

Representation of Migrant Women in the Works of Arab Canadian Writers
Nadia Ghalem, Abla Farhoud, and Nadine Ltaif

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Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctorate of Philosophy degree in Women's Studies

Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies
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Abstract

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen a growing number of people migrating for economic, political, and cultural reasons to developed countries. Women have been a part of global migration movements for over four centuries and the number of female immigrants gradually rose during the 20th century. The changing face of migration has drawn the attention of migration experts to the significance of female migration and the necessity of conducting more gender-targeted work on the subject. This doctoral thesis examines the representation of migrant women in the selected literary works of three Arab Canadian women writers, Nadia Ghalem, Abla Farhoud, and Nadine Ltaif. By using a combined framework of intersectional and materialist feminist approaches, I examine how factors including race, gender, class, religion, and sexuality are involved in the experiences of female characters exposed to discrimination or oppression. I also focus on these characters' relationship to modes of production, the social classes they belong to, as well as the patriarchal and gendered social structures, practices, and relations they are subjected to, and analyze how these elements inform the different positionalities they occupy in the family, society, and state. The findings illustrate that the fictional figures experience migration and exile as doubly and triply marginalized subjects, and patterns of female existence in society are highly informed by their relationship to patriarchal and gendered social structures and cultural norms of their native country. All the protagonists go through a transformation and being all directly exposed to at least two cultures at a relatively young age, they can make a cognizant choice for their lives more easily than their elders. Most of the protagonists choose the life they want for themselves; namely, they succeed in reclaiming their lives and can flourish.

Keywords: migrant women, migration, exile, patriarchy, gender, sexuality, class, ethnic culture, female oppression, discrimination

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Dominique Bourque, my supervisor, for her invaluable guidance, motivation, and feedback through every step of my PhD studies. Dr. Bourque's sincere support has left an indelible mark on these past five years of my life full of ups and downs.

I also would like to thank my thesis defence committee members, Dr. Catherine Khordoc, Dr. Ryme Seferdjeli, Dr. May Telmissany, and Dr. Luisa Veronis, who generously shared their knowledge and expertise with me and provided constructive comments.

An immense thank you to Dr. Christabelle Sethna, who, just at the beginning, showed me that this is possible and that the light at the end of the tunnel is not so far away.

My deepest debt goes to my family who have been patient, encouraging, and supportive throughout this highly meaningful journey of my life. Your love gave me the strength I needed to keep going.

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Introduction

I am a two-thousand-year-old Arab woman. They tried to bury me in the desert, but they failed. They killed me several times, but I always resurrected myself from the ashes to fly, and to write.

— Ghada Samman¹

I. Context

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen a growing number of people displacing and migrating for economic, political, and cultural reasons to developed countries, including North America and Europe as the main recipient regions (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). The estimated number of international migrants has increased threefold within the past five decades, with the United States of America being the main country of destination since 1970, followed by Germany (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021).

For more than four centuries, women have been part of global migration movements (Donato & Gabaccia, 2016), and statistics show that their share among immigrants rose gradually during the 20th century² (Dumont, Martin, & Spielvogel, 2007). In recent years, scholars have declared feminization an important dimension of the new age of international migration and globalization, a phenomenon called the “feminization of migration” (Chammartin, 2002; Donato & Gabaccia, 2016; McAuliffe & Khadria, 2019; Paiewonsky, 2007). The number of female migrants has been high, starting in the 1960s at a rate of 47% (Paiewonsky, 2007) and

¹ This is how Syrian writer Ghada Samman replies to Italian readers when asked to introduce herself (De Capua, 1992, p. 103, as cited in Al-Samman, 2015, p. 45).

² The female immigrants who arrived in Canada consistently outnumbered the male immigrants between 2000 and 2020. In 2021, the number of female immigrants were 113,110 when compared to the number of male immigrants, 113,198 and in 2022, the numbers were 242,884 to 250,100 respectively (Statista, 2023).

reaching about 48% within the total number at present (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2019). Also, the number of female migrants grew faster than the number of male migrants between 1965 and 1990 in the major receiving countries with a share of 51.6% in Europe and 51.8% in North America (Chammartin, 2002; UN DESA, 2020).

However, the most important change has not been in women's share when compared with men's, but it has been in the way women move today: As opposed to previous migrating patterns where women were moving as dependents, together with their husbands and/or fathers or joining them later,³ women now migrate independently in search of jobs, for educational or asylum purposes (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2019; Paiewonsky, 2007). The changing face of migration has drawn the attention of migration experts and other stakeholders to the significance of female migration (Donato & Gabaccia, 2016; Paiewonsky, 2007) and to the necessity of conducting more gender-targeted work on the subject (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2019).

The use of gender as a component of analysis in ethnic studies and migration studies began in the early 1980s (Bilge & Denis, 2010). It first started with studies addressing women's relationship with ethnicity and migration since women were not included in ethnic and migration research until that time, and it continued with the "gender and migration" stage in the early 1990s with new methodological and analytical perspectives (Bilge & Denis, 2010). Since the early years of the twenty-first century, gender has been increasingly considered a structural element of the migration process, and gender analysis, which was traditionally limited to the analysis of family or household, has thus been extended beyond in scope (Bilge & Denis, 2010).

When we look at the current research on gender and migration, we see that it considers the

³ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that between 2007 and 2010, women constituted the majority of victims of trafficking in persons detected globally (Table de Concertation sur les Agressions à Caractère Sexuel de Montréal, 2023).

category of “migrant women” in its diversity and pays more attention to multiple axes of power relations (race, class, sexuality, age, nationality, religion, caste, and able-bodiedness) intersecting and shaping gendered experiences and migration processes (Bilge & Denis, 2010).

The 1980s were also a time when literary representations of migration and exile began to draw attention of the academia; it was in this decade that scholars of ethnic studies and postcolonial studies started to focus on the literature on migrants or migration neglected until that time (Lalagianni & Moura, 2014). Again, in the 1980s, research addressing marginalized groups such as migrants and women in literature started to emerge in the disciplines including cultural studies, gender and queer studies, border studies, and transcultural studies (Corio & Vitali, 2010).

II. Migrant Literature in French, “Écriture Migrante” in Québec

The migrant literature that might be called the literature of “otherness” is not totally new for Québec; rather, it extends and strengthens an old tradition (Emont, 2016). As Clément Moisan notes, the otherness started to mark the French-Canadian literature right from the beginning, since its birth four centuries ago (Moisan, 2008, as cited in Emont, 2016, p. 87). The “other” was firstly the fascinating and stupefying figure of the Indigenous for the European pioneers. Then, after the cession of Canada to Great Britain, it became a political and social obligation to live with a dominant “other,” the new British master or the American neighbor (Emont, 2016). Thus, positioned between several centres of cultural, political, and financial power—that of France, Anglophone Canada, and the USA—Québec has come to have its own

cultural and literary dynamics,⁴ a literary culture that is open and closed at the same time, open to influences while defending its traditions and uniqueness. (Chapman, 2013).

Daniel Chartier, the author of the *Dictionnaire des écrivains émigrés au Québec 1800–1999* (2003), contends that over the last two centuries, more than five hundred writers have immigrated to Québec under varied conditions and circumstances, and the share of “foreigners” among writers is twice as high as among the general population, (2002, p. 303). Though the literary production of migrant writers is not a new phenomenon neither in Québec nor in Canada, it was not until the 1980s that Québécois literary critics started to engage with the migrant literature, or “écriture migrante” (Carrière & Khordoc, 2015). The expression “écritures migrantes” was first used by Robert Berrouët-Oriol (1986 –1987, p. 20), Québécois poet and linguist of Haitian origins, in the transcultural magazine *Vice versa* (Chartier, 2002; Khordoc, 2013). However, it was poet, novelist, and essay writer Pierre Nepveu (1988) who, starting at the end of the 1980s, introduced the term into literary and academic circles in Québec (Khordoc, 2013). Nepveu (1988) expresses his preference of the term “migrant” writing to “immigrant” writing, as the latter term seems a little too restrictive, emphasizing the very experience and reality of immigration, of arriving in a new country and the difficulties of living there (which is what many texts actually recount or evoke), whereas “migrant” writing emphasizes the movement, the drift and the multiple crossroads of the exilic experience and notes that “‘immigrante’ est un mot à teneur socio-culturelle, alors que ‘migrante’ a l’avantage de pointer déjà vers une pratique esthétique, dimension évidemment fondamentale pour la littérature actuelle,” [“immigrant” is a word with socio-cultural content, while “migrant” has the advantage of already pointing to an aesthetic practice, an obviously fundamental dimension for literature

⁴ Québec's “intercultural” approach differs from Canada's “multicultural” approach and the American “melting pot”. See Dupuis (2008) for a discussion of interculturalism and multiculturalism.

today”] (translation mine) (Nepveu, 1988, p. 233). Thus, Nepveu not only sheds light on the nuances the term “écriture migrante” holds but also brings it to the attention of scholars and makes it part of contemporary Québécois literature. Accordingly, Québec becomes “the place of the theorization of écriture migrante” (Bourque & Hogikyan, 2010, p. 24).

The expression “écriture migrante” refers to the literary works of writers who, after immigrating to Canada, chose to settle in Québec and write or at least publish within the framework of the province's literary institutions (Dupuis, 2008). Being one of the largest French-speaking communities outside France and having its own literary canon, Québec is home to literatures of exile, “écritures migrantes,” of over a dozen different cultures (Arino & Piccione, 2007; Dahab, 2009; Ireland & Proulx, 2009). Québec’s “écriture migrante” shares certain common characteristics in terms of the themes they cover, such as migration, exile, uprootedness, nostalgia, language, memory, the ambivalent attitude toward both the country of birth and the country of adoption, and the importance of the act of writing (Verduyn, 1992a). The mourning for the homeland, difficult adaptation to the unfamiliar country, wavering between identities, narratives of the new place, and meeting the Other are also among the themes mostly explored by Québec’s writers of various ethnic origins (Laurin, 2017). Like Northrop Frye’s argument that Canadian identity does not constitute itself around the question “Who am I?” but around the question “Where is here?” (Frye, 1971, as cited in Rosenthal, 2008, p. 294), two questions, “Qui suis-je? [Who am I?] and “Où suis-je?” [Where am I?] are the important staples of the “écriture migrante” (Verduyn, 1992b). These “écritures migrantes” of the authors who have immigrated to a country whose language they use also reflect a so-called “peripheral” cultural specificity (Lasserre & Simon, 2008, para. 3). Along with the richness of their dual cultural affiliation and bilingualism, these works never cease to question a “national” identity

and culture, to reconfigure the centre and its supposed margins, and to relativize them (Lasserre & Simon, 2008).

