this context, it is those that pertain to female sexuality, shown by her wish to remove herself from the jurisdiction of the patriarchy. To escape from this oppressive role assigned to women, exemplified in Faïzah's situation, Ikram declares the right to do what she wants with her own body, and, in so doing, refutes the patriarchal order. In the passage quoted above, this idea is illustrated by her wish, and her subversive decision, to no longer remain a virgin. Farhoud further develops Ikram's resistance to Lebanese customs, with emphasis on the inequality between the sexes. In her inner thoughts, Ikram contemplates the ongoing battle between the sexes that she observes in Lebanon. Positioned as an outsider, she rejects the socially scripted roles: "Je n'en peux plus de baisser les yeux. Je suis tannée de cette guerre des sexes, qui a toujours le même gagnant" (150).[21] In the homeland, women are forced to lower their gaze, a gesture signifying their subordination to men, thereby imprisoning them in eternal silence. Above all, feminine sexuality must be veiled and never discussed, a constraint that directly impacts Faïzah's predicament with Azziz. Ikram heightens her feminist position by condemning this sexist perception of the female body: "J'en ai ras le bol du secret, de ce voile de pureté moyenâgeux, de cette société féodale aux moeurs arriérées" (151).[22] Here, Ikram echoes her brother's view of Lebanese society, noted above, as "backwards"; however, she goes further in saying that the emphasis on feminine purity is not only shockingly obsolete but harks back to the views identified with feudal societies in the Middle Ages.

In the wake of this dramatic scene, Farhoud shifts the narrative focus to Faïzah, who unexpectedly mirrors many of her sister's attitudes, as shown in her revealing interior monologues. Faïzah analyzes the outcome of this emotionally charged episode by contemplating her irreversible mistake: she confessed to her fiancé that she was not a virgin. Although Faïzah was aware of a slight change in his attitude towards her, she was unprepared for the broken engagement. Here, she highlights the importance of virginity: "pour l'Oriental, la volonté de posséder une vierge, et même plusieurs, fait partie de sa culture, de ses rêves, de ses désirs les plus profonds, qu'il soit musulman ou chrétien ne change rien" (154-55).[23] She elaborates by also revealing another cultural ritual associated with designated gender roles: "l'homme oriental, quel qu'il soit, amoureux ou non, veut être le premier. Le premier en tout" (155).[24] In these passages, Faïzah echoes Ikram, as she, too, offers a social commentary on the relationship between the sexes. In Lebanon, regardless of Muslim or Christian religious practices, the cultural expectation is similar for women (154-55).

Faïzah's concluding words reinforce the authoritative role of Lebanese men, who must maintain their superiority on every level, which is not limited to sexuality. In her mind, Faïzah remembers her parents' words of caution: "ma fille ce n'est pas un garçon pour toi. Il va faire de toi sa servante. Il ressemble à sa famille. Ces gens-là n'ont aucun respect pour personne, ce sont des tyrans" (156).[25] Here, the parents' forewarning, signifying a more contemporary position, collides with the repressive attitudes towards women, which are upheld by Azziz's wealthy and highly traditional family. In any case, the outcome of this traumatic breakup provides the catalyst for Faïzah's increasing unhappiness, creating an acute emotional crisis. Since the broken engagement constitutes a pivotal episode in the text, it is also important to put this event into perspective with the overarching image of the homeland as an imaginary, mythic place. Moreover, Rushdie's notion reinforces the crisis of disillusionment, triggered by Faïzah's disheartening experience. Faïzah seems to be a victim of her own *trompe-l'oeil* because she believes that she can marry the man of her dreams. However, as an outsider from Montreal who has been exposed to more contemporary attitudes towards sexuality, she cannot ultimately conceal the fact that she no longer possesses the purity that women are required to have; thus, the patriarchy ultimately punishes her by marginalizing her socially. Sarah Ahmed adds depth to this problem of marginalization in her theory of embodied others, in which the body of the "other," the female "other" or the stranger, is unable to assimilate into other social spaces. In essence, the stranger suffers from "out-of-place-ness"; thus, it is impossible to become a "body-at-home" (*Strange Encounters* 53-54).