Nowadays, the notion of exile is studied either in a context of plurality or in a landscape of cultural hybridity and crossbreeding, as Dominique Bourque and Nellie Hogikyan (2010) emphasize in their analysis of the new paradigms of exile. Accordingly, hybridity, in the form of juxtaposition, confrontation, and unusual meeting of cultural signs and linguistic elements, is a characteristic feature of migrant literature in general and of “*écritures migrantes*” in particular, as Carmen Mata Barreiro (2012) notes. The texts of the “*écriture migrante*” thus present themselves as hybrid writings, either on a linguistic level as in the usage of words, symbols, or proverbs in different languages and creoles, as well as on a cultural level as in the meeting of imaginations and representations, the rejection or taming of the cultural space of the host society (Mata Barreiro, 2012). In addition to this confrontation of languages, “*métissage linguistique*” [linguistic blending], and cultures, hybridity in Québec’s “*écriture migrante*” manifests itself in the discourse of narration and text setting as well as in the construction of literary genres and the configuration of themes (Mata Barreiro, 2012, p. 69).

The concept of “*écriture migrante*” as a critical category, alongside its growing popularity in Québec, has been considered problematic and critiqued by some writers and experts (Carrière & Khordoc, 2015). Marie Carrière and Catherine Khordoc (2015) point to the controversy surrounding the idea of “*écriture migrante*” due to its “implied constitution as one coherent literary corpus,” whereas the writers in question are a heterogeneous group of individuals different from one another in both cultural and artistic terms (p. 629). The term is also criticized for having a reductive nature, with the implicit expectation that these writers will only address the themes of migration, exile, and loss in their works (Khordoc, 2016). The concept, though

initially welcomed by some writers who migrated to Québec as this classification highlighted their works about their migratory experiences, has later become “a ghetto from which it is proving difficult for writers who have immigrated to break free,” according to Khordoc (2016, p. 2). Most of the writers associated with the “écriture migrante,” many of whom reject the label “migrant” ascribed to them, want to establish themselves in the literary canon of the country where they reside while retaining the right to assert and express their difference (Dupuis, 2008).

The term “écriture migrante”, which, for some, has the disadvantage of singling out a part of Québec's literary corpus, has nonetheless succeeded in highlighting it by attracting the attention of a growing number of critics, publishers, juries, and students, as Khordoc (2007) noted. Indeed, “within the past twenty years (im)migrant writing has experienced a rise in popularity, rather than the opposite, an effect that even its challengers may have helped with through their work,” as shown by Simona Emilia Pruteanu (2016, p. 2).

III. Arab Canadian Writing

Regarding the context in Canada, Arab immigrants first set foot in the country in the late 1800s (Abu-Laban, 1980). Originating from Syria—Syria and Lebanon were under one administrative unit, that of Ottoman rule at that time—the pioneers arrived in Canada between 1882 and World War II, and they were nearly all Christians. Following World War II, in the second wave of Arab immigration to Canada, an increasing number of immigrants came from Arab countries other than Syria and Lebanon: Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, and Iraq. These post-war immigrants included Christians as well as Muslims. The rate of males to females was around 1.4 on average between 1911 and 1971, with a steadily decreasing percentage each decade and reaching 1.1 in 1971. Social, economic, and political factors in the

Arab world played a role in migration to Canada in the first wave, around the turn of the century, as well as in the post-war period, particularly in the 1960s (Abu-Laban, 1980). Arab immigration gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, following the 1967 Six-Day War⁵ and the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), with the need to flee the ravages of war and the political instabilities in their countries (Dahab, 2009). Houda Asal (2020) emphasizes that women's place in Arab immigration to Canada has not been carefully examined and draws attention to the necessity of such a gendered focus in any current analysis of the image and reality of Arab and Muslim minorities in Canada, especially in the context of racism.

The early 1970s are the years when Arab Canadian literature originated, and this body of writing includes works produced by first-generation immigrants and their children who have their origins in the Arab countries, directly or indirectly, and have their roots in the Arabic language and culture (Dahab, 2009). There are roughly three phases of Arab Canadian literature in French and English: the early phase is during the 1970s and 1980s, the second one from the late 1980s to the mid and late 1990s, and the third one is from the late 1990s into the new millennium, a phase in which the aftermath of 9/11 played a key role (Dahab, 2015). The first phase of Arab Canadian literature is broadly characterized by “nostalgia, reconstruction, and longing,” during which texts mostly focus on memories of the native land; “remembrance of trauma/war, witness-bearing, and at times, reconciliation with the past” are the salient themes in the second phase; and the third phase is characterized by “transcendence, resolution, opposition, or self-remarginalization,” as Elizabeth F. Dahab notes (2015, p. 640).

Approximately 65 percent of Arab Canadian writing is in French, 20 percent in English, and the rest in Arabic (Dahab, 2015). The reason why the authors choose to write in French lies

⁵ The war between Israel and a coalition of Arab states consisting of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria that resulted in the former's decisive victory (Britannica, 2023).

in their home countries' French colonial history, but most importantly in the positive relationship they previously built with French as "the language of thought and creative expression" (Dahab, 2009, p. 23). Authors with origins from Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, Syria, and Tunisia and with various religious backgrounds have contributed to this body of writing in all literary forms and with various styles of writing that range from the realist to the postmodernist (Dahab, 1999). Mostly settled in Québec, these authors of Arab origins in Canada and their works, together with authors of various other origins, are predominantly covered under the umbrella of Québec's migrant literature institutionalized as "écriture migrante" (Lalagianni & Moura, 2014).

The terminology related to being "Arab" is problematic and needs clarification since it has different connotations and refers to different realities in terms of the communities who speak Arabic or who have Arab origins (Labelle, Rocher, & Antonius, 2009). Physical characteristics are not an indicator in determining Arab ethnicity and Arabs in Canada have various racial origins, different citizenships, and different religions (Abu-Laban, 1980; Abu-Laban, 2013). It is important to keep in mind that, despite the popular Western perception, not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs (Abu-Laban, 1980; Abu-Laban, 2013). Muslims make up 85% of Arabs, only 20% of Muslims are Arabs and the percentage of non-Muslim Arabs is even higher in Québec (Labelle, Rocher, & Antonius, 2009). As the definition of the word "Arab" is problematic, an objective usage can be made by referring to any of the 22 countries that belong to the Arab League, which was founded in 1945 and which forms a more or less coherent geopolitical whole (Labelle, Rocher, & Antonius, 2009). Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, when I mention Arab countries, societies, or individuals, I refer to the countries, societies, or individuals of these 22 countries that form the Arab League.

IV. Corpus of Analysis

For the purposes of this thesis, I wanted to focus on the literary production of female writers with Arab origins considering the significance of this social group of Arab descent in Québec, and the little critical attention received by the works of these female artists of Arab origin. I also took into account the fact that women's place in Arab immigration to Canada has not been carefully examined and a gendered focus is necessary in any current analysis of the image and reality of Arabs in Canada (Asal, 2020). Another reason for my decision to focus on women writers of Arab origin is that Arabs currently make up a large and growing proportion of the total migrant population, particularly in the wake of the Syrian Civil War that began in 2011; the highest number of refugees and other people in need of international protection in the world are from Syria, an Arab country, as of the end of 2022 (UNCHR, 2022). Lastly, I chose to analyze the literary works of Arab Canadian women artists since they experience migration and exile in similar contexts and address in their works the challenges that migrant women face in terms of their social and cultural backgrounds.

In selecting the texts to build my corpus of analysis, I took two criteria into account. First of all, I selected these three writers and their specific works since these texts have female protagonists with migrant experiences in-between two cultures and going through an existential crisis. The texts also include representations related to women's condition, and their position in family and society, with female protagonists as well as female secondary characters who face socio-cultural constraints, which, in other words, address the issues and offer materials that fit my research purposes. Secondly, I wanted to limit the scope of my research to novels and poetry,

and therefore, did not, for instance, include Abla Farhoud's plays that address the above-mentioned topics and provide a similarly rich material to study within my corpus of analysis.⁶

The three female artists, Nadia Ghalem, Abla Farhoud, and Nadine Ltaif, whose works I analyze in my research in terms of their representations of migration, exile, and migrant women, were born outside of Canada and later immigrated to Québec. They publish(ed) and produce(d) in French since they are Francophones, with their origins in French-colonized countries. The authors' literary productions cover the themes of migration and exile in different forms, such as novels, short stories, plays, and poetry.

These three artists of different generations have in common their origins in Arab countries formerly colonized by France. Another common feature of these three artists is their covering of the themes of migration/exile and gender in their works, as well as their choice of literature as an artistic form. My aim is to analyze these three women authors' works with a combined framework of materialist feminist and intersectional perspectives and highlight the similarities and distinctions in their representations of exile/migration and migrant women in different literary forms. My intention is to provide a feminist analysis of these texts rather than a literary one as I am not using literary tools but an original feminist methodology to study representations of female experiences of migration.

In my thesis, I start by analyzing the selected works of Nadia Ghalem. Born in Algeria in 1941, Ghalem settled in Montréal in 1965. I examine her two novels, *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) and *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) in which she conveys the meaning of exile through the voices of a multiplicity of female characters.

⁶ *Les filles du 5-10-15* (1993) and *Jeux de patience* (1997).

Secondly, I turn my attention to the selected works of the novelist and playwright Abba Farhoud, who was born in Lebanon in 1945, immigrated to Canada in 1951, and lived in Montréal until her death in December 2021. I explore Farhoud's two autofictional novels, *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) and *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), in which she gives voice to female characters who experienced migration and exile and describes the conditions of being a woman.

Thirdly, I examine the selected works of the poet Nadine Ltaif. Ltaif, of Lebanese ancestry, was born in Cairo, Egypt, in 1961 and immigrated to Montréal in 1980. Her three poetry collections, *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987), *Entre les fleuves* (1991), and *Élégies du Levant* (1995), are another focus of analysis in my project. I have chosen Ltaif's works since they reflect migration and exile from the eyes of a female poet with a feminist perspective.

V. Scope of Research

In this project, I first aim to explore the works of these three women writers and see how they engage with migration, exile, and women from a feminist perspective, which is rare in migration and exile studies. As migration is mostly considered a masculine phenomenon in conventional theories and the female experience and its representations in literature are less frequently explored (Averis, 2014; Averis & Touré, 2016; Brunet, 2005; Kaminsky, 1993, 1999; McDaid, 2017; Wimbush, 2021), my first objective is to increase women's visibility in the field and contribute to the debates with a feminist critical voice.

My second objective is to conduct research that combines an intersectional and materialist feminist framework. The materialist feminist and the intersectional methodological perspectives are rarely used as literary analysis tools; only a few critical analyses of literary

works use these two frameworks (Dolan, 2012; Hubler, 2010; Loh, 2015; Václavíková, 2022; Wayne, 1991) and the works they analyze are neither on exile or gender nor produced by women artists in exile. As most of the studies that investigate the artistic products of migrant women writers focus on thematic content and formal techniques with cultural and historical perspectives, I aim to offer an original and nuanced perspective on these novels and poems as well as provide complementary elements to the analyses that were conducted on the authors' representations of women's migration through this combined framework. Thus, I wish to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in women's studies and literary studies by offering a useful tool to researchers.