It is interesting to consider one of the earlier interior monologues in which Faïzah provides her own insight on gender differences and role expectations in Lebanon. From her early days in Beirut, she was aware of the power structure between the sexes. In a patriarchal society, women are constantly subjected to a man's desiring gaze, relegating them to the object position. In her study of the urban landscape of Beirut, Hayek suggests the city can be viewed as a site of oppressive nationalism (57). As a social backdrop, this term seems to reinforce Faïzah's observations of the clear delineation between genders in Lebanon, but she also maintains that feminine power does exist; it is predicated on sustaining that desiring gaze, which wanes as soon as a woman surrenders to the subjugated role of becoming a man's wife. When women lose their virginity, they lose their value; thus, their power is ostensibly destroyed, as Faïzah observes: "la marchandise défraîchie est dévaluée, autant pour les riches que pour les pauvres" (23).[26] With this keen assessment of the feminine condition in a conservative culture, Faïzah's observations mirror, to some extent, Ikram's stronger feminist position, but Ikram chooses to not participate in this oppressive tradition. She refuses to put herself in a position in which she is forced to subjugate herself to a Lebanese man. In any case, Faïzah solidifies their stance, as she emphasizes the value placed on virginity. In the passage cited above, the feminine body is viewed as a commodity, for it circulates within the masculine economy but loses its value as soon as feminine virtue is sacrificed. In disbelief, Faïzah contemplates the female condi-

tion: "On atteindra bientôt les années 1970 et le sexe féminin est encore une monnaie d'échange" (179).[27] Here, it is important to note the temporal disparity, which reveals an interesting cultural anachronism. Faïzah is a modern woman who embodies views that align with the post-sexual revolution, whereas the reference to 1970 is deceptive because it does not signify a contemporary point in time. Rather, it smacks of archaic attitudes towards feminine sexuality. The inequity of this power dialectic between the genders seems to predict Faïzah's future in this highly conservative society. In the aftermath of her broken engagement, she suffers further humiliation and emotional turmoil, as the society labels her a repudiated woman. At the same time, Faïzah also demonstrates resistance to patriarchal constraints, which is articulated through the body. Although she receives a marriage proposal from her boss, she chooses to retreat from Lebanese society to join a convent: "Dans la montagne, avec les religieuses, je me sentais bonne et pure. Donner mon corps à Dieu ne sera pas plus difficile que d'ouvrir mes jambes à un homme que je n'aime pas" (178).[28] With these words, she shows that she refuses to be trapped in a macho system, reducing her body to an object, akin to a "marchandise dévaluée" (23).[29] Moreover, she regains control of her own body, proclaiming herself pure again in her wish to devote herself to God, as noted in the passage quoted above. It is the combination of this traumatic event and radical decision that sets Faïzah on an isolated path, one which leads to further social marginalization.

If Faïzah's personal misfortune reinforces the concept that coming "home" is inherently a fantasy or a disillusion, Ikram, too, is subjected to the harsh reality of no longer regarding Lebanon as "paradise." Farhoud creates an opposition between the sisters by directing the focus to Ikram's professional experiences. As noted above, Ikram was heartened to find work as an actress, but her enthusiasm soon wanes. When she asks to see her contract, the answer from the production staff deviates radically from her expectations: "Un contract, mais tu veux rire? Il y a pas de contrat, nous sommes au Liban, ici, tu l'oublies?" (137).[30] Here, she not only confronts a different reality but is also insulted, which, in turn, highlights her outsider position. In her discussion with the producers, she is told: "Mais pourquoi veux-tu un contrat? Les contrats, c'est des histoires inventées par les Américains" (137).[31] Ikram quickly gleans that roles are designated by word of mouth, an informal custom in this unfamiliar culture. In discussing acting with an established actress who comes from Egypt, Ikram soon learns some difficult facts about her craft, when Madame L. tells her, "être professionnelle dans ce métier, c'est quelque chose que tu as importé du Canada. Avec ta fougue. […] Faire un métier artistique pour s'exprimer et en même temps gagner sa vie, ça n'existe pas ici" (165).[32] With these candid words, Ikram's illusion of succeeding on the stage or in television fades, as the truth strips away the misleading preconception that acting would be equally valued and respected as it was in artistic circles in Montreal. The *trompe-l'oeil* mechanism resurfaces within the theatrical context of veiling the harsh "real" truth of the homeland. In the passage cited above, this notion is reinforced by Madame L.'s discerning viewpoint. For

Ikram, this professional disappointment seems to solidify an impression shared by both sisters, one that augments the social implications of deception. In many parts of the narrative, the two sisters view Lebanese customs as elements of a hypocritical culture. This idea is buttressed by their observation that Lebanese society is inherently "trompeuse." Faïzah alludes to this idea in the opening pages of the text: "Je vis dans une société d'hommes où tout marche par supercherie" (23-24).[33] Interestingly, Farhoud addresses this idea in her comments about the text: "Les codes d'un pays oriental sont sournois parce qu'ils construisent un environnement où tout a l'air d'être simple et facile" (Deglise 3).[34] It is Farhoud's use of the word *sournois* which, in turn, reinforces her character's perception of *supercherie* as a sociocultural practice in Lebanese society. For the two sisters, these various personal experiences with deception buttress the image of Lebanon as a mirage on the horizon, a seemingly impossible place to establish a sense of "home."