VI. Research Questions

My research focuses on answering the following questions:

- How do Nadia Ghalem, Abla Farhoud, and Nadine Ltaif represent migration and exile as a female experience in their artistic works? How do they represent identities and contexts?
- How are factors including race, gender, class, religion, and sexuality involved in the experiences of the female characters and how do they shape their experiences of exposure to discrimination or oppression? How do the artists represent the influence of ethnic and cultural identity on women's subordination?
- How do women's relationships to modes of production, the social classes they belong to, and the patriarchal and gendered social structures, practices, and relations they are subjected to inform their marginality and the different positionalities they occupy in the family, society, and state? In what contexts are those women depicted by the artists?

VII. Thesis Argument

The selected works of Arab Canadian women writers Abla Farhoud, Nadine Ltaif, and Nadia Ghalem illustrate that the female protagonists experience migration and exile as doubly and triply marginalized subjects, and patterns of female existence in society are highly informed by their relationships to modes of production, and patriarchal and gendered social structures.

VIII. Relevance

The three Arab Canadian female artists I have chosen as subjects of my analysis, Nadine Ltaif, Nadia Ghalem, and Abla Farhoud, have been living/lived in Montréal, Québec, and producing/produced works that cover the themes of gender and migration/exile in literature. I have chosen migrant artists with Arab origins since they experience migration and exile in similar contexts and ways and address the challenges women encounter in terms of their social and cultural backgrounds. I have also considered the fact that migrants with Arab origins constitute an important and growing portion of the migration population, especially after the Syrian Civil War⁷ (UNCHR, 2022).

In today's world, where migration has become a more widespread phenomenon, the number of artistic works created by migrant individuals has increased, concomitantly with the need to examine them with a critical eye. Following “the feminization of migration,” with more women migrating independently as well as with their families, the necessity to consider migration from a gender perspective drew the attention of migration experts (Chammartin, 2002; McAuliffe & Khadria, 2019; Paiewonsky, 2007; Talahite-Moodley, 2016). Given the tendency in

⁷ Arabs currently make up 1.9% of the population in Canada, with 690,000 Arabs living in the country according to the 2021 Census (Statistics Canada, 2022, as cited in Eloulabi, 2023).

conventional exile and diaspora discourses to treat migration as men's activity and ignore the female experience and its representations (Averis, 2014; Averis & Touré, 2016; Brunet, 2005; Kaminsky, 1993, 1999; McDaid, 2017; Wimbush, 2021), a special focus on the representation of women's migration is needed for critical studies in the literature, too. Considering that women experience migration as doubly and triply marginalized subjects, it is crucial to add broader and more specific perspectives in the analysis of women's experiences and their representations of migration and exile (Bourque & Hogikyan, 2010).

IX. Methodological Overview

Before addressing my methodological framework further in detail in the Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks chapter of my thesis, I want to provide a brief overview of my methodological approach. I base my analysis of these works on an intersectional perspective to see how race, gender, class, and similar systems of power depend on and mutually construct one another, and these overlapping power relations, as a result, create complex, interdependent social inequalities (Collins, 2015, 2019) in the representations of women's lives. I use "race" in an expanded sense, following Jules Falquet's example, as "a social phenomenon created by structural social relations of 'race', organized especially around nationality, religion, skin colour, and immigration status" (2016b, p. 3). Because "intersectionality's *raison d'être* lies in its attentiveness to power relations and social inequalities," as Patricia Hill Collins (2015) argues, an intersectional point of view will enable me to detect and describe the social, political, or environmental conditions that make women vulnerable to subordination and oppression in the representations of migration and exile.

I then investigate the how and why of these conditions by using the analytical tools of materialist feminist theory. Colette Guillaumin's (2003) concept of "sexage" [sexlavement] which refers to the reduction of women to their bodies as well as their appropriation and exploitation (enslavement) by men (Bourque, 2015) helps me to analyze the various kinds of social relationships women are in as a spouse, sister, or daughter, how their labour force and/or their entire personhood are appropriated, and what role being a migrant and in exile plays in this equation. I also refer to Paola Tabet's (2004) concept of "conjugal amalgam" in a close examination of marriage relationships that enable men to appropriate women's services such as sexual access, childcare, domestic service, and emotional labour by providing material support in exchange for these services and her concept of "sexual-economic exchange" (2004, 2012) for relationships of domination between men and women in general. Monique Wittig's (1992) political system of complex power relations and Christine Delphy's (1984) theory that analyzes the oppression of women based on "class" and in the frame of the domestic economy are the other tools that help me to examine my corpus through a materialist feminist lens. In short, an intersectional approach helps me to focus on the consequences, whereas a materialist feminist perspective allows me to make connections with the causes and foundations regarding the analysis of women's various conditions.

In my close reading of the selected novels and poetry in my corpus of analysis, I focus on elements such as theme, plot, setting, characters, tone, imagery, symbols, motifs, and style of the writers to answer my research questions. The works I examine are all in French. As the language of my dissertation is English, I use the published translations of the works if available and provide the translations myself where necessary.

X. Chapter Outlines

a) Introduction

My introduction chapter first situates my topic within the existing literature on the representations of migration and exile in the world as well as in Canada and Québec. I then introduce the corpus I analyze, provide the scope of my project, and present my research questions. After discussing the relevance of my study and its significance within the research carried out so far, I present a brief overview of my theoretical and methodological framework.

b) Chapter 1- Literature Review

In this chapter, I provide a literature review on studies that analyze the literary works of women artists in exile, both in the world and in the Québec context. I attempt to discuss the main approaches these studies favor and the topics they address, and I seek to explore if these studies present formal and discursive commonalities regarding the representations of gender, migration, and exile. Critical analyses of the works of Abia Farhoud, Nadine Ltaif, and Nadia Ghalem are a point of focus in this chapter, where I identify the gap(s) to be filled by my project.

c) Chapter 2- Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

Locating the gap in the literature, namely, the necessity to focus on women's experience and their representations of migration and exile with a broader and more refined perspective considering the particular marginalizing conditions of women in exile (Bourque & Hogikyan, 2010), as well as the debates on the invisibility of migrant women and their artistic production and the rarity of a gendered perspective in the conventional exile/diaspora discourses (Averis, 2014; Averis & Touré, 2016; Brunet, 2005; Kaminsky, 1993, 1999; McDaid, 2017; Wimbush,

2021), take me to the chapter where I discuss how I can fill this gap. Here, I discuss some key terms, including “migrant,” “representation,” “context,” and “identity,” to which I refer throughout my thesis. This discussion leads me to the selection of appropriate criteria for the collection of my data.

This is the section where I introduce the intersectional feminist approach and the materialist feminist theory as the backbone of my project and their relevance to my purpose. Here, I explain that I use them as two complementary methodological approaches that help me to research an understudied topic and enable me to cover the representations in the selected corpus more extensively. I then specify how I make use of these two perspectives as analytical tools that guide me in answering my research questions. I provide here a terminological discussion considering that these frameworks were elaborated in two different contexts and countries, namely the United States and France, that are not the Québec one but that both influenced it. The corpus I analyze and the elements I pay attention to in the corpus are also outlined in this part of my dissertation.

d) Chapters 3 to 7—Analyses

Chapters 3 to 6 are the parts where I examine Nadia Ghalem’s novels *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) and *L’amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), and Abba Farhoud’s novels *Toutes celles que j’étais* (2015) and *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017) in this order.

In Chapter 7, I focus on Ltaif’s three collections, *Les métamorphoses d’Ishtar* (1987), *Entre les fleuves* (1991), and *Élégies du Levant* (1995), all in one chapter.

In these chapters, I conduct an intersectional analysis of the protagonists’ social identifications represented in the selected corpus. In the frame of my materialist feminist

perspective, I explore the similarities and differences in the artists' representation of the socio-political and economic systems of power in their works. This analysis draws on a study of the representation of the contexts and situations before and after migration. The characters through which the artists represent the experience of migration and exile, immigrants or descendants of them, their relationships with other characters, and their place in the family and society are analyzed in the frame of the material realities of being a woman.

e) Chapter 8- Discussion of Findings in the Analyses

In this part, I provide an analysis based on my findings in the seven preceding chapters. The strengths and weaknesses I present here allow me to propose a new theoretical and methodological model for research.

f) Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarize my analyses and explore the limitations of my work. I discuss whether my research questions have been answered or not and in what ways, which lead me to possible new questions that may arise as a result of my work. Finally, I specify what is original about my approach and project, as well as outline the possible connections and recommendations that can be made between my analyses and future feminist scholarship.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

I. Introduction

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been an era of increasing globalization and mobility, with a growing number of people from diverse backgrounds leaving their native country and migrating to other lands for economic, political, and cultural reasons. Starting with the 1980s, ethnic studies and postcolonial studies encouraged scholars and literary critics to focus on the literature on migrants or migration neglected until that time (Lalagianni & Moura, 2014). Again, in the 1980s, disciplines including cultural studies, gender and queer studies, border studies, and transcultural studies started to focus on marginalized groups, including migrants and women, in the literary field (Corio & Vitali, 2010).

In the literature review chapter of my thesis, I will address previous studies, books, and articles that deal with the literary works of migrant women artists, including my corpus of analysis, Abla Farhoud's *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) and *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), Nadia Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) and *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), and Nadine Ltaif's poetry collections *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987), *Entre les fleuves* (1991), and *Élégies du Levant* (1995). I aim to discuss the topics that previous research covers, the main approaches these studies favor, and the formal and discursive convergences regarding the representations of migration and exile to see where my thesis fits into this existing literature.

II. Discussions on Terminology

The critical reflections on migrant/exilic writing have increased in the last decades, together with the difficulty of defining the phenomenon, the artists, and their productions.

Katherine Anderson writes that “the growing field of scholarship on literature of migration has been plagued since its beginning with finding an appropriate term for naming this literature” (Anderson, 2017, p. 484). The authors who experienced migration and exile may themselves prefer to be called “migrant,” “exile,” “nomad,” or “diasporic,” and some do not want to be classified in any of these boxes. A common discussion in the studies I have analyzed is about how to name mobility in general and women's mobility in particular and which term(s) to use to conceptualize their experience of displacement.

The terms used in the critical studies have a porous nature and are frequently interchangeable, and the scholars point to the need to revise the use of terminology by considering the limitations imposed by categories (Averis & Hollis-Touré, 2016; Wimbush, 2021). Dominique Bourque and Nellie Hogikyan, in their edited volume that explores the variety and complexity of the exilic situations of women from several geographies as represented in various artistic forms, mainly use the term “exile” for women’s experiences of displacement and define them as “migration” at places and thus point out that an individual’s experience can be both exile and migration at the same time (Bourque & Hogikyan, 2010, as cited in Averis & Hollis-Touré, 2016). Their distinction between these two terms is based on “exile” being the result of the individual's intellectual, political, or identarian struggle and “migration” having the dimensions of social, economic, or cultural accommodation (Averis & Hollis-Touré, 2016).

Ailbhe McDaid (2017) discusses the contested definitions of the concepts of “emigration” and “diaspora” and makes a distinction between the present and the past, between the often voluntary, emancipatory, and temporary nature of modern experiences of migration and the historical forced emigration, which is traumatic and permanent. McDaid argues that contemporary migration presents an ambiguous relationship to national identity and that

contemporary poetry of migration diverges from historical migration writing. McDaid thus points out the necessity of rediscussing the established parameters of migration discourse and emphasizes that alternative interpretative models are needed to address these new realities.