Ikram's and Faïzah's painful experiences with disillusionment augment the disconnect between two vastly different cultures. In the closing pages, Farhoud reinforces the theatrical structure of the text, as Youssef informs the reader that Daoud and Ikram only stayed for four years. The dramatic chorus technique circles back to Youssef, as it did in the opening chapter. For the reader, he provides an inclusive description of the Abdelnours' repatriation experience in the homeland. According to him, these four years can only be characterized as a monumental *débâcle*. Here, Youssef offers a succinct appraisal of Ikram's disappointing cultural encounters: "Fille jeune, actrice, venue d'ailleurs, qui voulait et devait gagner sa vie, elle est entrée en collision frontale avec un pays phallocrate, où le mensonge est érigé en mode de vie, et qui n'a aucun respect pour l'art" (218).[35] There is, however, a more abstract element that Ikram blames for the family's series of misfortunes: the sun. Ikram contemplates this image because her sister left the family a note to explain her decision to join a convent. Within this note, Faïzah composed a poem for Ikram and Adib in which she describes the sun as "tricheur voleur menteur traître" (221).[36] She also highlights the opposing forces of the sun's power in the following lines: "Aussi repoussant qu'intrigant / Aussi répugnant qu'attirant" (221).[37] Faïzah's lyrical words point to Farhoud's use of the *trompe-l'oeil* device, as she links her personal disaster to the idea of being blinded by the glorious rays of the sun that ostensibly welcomed her home. In the closing pages of the text, Ikram sustains Faïzah's focus on the sun as she asks herself: "Qu'est-ce que le Grand Soleil a fait de nous?!" (223).[38] Echoing Faïzah's warning about the potential danger of the sun, Ikram suggests that the sun negatively influenced the family's experience in Beirut: the sun not only tricked the family, especially the children, into believing that Lebanon could become their "home," but also represents an image that, as Faïzah writes in her poem, is *repugnant*. In other words, the luminosity of the sun's rays did not welcome them into the culture but rather amplified their outsider position. To broaden the migrant perspective on this inability to adapt to the homeland, Iain Chambers observes that the sense of belonging can be fuelled by fantasy and the imagination to the extent that

achieving a fulfilled sense of identity is unattainable, which ultimately leads to failure (25).[39] Although the Abdelnours arrive "over there" in Lebanon, they never succeed in planting roots; thus the very notion of coming home, as Chambers, Said, Rushdie, and Ireland maintain, is but a mere myth or fantasy. Most importantly, the image of the homeland represents a mirage on the distant horizon.

Abla Farhoud's *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* is a compelling novel that allows the reader to follow the international peregrinations of the Abdelnour family. Farhoud's autofictional text offers a personal perspective on the problems of disenfranchisement and geographical displacement, while emphasizing cultural differences and social boundaries as integral components of the challenge of repatriation. On a thematic level, Farhoud's attention to these issues connects her writing to that of other noteworthy migrant authors such as Dany Laferrière, Monique Bosco, Régine Robin, and Émile Ollivier. These authors direct the reader's focus to nomadism, the impossibility of returning home, and the difficulty of living in an "in-between" space, which creates a series of obstacles for the younger generation. In concert with these multicultural voices, Farhoud delves into the crisis of exile, but her view is not limited to the plight of migrants. She broadens the perspective on this problematical aspect, as it affects all human beings who share the universal condition of solitude and estrangement: "mon expérience d'immigrante est une métaphore du trajet de l'humain" (Vaïs and Wickham 29).[40] Farhoud emphasizes the human problem of deracination by allowing the reader to observe the family's myriad cultural experiences and profound disappointments through the fascinating lens of a classical theatrical mechanism, the *trompe-l'oeil*. Above all, it is through the poetics of her innovative *trompe-l'oeil* technique that Farhoud creates an original representation of the crisis of disillusionment in a narrative of return, as illustrated by the image of the sun. The sun does not call them home but relegates them to that marginalized zone especially reserved for immigrants: the border, an impossible space in which the Abdelnours are destined to wander endlessly in their quest to finally come home.