Drawing from Arjun Appadurai, who points to the lack of an idiom to fully capture the collective interests of different groups of people in complex transnational positionalities, Azade Seyhan (2000), another scholar who discusses the issue of terminology in this field, notes that the definitions such as “exilic,” “ethnic,” “migrant,” or “diasporic” cannot offer a nuanced account of the body of writing produced between multiple languages, geographies, cultures, and histories. Seyhan discusses the contested term “ethnicity,” which she considers as referring to a culturally constructed concept under certain historical conditions rather than to a stable ethnic identity and gives the example of the second-generation Turkish-German writers, born and educated in Germany, who can be considered producers of ethnic culture, differently from their parents who were migrant writers in technical terms. Seyhan also states that both terms “ethnic literature” and “immigrant literature,” although technically correct, refer to a body of cultural production that is not an integral part of the national literature, which, on the contrary, has a transitory position in it. Accordingly, Seyhan states that she prefers to use the terms “diasporic,” “exilic,” or “transnational” literature rather than “ethnic” or “immigrant” unless the texts represent a conscious ethnic adherence.

Antonia Wimbush (2021) criticizes the existing definitions of exile for being problematic in terms of their masculine focus. In response to Edward Said’s perspective that ignores the female exilic experience, Wimbush notes that women and children, too, flee their countries for several reasons and points out the effects of gender issues on the experiences of exile.

Alessandro Corio and Ilaria Vitali (2010), too, refer to Said and his distinction between “exile”

and “expatriation,” where “exile” refers to a ban from one's country and expresses the impossibility of return, whereas the latter defines the condition of an individual who wants to live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. They argue that these two terms are insufficient in describing the multiple and varied itineraries of women migrant writers in their personal and artistic lives and their differing relationships to their homeland. The other terms Corio and Vitali (2010) mention in this frame are “migrant writing,” “diaspora writing,” stressing hybridity, ambivalence, and polyphony in literature, as well as “enracinerrance” by Jean-Claude Charles to refer to the idea of one's roots and wandering, Hédi Bouraoui's “émigressence,” referring to the essence of emigration, and “migritude” by Jacques Chevrier, all in the context of defining displacement. The model of the “nomad” offered by Rosi Braidotti is an alternative term to describe women's experience of mobility, as noted by Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré (2016). On a relevant note, French Lebanese writer Vénus Khoury-Ghata's experience is named “literary nomadism” in her own words as she wanders and carries her writing between her homeland and her host country (Lalagianni & Moura, 2014, p. 57).

Catherine Khordoc (2016) addresses the relevance of the term “écriture migrante” in the context of Québec and discusses the reducing effect it might have on the writers and their works by creating an implicit expectation that these writers with a migration background write exclusively about their experiences of migration and exile. Lucie Lequin (2008) also discusses the question of how to name women writers in the same context and gives examples of the negative attitude some writers share about defining and naming. Lebanese Canadian writer Abba Farhoud rejects all labeling and expresses her view regarding her position by saying, “Si pour les Québécois je représente l'ailleurs, quand je suis ailleurs je représente les Québécois” [If for Quebecers I represent elsewhere, when I am elsewhere, I represent Quebecers] (Farhoud, 2000,

p. 45, translation mine). This positionality is not about the legal status in the country but about the migrant self, which is part of her writing even though it has been a long time since her migration, as noted by Lequin (2008). Ying Chen, the Chinese Canadian author, is also uncomfortable with the limiting aspect of this naming (Chen, 2004, as cited in Lequin, 2008). Lequin notes that for Chen, the literature has no nation, no borders, without denying her origins or where she lives. On the same note, May Telmissany (2010) discusses Egyptian Canadian poet Iman Mersal and her rejection of identifying labels which she finds “kitschy”. Publishing in Cairo in Arabic might be seen as evidence of the writer's strong bond with her homeland, whereas her refusal of the labels might be interpreted as a desire for dissociation, which creates ambiguity in terms of the writer's relation to the homeland, according to Telmissany (2010).

Edward Said's (1979) theory of Orientalism, based on the critique of the Western conceptions and representations of the East and the creation of a binary opposition between Europe and its “Other” as “its contrasting image” (p. 2), the negative reflection of the self, may be useful in understanding why some writers reject the label of “migrant” ascribed to them. It can be argued that the conceptualization of “migrant literature” and “migrant writer” sets a similar relationship of the “self” and the “other” and denotes difference even though it does not imply any negative connotation as in the Orientalist perspective. Arguing that the conceptualization of “migrant writer” creates “a barrier that separates their works from those by non-immigrant writers,” Khordoc (2017) proposes, as an alternative, a transnational approach that would focus on the Québécois literature as a whole and analyze the works in terms of their forms and themes, without making a distinction between “écrivains de souche” [native writers] (translation mine) and immigrant writers (p. 79). Khordoc (2017) argues that themes such as “mobility, traversing borders, origins, belonging” are not exclusive to “écriture migrante” and

that these are recurrent common themes deployed by several Québécois writers, immigrant or not (pp. 79–80).

III. Criticism of Male Perspective in Migration and Exile Studies

Several studies I have analyzed point to a lack of female perspective in critical works that explore the representations of exilic and migrant experiences⁸ (Al-Samman, 2015; Wimbush, 2021). Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré assert that the current theoretical discourses of exile treat it as a primarily masculine phenomenon and fail to adequately cover the experience of women (Averis, 2014; Averis & Hollis-Touré, 2016). They also emphasize that exile is defined more as a masculine phenomenon in the conventional theories since it is related to movement and dynamism, acts attributed to men, whereas women are rather associated with immobility and stability. Averis and Hollis-Touré note that exile needs to be rethought with new dimensions added by women's leaving home and homeland and that the female experience, with its particularities, should be examined in its divergence from the male experience (Averis, 2014; Averis & Touré, 2016).

Julie Brunet (2005) argues that the critical studies addressing the literary productions of migrant writers tend to focus mainly on the works of male writers and points to the lack of critical works that conduct a detailed and deep analysis of the female writing of exile. She notes that all social factors that play a role in the experience and representation of migration and hybridity, such as the homeland or host country, political regime, socio-historical context, religion, age, or level of education, are taken into consideration, whereas gender is underestimated in critical works that deal with migrant writing.

⁸ Québec played a pioneering role in this field where the phenomenon has been studied within the framework of “écriture migrante” (Chartier, 2002; Mata Barreiro, 2007).

In the context of the canonical invisibility of female migrant writers in Irish literary history, McDaid (2017) argues that migration can offer an alternative avenue for contemporary female poets to have an identity that is not limited by national or diasporic narratives, one that is free from restrictive constructions of nationalist feminine ideals that assign women a silent and passive role in poetry and from the barriers posed by the gendered nature of the diasporic discourse based on the assumption that the writer-in-exile is almost always male. Bourque and Hogikyan (2010) also emphasize that women experience exile as doubly and triply marginalized subjects and argue that studies focusing on migrant women's representations would bring a broader and more inclusive perspective, one that is not limited to spatial boundaries, political and ideological frameworks, and categorizations (based on race, sex, etc.).

IV. Meaning of Exile for Women Artists

The liberating effect of the exilic experience on women artists is discussed in most of the critical texts that discuss their works (Bourque & Hogikyan, 2010; Lalagianni & Moura, 2014; Marchese, 2007; Wimbush, 2021). The homeland does not always mean a safe place for women; it may represent a location where identity is already problematic. The same is true for homes and domestic sites that might be places where women experience violence and alienation (Averis & Hollis-Touré, 2016; Chanady, 2010) since there might be cases where “domestic violence undermines the safety and security that is associated with home,” as Averis notes quoting from Jumana Bayeh (Bayeh, 2015, as cited in Averis, 2017, p. 15). Therefore, identarian destabilization is not necessarily a negative event, and exile can offer women the opportunity to be able to express their identity, which they could not previously do due to the limitations and restrictions in their homeland (Averis, 2014). Julie Brunet (2005) also argues that these women

writers, some of whom flee the unacceptable conditions and traditions in their countries, obtain the rights they did not have in their homeland and, for this reason do not suffer from homesickness as much as their male counterparts do. Hanadi Al-Samman (2015) mentions the marginalizing but also empowering effect the migration experience had on Arab women writers in exile and argues that this led them to create a body of literature where they challenged patriarchal, dominant ideologies, and authoritarian dictators.

Elena Marchese (2007) explores the theme of exile and its meaning as addressed in the novels written by women authors. In most of their works, physical exile has a positive meaning and is a way that leads to the emancipation of the female characters after they leave their homeland. Marchese, expanding upon Freud's and Kristeva's ideas, also discusses the subject in the frame of the female protagonist's "inner" exile, the alienation one lives deep inside herself even if she is at home and in the homeland, as a common theme in the works. Discussing migrant women's experiences as a complex issue, Pruteanu (2016) emphasizes that women who can engage in a certain kind of interaction with the host society usually get to know emancipation in their new context and quotes a similar remark of Lucie Lequin and Maïr Verthuy on the women migrant voices in Canada and France: "Les migrantes commencent alors à écrire, à créer, à transgresser, à se révolter et à se transformer" [the migrant women then begin to write, to create, to transgress, to revolt, and to transform themselves] (Lequin & Verthuy, 1996, as cited in Pruteanu, 2016, p. 3, translation mine).

On the same note, Lucie Lequin (2001) gives some examples of Québec's female writers of various origins in the context of the meaning of exile for them. Nadine Ltaif expresses her reason for leaving her country as her wish not to have to defy the contempt in men's eyes and her wish to escape the hatred in their looks. This desire to flee from men's looks or their rules is the

expression of her wish to become free, which is represented in several other forms in other female writers as well: for Carole David, this is the right to speak; for Gloria Escomel, this is the freedom of sexual orientation; for Andrée Dahan, the right to be in public space; and for Bianca Zagolin, this is the appropriation of her body and her heart (Lequin, 2001). Corio and Vitali (2010) also discuss what exile means for women writers and give the example of French Lebanese poet Vénus Khoury-Ghata speaking as follows: “If I had stayed in Lebanon, I would have had kids and sought shelter in caves to protect myself from bombings. I would not have written. I would not have added a voice, mine, to the Francophonie” (p. 13).

V. The Use of Language

The use of language is another salient discussion in several studies that deal with the works of women migrant artists (Averis, 2017; Kačkutė, 2023; Montandon, 2006; Talahite-Moodley, 2016, 2021). Some female writers in exile prefer to write in their native language, whereas the majority produce works in the language of the host country. Telmissany (2010) discusses the diasporic experience as a movement inside and outside a language in addition to being a spatial movement between countries and argues that “the Arab diaspora hesitates between languages (Arabic, English, French, Dutch, etc.)” with reference to the writers’ choice of language (p. 28). Al-Samman (2015) notes that the Arab writers she focuses on in her study insist on writing in Arabic despite being in diaspora and mentions the Arab French poet Salwa Al Neimi’s choice of writing in the Arabic language as the most suitable medium for expressing the body and Eros, which are important themes of her poetry. Corio and Vitali (2010) discuss the exiled female writers’ desire to have the freedom to go beyond borders, languages, discourses, genres, and styles in their writing and argue that their choice of writing in French might be a sign

of their demand to break free from the patriarchal structures of their native tongue. However, in some instances, the language of the host country is the writer's own language, as is the case with the writers Andrée Dahan, Régine Robin, and Suzanne Lamy, and a feeling of alienation, like a stranger in their own language, might accompany the exilic experience, as Lequin notes (2001).

Lequin (2001) discusses the question of language not only in its relationship with the difficulties of integration but also in its acting as a creative force for hybridity and extraordinariness in the literary works of the authors in exile. She gives the example of Haitian Canadian author Marie-Célie Agnant, using Creole images and proverbs together with the French language in her novels. These writers' use of language and style is original because they use both the images in their native language and the host-country language and offer a new look in their work with old and some much-used themes (Corio & Vitali, 2010).

VI. Genres and Themes

The studies I have examined generally focus on certain genres. The analyses on literature mainly explore the novels and short stories of the women writers in exile; the critical works on poetry and plays are less common in these articles or books, in agreement with the low number of works produced in these genres. Some previous research includes biographic information about the authors and gives their reasons for leaving their homeland for a better understanding of their literary works. Critical studies mostly focus on the thematic analysis of the literary works, but they also address the stylistic and aesthetic features, the narrative elements and textual strategies, the metaphors, and the hybridity in generic conventions. The fact that studies on literary productions by women artists address the formal aspects of the works in relation to

differing stylistic elements and at varying levels of detail makes it hard to draw a clear-cut framework regarding their convergences.

However, this is not the case with the themes, which were extensively explored as a major component of the analysis in previous research on migrant women artists' writing. The most popular themes the artists engage with in their representations of exile and migration are belonging, uprootedness, identity, hybridity, the difficulty of existing as a woman, homelessness (in its metaphorical sense mostly), comparison between the homeland and the host country, and the alienation one feels upon returning to the homeland. Lequin (2008) notes that in the works of migrant women writers of the younger generation, migration and belonging are more often addressed not in relation to nation or homeland but rather in relation to one's self and the world.

A common and thoroughly examined theme is the characters' relationship with their mothers and grandmothers (Averis, 2017; Calvo Martin, 2007; Chanady, 2010; Kačkutė, 2023; Lequin, 2006; Mata Barreiro, 2007). In these studies, the continuity of the female line is addressed, the representations of the mothers and grandmothers as a bridge between the cultural and memorial heritage and new generations are discussed, and the role of the daughter in the processes of intergenerational exchange and transfer is emphasized. The mother-daughter relationship and the mothers' role as keepers of traditional links with the homeland are not always cherished in the works of migrant and exiled women artists. For instance, Al-Samman (2015) discusses Salwa Al Neimi's poems, which address the role of the poet's mother and other matriarchs in the culture equally responsible for the oppression of women by enforcing restrictive rules and thus refuse these inherited values. The heroine in her poems represents the young generation of women who do not want to resemble their foremothers and want to have a better future.

VII. Previous Research on Arab Canadian Writing

Mostly settled in Québec, the writers of Arab origins in Canada and their works, together with authors of various other origins, are mainly explored under the umbrella of Québec's "écriture migrante" (Lalagianni & Moura, 2014). The writers and their works are discussed in anthologies and critical works, largely in French, in terms of the common themes they cover, their choice of language in writing, and their stylistic and formal features (Bourque & Hogikyan, 2010; Dahab, 2002; Lequin, 2001; Lequin & Verthuy, 1992; Pruteanu, 2013; Rachédi, 2010; Telmissany, 2010; Verduyn, 1998). As the largest French-speaking community outside France and with its own literary canon, Québec, too, is the subject of these studies for being home to migrant literatures of over a dozen different cultures (Arino & Piccione, 2007; Dahab, 2009; Ireland & Proulx, 2009). Because these migrant writers are Francophone, their works are also examined in several comparative studies of the literatures in Québec and France (Lequin & Verthuy, 1996; Pruteanu, 2013). Another comparative form of analysis in this field is the one between the literatures of Canada and Québec (Carrière & Khordoc, 2008; Verduyn, 1998).

Besides, some of the studies on migrant literature in the context of Canada and France focus distinctly on female writers and their works (Bourque & Hogikyan, 2010; Brunet, 2005; Dahab, 2002; Lequin & Verthuy, 1992, 1996). However, the secondary sources that explore Arab Canadian writers as a separate category are scarce (Dahab, 1999, 2002, 2009, 2015). All the analyses dealing with migrant literature in general and Arab Canadian writing or migrant women's writing in particular center on the common themes, styles, literary forms, and devices used by the authors. A feminist perspective is present in the analyses of women's

writing, but none of them discusses the literary works of migrant women writers in an intersectional or materialist feminist framework.

VIII. Previous Research on my Corpus of Analysis

Previous critical studies that analyze the selected works in my corpus of analysis, Nadia Ghalem's two novels *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) and *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) and Nadine Ltaif's three poetry collections *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987), *Entre les fleuves* (1991), and *Élégies du Levant* (1995) are few in number. Previous research on Abba Farhoud's two novels, *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) and *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), is even rarer due to their relatively more recent publishing dates.

The critical works that examine Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) offer biographical information about the author as well as undertake a literary analysis addressing the thematic and formal aspects of the texts. While Esma Lamia Azzouz (1998) explores the author's text in the frame of Algerian women's writing in French and discusses the characteristics that align it with or differentiate it from other texts in the same context, Roxana Ibrahim (2006), in her article, focuses on symbols such as "glass" and "mirror" used by the author and their function in the narrative. Margarita Garcia Casado (2008) discusses the elements of violence in relation to war and family in Ghalem's text; Anissa Talahite-Moodley (2021) addresses the author's use of places in reference to metaphorical and physical crossing of borders and borderlands; and Marie-Lyne Lavoie (2015) adopts a semiotic perspective on language and vocabulary and analyzes the text in the frame of the role migration shock plays in authorial creativity.

As for previous literature on Ghalem's *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), Talahite-Moodley (2016) offers an analysis of the text by providing biographical information about the

author and discusses Ghalem's addressing traveling as lifestyle to understand the contemporary world, which is one of the ruptures and one of the crossroads for cultures, languages, and peoples. Talahite-Moodley's (2016) article also offers a feminist perspective by exploring the female characters that populate Ghalem's text, women's condition, their ability to cross borders easily, and the different relations they establish with space. Talahite-Moodley (2021), in another study, examines Ghalem's text which she considers in the frame of "borderland aesthetics," and discusses her style and themes with a focus on the metaphorical and physical crossing of borders and borderlands with reference to the author's use of the borderlands as key settings in her text (p. 106). Besides, Talahite-Moodley (2021) addresses the female characters Ghalem uses and provides a feminist perspective by discussing these women's functions in the text.

Sage Goellner (2022), in her article, addresses autobiographical elements in Ghalem's *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) and discusses her style and themes with a special focus on the author's use of memory and repetition. Goellner (2023), in another study, in addition to the autobiographical elements in Ghalem's text, undertakes a thematic and formal analysis of the writer's use of repetitions as well as focuses on her use of geographical superimpositions by putting one place over another to create new kinds of home, which eventually presents home as an ever-changing place in her narrative.

In the frame of Ltaif's poetry, previous research includes Katarina Relja's (1995) analysis that explores the poet's works and her representation of the linguistic and cultural exile through the lens of the concepts of transculturation, alterity, and "minor literature." She explores how the poet perceives exile, how she expresses the experience of crossing borders, and how the act of writing becomes an act of transformation as well to adopt a new belonging, a new territory. Antoine Sassin (2006) undertakes an analysis that explores examples of Mediterranean

symbolism with a focus on the four female mythological figures Ishtar, Phoenix, Agar, and Hecate addressed by the poet and with references to the autobiographical elements in the texts.

Mythical elements and female characters such as goddesses, dancers, mothers, wet nurses, and friends that occupy Ltaif's imaginary are also discussed by Christl Verduyn (1992a, 1992b), who presents a partly feminist perspective in this context. Verduyn, in her articles, also addresses the poet's style, the general themes, symbols, as well as autobiographical elements in the texts. Verduyn, in this context, refers to Ltaif's exploring of themes such as women's condition, the difficulty of female identity, the sexual and economic exploitation of women, mother-daughter relationships, and madness in addition to other themes that align with characteristics of the "écriture migrante," such as migration, exile, uprootedness, language, and an ambivalent attitude to both countries, the country of birth and the country of adoption.

Antonia Wimbush's (2021) book *Autofiction: A Female Francophone Aesthetic of Exile*, explores Farhoud's two novels *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) and *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017). Being the only research on the former novel to my knowledge, this critical study is one of the closest to my research in terms of scope and methodological framework. Wimbush's study analyzes different models of exile and displacement as addressed in the texts of Francophone postcolonial women writers and is significant in terms of highlighting the gender "blind spots" and discussing women's experiences of migration, neglected by existing works on migration and displacement (p. 2). Wimbush also points to the liberating effect of exile for women and emphasizes the role it might play in offering women a solution to flee from a restrictive and male-dominated society. By placing women at a central position in the discourses of exile, Wimbush's research addresses exile as otherness in terms of gender, sexuality, race, and language. The author provides an analysis of Farhoud's two novels in the context of the meaning

of growing old in exile, with reference to the authors' representations of women's experiences of migration at diverse ages and at different stages of their lives, and offers a nuanced depiction of the intersections between aging and migration.

The study by Nancy M. Arenberg (2021) which explores Farhoud's *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017) is also another important source for my research. Arenberg explores the text in the context of the feeling of disillusionment felt following the return to Lebanon, the home country, based on the difficult experiences of the two female protagonists, Ikram and Faïzah, accustomed to mobility, freedom, and opportunities in Canada. Arenberg offers a feminist perspective in her study by addressing this disillusionment on a corporeal level as well, with reference to the two sisters' acts of resistance to the cultural traditions and norms of Lebanese society.

IX. Conclusion

In the literature review chapter of my thesis, I have investigated the studies that deal with the representations of migration and exile in the literary works produced by women artists who themselves are in exile. A number of these studies, taking a gendered approach, focus on women artists' works only, whereas others deal with the works of female and male artists together. Some sources I have worked on take the region of origin of the artists into consideration in their organization and center exclusively on the works of artists who are of Arab, African, or Asian origins, for instance, whereas others deal with the works of women artists from different geographies of the world in the same study, taking the host country or region as the common denominator, as is the case with Julie Brunet's *Histoires de grands-mères : Exil, filiation et*

narration dans l'écriture des femmes migrantes du Québec (2005), focusing on the female writers located in Québec.