Notes

1. For other immigrant texts by Abla Farhoud, see *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) and *Le Bonheur à la queue glissante* (1998).

2. "Lebanon is light." (All translations are mine.)

3. "Here, everything is exciting, everything is different, everything is charming, everything is bright, one is never bored."

4. "The big sun is there to drive us crazy."

5. "Their adaptation didn't happen without pain. For them it was a new country. The language, the customs, everything."

6. "Smiling is an invitation. I'm saying that for your own good, you aren't familiar with the country yet, men, you know, when they see a young woman [….] If she smiles at them for a second, it's a second

too much, they immediately think she's easy."

7. Ghenwa Hayek studies the city/rural binary in Beirut by offering a detailed analysis of several seminal Lebanese texts. She also explores the evolution of urban spaces in Beirut, taking a cultural approach to study the connection between geographical places and national identity.

8. "Here, a woman of my age doesn't go swimming."

9. "No, you are foreigners to them, Americans, they excuse you for everything, you aren't obligated to follow the rules."

10. "I was raised here. When I lived in Canada, I did like the people there, now I am here, and I do like the people from here."

11. "This country is walking sex. Sex is imprinted in the gaze of men."

12. "You know, my daughter, we are in Lebanon […] a girl from a good family doesn't act in the theatre or on television."

13. "I'm talking about Lebanon. We live in Lebanon, Ikram. The rules have changed."

14. "Tell me clearly: 'I don't want you in my house.' I will go beg on the streets or become a prostitute. But I will act in the theatre or on TV."

15. "People are backwards!"

16. "At least two centuries behind."

17. "I don't want to sell my soul. Do what my father and the society want me to do, is to give up what I love, become what I'm not, this would be to sell my art and my soul."

18. "I said to myself that there is too much sun in Lebanon, it's impossible to be depressed or anguished. Precisely, the sun is beginning to weigh on me, I can't stand it any longer, I must escape from it."

19. "Impure, that means dirty, devirginized, everybody knows it. My sister is no longer a virgin, and it's the reason for her broken engagement."

20. "I am tired of this mentality, of this vulgar farce that plays with our bodies. I'm sick of it. I don't want to be a virgin any longer. Even if it would only be to snub this masquerade."

21. "I can no longer lower my gaze. I'm tired of this war between the sexes, that always has the same winner."

22. "I am fed up with secrets, with this veil of medieval purity, with this feudal society with outdated morals."

23. "For a Middle Easterner, the will to possess a virgin, and even several, is a part of his culture, of his dreams, of his deepest desires, that he might be Muslim or Christian doesn't change anything."

24. "A Middle Eastern man, that he might be in love or not, wants to be the first one. The first one in everything."

25. "My daughter, this isn't a man for you. He is going to make you his servant. He resembles his family. Those people don't have any respect for anyone, they are tyrants."

26. "Stale merchandise is devalued, as much for the rich as for the poor."

27. "We will soon reach the 1970s and the female gender is still an exchange commodity."

28. "In the mountains, with the nuns, I felt good and pure. Giving my body to God will not be more difficult than opening my legs to a man whom I don't love."

29. "A devalued commodity."

30. "A contract, are you kidding me? There's no contract, we are in Lebanon, here, have you forgotten?"

31. "But why do you want a contract? Contracts, those are stories made up by Americans."

32. "To be a professional in this career is something that you imported from Canada. With your spirit […] To pursue an artistic career to express oneself and earn a living at the same time, that doesn't exist here."

33. "I live in a society where everything functions by deceit."

34. "The codes in a Middle Eastern country are deceptive because they create an environment where everything seems easy and simple."

35. "A young girl, actress, coming from elsewhere, who wanted to earn a living, she collided with a chauvinist country, where a lie is a way of life and where there is no respect for art."

36. "Cheater / thief / liar / traitor."

37. "As repulsive as it is intriguing / as repugnant as it is attractive."

38. "What has the big sun done to us?!"

39. In *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, Iain Chambers discusses some key migrant problems such as living between borders and exile, emphasizing the impossibility of attaining a fulfilled identity.

40. "My experience as an immigrant is a metaphor for the human path."

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