The studies I have discussed mainly undertake a thematic analysis of the texts while at the same time covering their stylistic and aesthetic features. A common point of focus is the general characteristics and implications of migration and exile for women artists. The discussions on the definitions and types of exile, the terminology to use, the use of language, and the autobiographical elements in the texts under scrutiny are the other topics frequently addressed in these books and articles. Another commonality of these studies is the cultural, psychological, and sociological perspectives they take in their literary criticism. As opposed to the general analytic frameworks adopted by the majority of this previous body of research, Brunet's (2005) analysis that applies a psychoanalytical perspective and Vassiliki Lalagianni and Jean-Marc Moura's edited volume *Espace méditerranéen : Écritures de l'exil, migrations et discours postcolonial* (2014) that adopts a postcolonial approach offer a more nuanced analysis framework for the literary representations of migration and exile by women artists who themselves are in exile. The analysis of Dominique Bourque and Nellie Hogikyan (2010) that draws attention to the symbolic and material aspects of female subordination that constitute the background of women's exilic experiences is also significant for my study in terms of pointing out the possibility of materialist feminist research on the works created by women artists in exile.

The studies I have examined also share a "feminine" mode, criticizing the current theoretical discourses of migration and exile that treat displacement as a primarily masculine phenomenon and tend to ignore the experience of women, which eventually leads to the invisibility of migrant women artists and their productions in critical studies. The role of the female characters that populate the literary works of women writers in exile, with a particular

focus on the mother-daughter relationship, is largely discussed in previous research. In addition, these studies underscore the liberating effect of exile for women artists and highlight female agency through characters created by women artists. The studies, though they do not often use the term “feminist” to define the women writers or their works under discussion, present a clearly feminist discourse in their critical assessments. In revealing the presence of the “feminine” voices and their representations of migration and exile, these studies manage to “shift the reader’s interest from the personal feminine to the political, to the communal” (Al-Samman, 2015, p. 19).

Chapter 2 Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

The analysis of my corpus and my research is based on two theoretical and methodological perspectives: the intersectional feminist framework and the materialist feminist theory.

I. Intersectional Framework

Intersectionality, which points to an individual's social and political identities —such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality, and many others—overlapping, interacting, and shaping their experiences of exposure to discrimination, oppression, or violence, is an important framework for tracking the key elements of my project. “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated,” American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw wrote in a polemical 1989 scholarly law paper called “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” where she discussed the separate treatment of race and sex discrimination in U.S. law and judicial decisions and coined the term “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140; Moradi, 2017, p. 108).

Sirma Bilge and Ann Denis (2010) define “intersectionality” as “the study of a matrix of power relations” (p. 4). As power systems like race, class, and gender depend on and reciprocally construct one another, and these intersecting power relations, as a result, create complex, interdependent social inequalities based on race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, ability, and age (Collins, 2015, 2019)⁹, my project examining the literary portrayals of

⁹ In the context of discussing race, class, and gender as mutually constructing systems of oppressions, Collins (2019) mentions the relational nature of power relations as a guiding premise of intersectionality. She examines relationality within intersectionality and posits “co-formation” as one of the three modes of relational logic. In an effort to clarify the concept of “co-formation”, Collins resorts to Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s metaphor of

the social problems of migrant women who are exposed to these inequalities simultaneously at a local, regional, national, or global level requires an analysis based on an intersectional perspective. The intersectional approach is not only concerned with the subordinate position of the subject; this frame of analysis can be effectively used to question whiteness, class privilege¹⁰ (Bilge & Denis, 2010), and privileges stemming from belonging to other social categories as well. I conduct an intersectional analysis to explore in depth the representations of these women's lives, including the complexities of context, especially in terms of place and time. In this framework, I discuss the representations of the experiences of women stemming from their various identities as interdependent, multidimensional, and in mutually constitutive and reinforcing relations (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991; Moradi, 2017, p. 108) as opposed to the "additive approach," which conceptualizes their experiences as separate, independent, and summative (Bowleg, 2008, p. 314; Moradi, 2017, p. 107).

Though the term was coined in 1989, the history of the idea itself is much older. It was as early as 1832 when the African American writer Maria Stewart drew attention to oppression based on gender and race and its combined effects on femininity (Bilge & Denis, 2010). Also, it

borderland theorizing and its components of borderland space, border crossing, and mestiza identity where borderland identifications are considered as being dynamic, changing, and unstable ones (Anzaldúa, 1987, as cited in Collins, 2019). The way Anzaldúa's metaphor "illustrates the interdependence of entities that are articulated not as finished projects, but rather as necessarily connected and perpetually co-forming", Collins argues that "intersectionality's spatial metaphor of the crossroads is not a dead space where durable roads converge and then continue on, unaffected by crossing the intersection. Instead, for intersectionality's critical theorizing, intersectional spaces are better conceptualized as borderland places where ideas co-form via dialogical engagement" (p. 245).

¹⁰ Michael Bratton (2021) defines "class privilege" as "a powerful (and often insidious) form of self-reproducing and legally sanctioned financial, material, social and relational advantage that affect one's opportunities for income, well-being, social standing, and life chances" (p. 55). Existing at vastly varying degrees, advantages based on class shape individuals' living conditions, choices, opportunities, and hopes as well as influence how other people perceive them and how they perceive themselves (Bratton, 2021). For a discussion of "class privilege" and its deployment as a social category in intersectional analysis, see Sirma Bilge's "Smuggling Intersectionality into the Study of Masculinity: Some Methodological Challenges" (2009).

was in 1851 that the abolitionist and women's rights activist Sojourner Truth, formerly a slave, asked the historical question, “Ain't I a woman?” to critique the essentialist understandings of femininity and the feminist movement of her time that failed to address the experiences of African American women (Bilge & Denis, 2010). The “Black Feminist Statement” of the Combahee River Collective (1977) is also significant in terms of pointing out the simultaneous oppression stemming from the interlocking social relations of sex, race, and class and containing the spirit of intersectionality¹¹ (Bilge & Denis, 2010). Angela Davis and bell hooks were two other African American scholars who pioneered the development of intersectional feminism in the United States in the 1980s (Bilge & Denis, 2010). Similarly, during the same period in Canada and Britain, scholars including Danielle Juteau-Lee, Barbara Roberts, and Hazel Carby, Valerie Amos, Prabtibha Parmar, Sallie Westwood, respectively, pointed to the importance of this type of comprehensive analysis without explicitly naming their approach “intersectional” (Bilge & Denis, 2010).

Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis’ (1983) work in Britain, which emphasizes the importance of an intersectional perspective, is also noteworthy in this frame. Anthias and Yuval-Davis argue that social categories of race, gender, and class cannot just be added to each other since their specific intersections result in specific effects and refer to the Black feminist movement’s endeavor to adopt this intersectional approach. What makes their contribution to intersectionality particularly significant for my research is that they advocate using the concept of ethnicity, which they find more inclusive than race (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983; Bilge & Denis, 2010). They argue that by focusing solely on racism and the black/white division, we miss

¹¹ In addition to their intersectional perspective, the Combahee River Collective (1977) also insist on the social construction of sex and gender. Criticizing the way “men have been socialized to be in this society”, the CRC emphasize that they “do not have the misguided notion that this is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness— that makes them what they are” (para. 15).

out on the diversity of ethnic experiences that are influenced by other factors, such as economic and political circumstances. Anthias and Yuval-Davis discuss ethnicity as a boundary uniting or separating collectivities based on some common origin and argue that there has been a systematic neglect of this “ethnic” context in feminist struggles.¹² They explore the interrelationship of gender and ethnicity by emphasizing that “every feminist struggle has a specific ethnic (as well as class) context” and highlight specific struggles that concern migrant women, for instance (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983, p. 62).

Over the last three decades, intersectionality has been taken up by scholars and intellectuals from multiple disciplines, and both quantitative and qualitative studies using an intersectional approach to analyze individual experiences and organizational or systemic processes at a macro level have increased considerably. The intersectional approach needs to be analyzed in the context of Canada and Québec, too, since my analysis hereby focuses on the works of women artists of Arab origins based in this Canadian province. Intersectionality, as a concept, has a more recent history and practice in the Francophone world, including Québec, and the feminist research here has mainly analyzed the socio-economic differences between women and men, while few analyses have been made on the construction of differences among women on the basis of race and class (Bourque & Maillé, 2015; Maillé, 2015). As Crenshaw (2011) notes, “intersectionality travels” (pp. 221–223), and as it travels, it does not remain the same and

¹² Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983) discuss the concept “ethnicity” as “various forms of ideological construct which divide people into different collectivities or communities” based on the categorization of individuals into who are included and who are excluded (p. 66). Juteau-Lee and Roberts (1981) also argue that “‘ethnicity’ is made not born and it is a product of one’s situation, rather than one’s nature” (p. 3). However, while discussing the concept in the frame of social relations that construct it, they, from a materialist feminist point of view, draw attention to systems of domination and subordination. Focussing on the parallelisms between “ethnicity” and “femininity” in this context, Juteau-Lee and Roberts (1981) state that they both are socially constructed systems of behavior produced by relations of power and domination and as constructed categories, they position their members into a relation of subordination to the ‘nonethnics’ and men respectively (p. 3).

does not receive the same feedback in the varied contexts it encounters (Baril, 2017; Collins, 2015). Though the analyses on gender and race date back to the 1980s in the US and Great Britain was able to quickly integrate the perspectives on race in their analyses of gender, France has only recently started to analyze gender and race together (Maillé, 2014). Chantal Maillé (2014) argues that, in the French context, the questions of class were in the foreground together with a universalist feminism focusing mainly on sexual difference; therefore, the intersection of the social relationships of class and gender has drawn the theoretical attention of the feminists, but the question of race as well as that of the postcolonial minorities remained absent in the discussions. In this context, French materialist feminism's stance towards the idea of "difference" and its conception as a social construction and political instrument can be said to have played a role in the late introduction of race and ethnicity into feminist analyses in the country. Instead of supposing these differences as women's essential inherent qualities and therefore something to be cherished, the materialist feminist perspective addresses social categories and the relations embedded in them as "social instruments of oppression" and deconstructs their naturalist meaning in Guillaumin's (1992) sense (Pheterson, 1994, p. 261). Thus, instead of focusing on differences among women, materialist feminists choose to examine the underlying oppression and subordination of the class of women by the class of men.

The influence of the French feminist theory and its universalist discourse on Francophone feminism (Maillé, 2014) is not the only reason for the late reception of intersectionality as a concept in Québec. An outstanding aspect of Québec society and Francophone populations in Canada is their ambiguous position as colonized, minoritized, and colonizer at the same time and their relationship with the Indigenous question (Baril, 2017; Maillé, 2014; Pagé, 2015). Geneviève Pagé (2015) argues that Québec has its own dynamics of racialization, which

invisibilizes the question of race, and that reflections on racism have long been obscured by a national discourse that has appropriated the subaltern status of blacks and slaves. Thus, the Québec society, defining themselves as a colonized people, supports the negation and marginalization of the issues about slavery and the colonization of the Indigenous peoples in Québec by denying the role they played in the past and present in establishing and maintaining this colonization, according to Pagé (2015). Naïma Hamrouni and Chantal Maillé (2015) note that working on the notions of race, racializing, and racism in the context of Québec is a difficult task to do and that the question of race is still undertheorized since the national narrative occupies almost the whole space of reflection and analysis in terms of identity issues.

The concept of “diversity” is also considered to have a role in shaping the nature of intersectional feminism in the context of Québec (Maillé, 2015; Ricci, 2015). Sandrine Ricci (2015) argues that a subsidiary position is given to the question of racism in the context of the women's movement in Québec paradoxically with the usage of the concept of diversity. This notion, which positively implies opening and tolerance, has the function of masking racism as a lived experience as well as domination relationships between the dominant and minority groups, according to Ricci (2015). On the same note, Maillé (2015) discusses “diversity” and “interculturalism” as vague notions that replace a precise language for categories and maintains that the popular term of “diversity,” while inviting us to consider the power relationships of race, class, and sex within an indistinct whole, attempts to obscure the question of racism (p. 105). Juteau (2008), too, mentions the vastness of the scope of the concept and refers to “ethnic diversity” as a nebula encompassing difference and equality, citizenship and rights, gender and national identity, multiculturalism (or interculturalism), and integration (p. 3).

Another element that differentiates intersectionality in the Anglophone and Francophone milieus¹³ is the presence or absence of discussions on language issues and trans issues as axes of oppression in intersectional analyses, according to Alexandre Baril (2017). Baril (2017) mentions the prevalence of “Anglonormativity,” “a system of structures, institutions, and beliefs that marks English as the norm,” in the field of intersectionality and highlights that French-language texts address linguistic identities and language power relations in their intersectional analyses as opposed to their English-language counterparts where language issues are excluded (p. 127). Baril (2017), on the other hand, highlights that the majority of Francophone feminists who have adopted intersectionality do not discuss trans issues and cisnormativity in their analyses, whereas these issues are addressed, theorized, and politicized in Anglophone feminist circles.

Despite Québec’s relatively late reception of intersectionality as a concept, an intersectional perspective is not new, and a number of feminist scholars here integrated gender, class, and race/ethnicity in their analyses without calling it “intersectional” by the early 1980s (Denis, 2008). In their discussion of “Ethnicity and Femininity” (1981), Danielle Juteau-Lee, and Barbara Roberts examine class, femininity, and ethnicity as interconnected systems of relation and subordination. Arguing that one’s location in any of these three systems of social relations has consequences and complications relative to the others, Juteau-Lee and Roberts posit that

¹³ Alain Supiot (2020, 2022), a French legal scholar, offers a nuanced analysis about the over-focus on identities in today’s world. In the current neoliberal context where we see a sharp rise in inequalities, where the working classes are abandoned to precarity and where masses of people have to migrate in order to flee poverty, Supiot draws attention to a rise in anger and violence, a phenomenon that contributes to the return of ethno-nationalism and xenophobia. Because individuals still need solidarity, Supiot argues that they invoke social justice with identity-based claims on ethnic or religious affiliation, skin colour or sexual orientation. The shift away from social state and its project of social citizenship which guarantees to everyone the economic security results in an “obsession” with identity and an increase in these identity-based claims in our day, according to Supiot (2020, para. 5).

these three dimensions of subordination must be considered as part of one system, thus offering an intersectional framework. Sociologist Ann B. Denis (1981), too, provides an intersectional analysis in her article where she discusses the participation in the paid labour force of women from different ethnic groups by using census data in Canada and Québec. Pagé (2014) observes the existence of a prototheory of intersectionality in Québec even earlier, in the 1970s, in the studies of the Québec feminists who explored the links between capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy at a time when leftist movements were vigorous and where women's liberation and national liberation were intertwined, which shows that an intersectional feminist approach is not a recent phenomenon in Québec. Pagé (2014), in the frame of the peculiarities of the Québec context, states that as a society between France and the United States, it has particularisms and influences coming as much from the south of the border as from the other side of the Atlantic. Concerning the relevance of an intersectional analysis of the oppression systems in the Québec feminist context, Pagé (2014) argues that the specific trajectory of the French-speaking Québec feminist movement, with its experience of multiple oppressions and its links with French materialist feminism, can serve as a springboard for the integration and adoption of an intersectional framework of analysis. According to Pagé (2014), American intersectionality and French materialist feminism, without being equivalent, would share the same central idea: to think of oppressions as multiple, interrelated, and non-hierarchical, and the Québécois feminists, being located at the crossroads historically, geographically, and linguistically, can serve as mediators between these two seemingly antithetical approaches (Juteau, 2015).

Though Crenshaw (1991), the creator of the concept, uses “intersectionality” in the context of race and gender and her analyses draw heavily from research on Black women, she notes that connections can be made with the experiences of other women of colour. She

emphasizes that factors including class, sexuality, and age also shape the experiences of women of colour, and that her focus on race and gender shows the necessity to consider multiple identities in analyzing the construction of the social world (Crenshaw, 1991). Even though gender, class, and race (or ethnicity) have become the areas that are mostly analyzed on an intersectional basis, they are not the only ones (Bilge & Denis, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The categories an intersectional perspective takes into account are many and include sex, gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, immigration status, physical ability, mental health, and body size (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Marital status, country of residence, generation, language (including accent), and able-bodiedness can also form the basis of power relations, the source of subordination or privilege, and thus the parameters of an intersectional analysis (Bilge & Denis, 2010). It is for this reason that an intersectional approach fits in the context of this project, where I discuss the representations of the multiple overlapping identities of migrant women in terms of being a woman, an immigrant, a working or middle-class person, and sometimes Muslim in a historical Christian context. The parameters my intersectional analysis hereby focuses on are sex, gender, ethnicity, immigration status, class, religion, and language.

Together with the rapid growth and increasing interest in feminist intersectionality starting with the early 2000s (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013; Collins, 2015), we also see discussions about whether intersectionality is a theory, a concept, a tool, or a methodology (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013; Collins, 2015, 2019; Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Patricia Hill Collins (2015) mentions the difficulty of giving a fixed definition and setting a clear-cut frame for the term considering that the body of knowledge it is studying is not fixed and the term is applied to a wide range of practices, interpretations, methodologies, and political perspectives. My research employs intersectionality as an analytic tool, a way of understanding and examining the

complexity in the world and in people's experiences, the organization of power, and the conditions of social and political life that are shaped by several factors and by several axes in mutually influencing ways (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Together with the increasing popularity of intersectionality also came the debates around the concept termed "the intersectionality wars" by Jennifer C. Nash (2017), where almost all aspects of intersectionality, its definition, history, content, and methods, but especially its relationship to Black feminism, are disputed (p. 117). In the frame of the current criticisms against intersectionality's synonymity with Black feminism, rather than being seen as a "product" of it (Nash, 2011, p. 447), my project that uses the analytical tool of intersectionality, in an expanded or already inclusive version, and explores the literary representations of migrant women's experiences will hopefully be a contribution to these discussions. By adopting an intersectional feminist approach, my analysis focuses not only on the identities or social categories but also on the visible and invisible power relations, the interlocking systems of oppression, and their interaction with contexts.

II. Materialist Feminist Framework

In addition to the feminist intersectional approach, my project draws on materialist feminist theory, mainly on the work of the French materialist feminists who analyze women's subordination and oppression according to class (Delphy, 1984), race and sex (Guillaumin, 2003), sex/gender and sexuality (Mathieu, 1991; Tabet, 1998; Wittig, 1992). Focusing on the material conditions of the oppression of women, materialist feminism examines the links between sex/gender and production relationships and seeks to explain women's oppression not only in the frame of capitalism but also, and mainly, in relation to patriarchy. Considering that "patriarchal or gendered structures, relations, and practices are every bit as material as capitalist

ones” (Jackson, 2001, p. 284), the materialist feminist theory questions social and cultural categories of difference such as sex, gender, sexuality, class, and race and undertakes a materialist analysis of domination and oppression of women in the frame of power relations between women and men as members of two socially and historically constructed classes.

Looking back at the history of materialist feminism, we see that this is a feminist theory that emerged in the late 1970s from feminist criticisms within Marxism (Hennessy, 1993). The theory’s origins lie in the works of the French radical feminists Christine Delphy, Monique Wittig, Nicole-Claude Mathieu, and Colette Guillaumin, who, as a form of political activism in their Women’s Liberation Movement (MLF), established the journal *Questions Féministes* (1977–1980) together with Simone de Beauvoir (Leonard & Adkins, 2005). Annette Kuhn, AnnMarie Wolpe, Michèle Barrett, and Mary McIntosh were the pioneers and contributors to the theory in Britain around the same time.

The French radical feminist theorists publishing the journal *Questions Féministes* refuse “the terroristic use of capitalism as the unique explanation” (Collectif, 1977, p. 6, as cited in Juteau, 2016) in reaction to the Marxist approach and undertake a materialist analysis of domination and oppression of women in the frame of power relations between women and men as members of two socially and historically constructed classes. Monique Wittig (1992), the French novelist and social theorist, highlights the importance of defining oppression in materialist terms. Drawing on de Beauvoir, she challenges naturalist assumptions of “sex” and the category of “woman” by showing its connections with the oppression of women. “For there is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary,” Wittig notes (1992, p. 2) and argues that “sex” is a political category constructed as a product of power relations between the two groups “men” and “women,” and

categories such as “male/female,” “masculine/feminine” are created to enable the domination of one group over the other. In this frame, the French feminist theorist draws attention to the key role heterosexuality¹⁴ plays in the construction of sexes as natural and the division of society into two sexes, which involves the appropriation of women’s work by men (Leonard & Adkins, 2005; Wittig, 1992). Heterosexuality is thus used as a tool to isolate women from each other and control them (keep them home, impregnate them, have them work for free, etc.) in this framework. Wittig is well-known for her argument “lesbians are not women” (1992, p. 32) to point out their nonconformity with the socially constructed category “woman,” which has a meaning only in heterosexual discourse. Wittig believes lesbianism is a way of escaping from the class of “women” and thus from patriarchal domination and argues that the destruction of the heterosexual system will lead to the destruction of the categories of “men” and “women” “for there are no slaves without masters” (1992, p. 15).

On the same note, French anthropologist Nicole-Claude Mathieu (1991, 2005) also underscores the cultural construction of “sex” and emphasizes how the ideology of the biological definition of sex is used to create a hierarchy of gender and thus the oppression of one group by the other. From a materialist and anti-naturalist perspective, Mathieu conceptualizes “sex-class identity” (*identité de sexe*), which is an identity of resistance bringing to light the dynamics of oppression. Based on class consciousness, this identity points to a dialectical opposition between men and women as separate classes and to the exploitation of the class of the sex “women” by

¹⁴ Materialist feminists use the concept “heterosocial” to foreground the social status, rather than the natural status, of heterosexuality, and situate the domination of the class of women by the class of men in a “heterosocial” regime. They consider that this regime’s basis is turning oppressed groups into others, not similar people: women, blacks, migrants, homosexuals are different from those in position of authority. Thus, from this perspective, lesbians are no longer defined as beings with a marginal sexual orientation, and therefore a specific essence, but as political subjects. By refusing heterosexuality, they partly withdraw from their sex class and work for the abolition of the political system which has established this social division (Bourque, 2006).

the class of the sex “men” (Leonard & Adkins, 2005). In other words, it is less an “identity” than an act of resistance, a political position. Mathieu prefers to use the term “social sex” as a reconceptualization of “gender” in order to emphasize the socially constructed nature of the categories “man/woman” and the ideological definition given to sex, particularly that of women (Mathieu, 1991).

French sociologist Colette Guillaumin (2003) analyzes women’s subordination and oppression in the frame of the ideas of “sex” and “race” that she discusses as socially and historically constructed categories. She maintains that the idea of nature is invented to create groups that are subjected to certain types of relationships (dependence, exploitation) as well as relationships of power that enable their domination and appropriation (slavery, marriage, migrant labour). Guillaumin argues that the idea of a natural group of “race” and “sex” is invented for material purposes, the former for the appropriation of people (as slaves and labourers) and the latter for the appropriation of the bodies of women (for their labour power and other purposes). In this context, oppression comes first, and social categories are created to mask it. Sources of power, political regimes use anatomical traits or any community belonging to declare its members naturally different. Elites who run those regimes (whether political or economic) otherize oppressed groups, which means that they present them as essentially different from them. By appropriating the “human” norm, the elite turn the other groups into particular groups. Once they have succeeded in marginalizing them and making them visible as “others,” they make them compete for work: divide to reign. Drawing on her research on race, Guillaumin (2003) conceptualizes the term “sexage,” through which she links the appropriation of women to their being used as slaves. In relations of “sexage,” the appropriation of women can take place in several forms, such as the appropriation of their time, the appropriation of their body (sexual

obligation), the appropriation of the products of the body (children), and the physical charge of looking after family members. This relationship of “sexage,” the appropriation of physical, emotional, and intellectual labour of women, with no payment within the family or in other institutions, is carried out by means of the labour market, confinement in space, the show of force including all sorts of violence, sexual constraints, and law and customary rights (Guillaumin, 2003; Juteau, 2016).

Another leading figure in materialist feminist theory whose ideas I will draw on in my research is French sociologist Christine Delphy. Delphy (1984) discusses sexuality as a place of class struggle that takes place not between the proletarians and the capitalists but between “social men” and “social women” and argues that the issue of sexuality has been brought to the political arena thanks to the women’s struggle (p. 217). She uses the concept “class” to refer to men and women because she thinks these two groups are connected to one another through a relationship of domination and they cannot be considered out of this relationship. In her article “The Main Enemy” (1984), Delphy explains the oppression of women on the basis of “class” and in the frame of the domestic economy. She advances the view that women share a class position, and with regard to this position they occupy, their main enemy is not capital but patriarchy since their labour is appropriated and exploited in marriage. “The furnishing of unpaid labour within the framework of a total and personal relationship (marriage) constitutes precisely a relationship of slavery,” Delphy argues, and adds that all women, at some point in their lives, are destined to enter into this relation of production and become members of this “caste” (p. 71).

Both Delphy (1984) and Guillaumin (2003) discuss women's labour within marriage and the family as a specific mode of production. What distinguishes Guillaumin’s approach from that of Delphy is not only the absence of a measure and limit that characterizes women’s free labour

but also the appropriation of labour as well as self-ownership (Galerand, 2015). In a “class” relationship, individuals own their body and their labour force and have the right to sell this labour, whereas in a relationship of “sexage,” as in the case of slavery, women (as a spouse, sister, or daughter) do not have ownership of their labour force and their entire personhood. In a class relationship, only labour is appropriated, whereas in the case of the marriage contract, women’s labour, as well as self-ownership, is appropriated by men (Galerand, 2015).

Italian anthropologist Paola Tabet, in close relationship with the French materialist feminists, is another scholar who has made noteworthy contributions to the theory. Tabet (2004, 2012) theorizes and analyzes relationships of domination between men and women in the frame of continuous economic-sexual exchange, as a form of transactional sex that goes beyond prostitution or sex work. According to Tabet, relations between men and women, and sex in particular, include power dynamics which also have an economic dimension, and women’s sexual acts in these relations, also within the institution of marriage, are services for which men pay in various forms. Tabet claims that this sexual-economic exchange is “a great scam based on the most complex, solid, and durable class relationship of all times, the relationship between men and women, a scam which is at work even today” (2004, p. 169, translation mine). Another contribution of Tabet (1998) is her discussion of sexuality and reproduction not as biological facts but as socially constructed relations. She explores how common interventions on sexuality and reproduction, which she terms “domestication,” result in forced reproduction and how men appropriate women’s sexuality and reproduction through marriage, kinship, and control (Leonard & Adkins, 2005). Tabet regards reproduction as socially organized work and discusses the exploited body, work (breastfeeding, for instance), and child of women as the outcomes of this work subject to relations of power and manipulation (Leonard & Adkins, 2005). In light of

Tabet's (2004) concept of "conjugal amalgam," which refers to all the services —with no measuring— that wives provide in a marriage relationship, the marriage institution, as a form of regulation of sexuality and reproduction, becomes a means of men's appropriating women's services such as sexual access, childcare, domestic service, and emotional labour in exchange for material support.

The theorists of materialist feminism consider the Marxist theory to be inadequate in addressing the oppression common to all women and criticize it for taking the oppression of women into account only as a secondary consequence of the class struggle (Delphy, 1984). Marxist feminism, too, is criticized for mainly focusing on class contradictions and class analysis and for working on an analysis of gender oppression around this central contradiction (Landry & MacLean, 1993). The Marxist framework is also discussed in terms of its failure to adequately address the reproduction and supporting of the biological life as well as women's invisible labour such as domestic chores and taking care of children and the elderly (Wayne, 1991). Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe (1978) also point to the need to examine the subordination of women with regard to women's relation to modes of production and reproduction and argue that Marxist theory rarely addresses this particular issue. They criticize Marxism for ignoring the specific conditions of women's oppression by considering women as part of general categories such as class relations and making no distinction between males and females in its categorization. Delphy (1984) considers the material analysis of the oppression of women as a crucial need of the feminist movement and discusses its omission as a shortcoming of the materialist theory, which, while focusing on the exploitation of the proletariat and the struggle of classes, does not include women as a group in these classes and does not consider their oppression as class oppression. Wittig (1992) draws attention to the two aspects of Marxism in

relation to women and argues that “it prevented them from being aware that they are a class and therefore from constituting themselves as a class for a very long time, by leaving the relation “women/men” outside of the social order, by turning it into a natural relation, doubtless for Marxists the only one, along with the relation of mothers to children, to be seen this way, and by hiding the class conflict between men and women behind a natural division of labour” (pp. 17–18). Tabet’s article “Les mains, les outils et les armes” (1998) offers another perspective in criticism of the naturalist discourse and of Marxist thought that bases the sexual division of labour on reproduction. By analyzing the historical distribution of tools and weapons to be used by men and women and showing that it precedes the division of labour, Tabet shows how this distribution organizes reproduction and excludes women from production (Galerand, 2015).

In addition to criticism against Marxism, materialist feminism voices criticisms against the feminist movement, too. The content of the category of “woman,” the monolithic view of women’s experiences, and mainstream feminism’s claim to speak on behalf of all women were problematic issues addressed to feminism. Valerie Wayne (1991) emphasizes the importance of different voices within the feminist movement, with a focus on the word “difference,” which describes the marginality of women and the many different positionalities occupied by women and feminists. Materialist feminism sees “woman” as a discursively constructed subject, aims at an analysis of this subjectivity with a focus on the intersections of gender and class, and thus offers a perspective alternative to the essentialist and idealist views of mainstream feminism (Hennessy, 1993). The materialist feminist point of view grapples with women’s subordination without making universalist or essentialist claims; it does not ignore differences among women, on the contrary, it argues that differences among women can be best addressed by taking material social conditions and inequalities into account (Jackson, 2001). Thus, this theory suggests that

feminism's commitment should be to the political position it occupies between domination and subordination, which can exist in many forms, not to an essence or a universalizing idea (Belsey, 1991).

The issue of “material conditions” that will be taken into account in a materialist feminist analysis of women's subordination and oppression requires the discussion of the term “material” and the question of what constitutes the “material”. In accordance with the French radical materialist feminists who emphasize the exploitation of women's bodies as a resource and the political/power relationship between men and women based on it, and with Tabet (2004, 2012), who conceptualizes as “sexual-economic exchange” the continuum of sexual relations for which men pay women in certain ways, Stevi Jackson (2001) criticizes the tendency to treat the “material” only in relation to capitalist economic relations and to consider the forms of inequality and oppression that do not serve capitalism as “non-material”. She does not consider materialist feminism as a form of economic determinism; her perspective on materialist feminism centers on social structures, relations, and practices within a context not limited to capitalism only. Accordingly, Jackson contends that patriarchal and gendered social structures, practices, and relations are also material, whether or not they are functional on capitalist terms. Social structures, relations, and practices stemming from racism, colonialism, and imperialism are equally material, and in this frame, language and cultural representations can also be addressed by materialist feminism in their social and historical context, according to Jackson (2001).

The relationship between patriarchy and modes of production is a major point of focus in materialist feminist theory, which necessitates analyses of the place of women in the family and the state, women's labour, paid or unpaid, and the sexual division of labour in the family (Kuhn & Wolpe, 1978). Delphy (1984) suggests that there are two modes of production: the industrial

mode and the family mode which includes domestic services, child rearing, and taking care of dependents, young or elderly. She refers to the industrial mode as the source of capitalist exploitation and to the family mode as the basis of patriarchal exploitation. Patriarchy based on a domestic mode of production is considered by Delphy (1984) as only one of the economic dimensions of women's subordination, and general acts of violence as well as sexual violence committed by men are other material dimensions of women's oppression. As Delphy (1984) argues, marriage is a patriarchal system where men dominate their families and husbands appropriate their wives' labour and it becomes a source of exploitation and oppression for women in this context.

Guillaumin's (2003) concept of "sexage" and theory of the appropriation of women, Tabet's (2004) concept of "conjugal amalgam," and Wittig's (1992) political system of complex power relations constitute the materialist feminist backbone of my analysis in the thesis. French sociologist Jules Falquet's (2014) theoretical model that combines the French materialist feminist theory and intersectionality, which she calls a "materialist-imbricationist feminist synthesis," facilitates my employing the two perspectives in my research (p. 236). The intersectional perspective in Falquet's model is illustrated with the metaphor of "communicating vessels," showing that class, sex, and race relations coexist and are connected with each other (2014, p. 238). Since positive or negative changes in one of these categories create changes in the other categories, Falquet asserts that a gender-based analysis is not sufficient alone; a simultaneous analysis of class and "race" should accompany it, as the Combahee River Collective feminists first highlighted in 1979. In the frame of her synthesis, Falquet uses the term "imbrication des rapports sociaux," interlocking structural social relations of sex, race, and class, which she takes from the "Black Feminist Statement" of the Combahee River Collective (1977),

instead of the term “intersectionality,” claiming that the former allows a more structural analysis as opposed to the latter, which is much more individualizing (2014, p. 252).

Falquet (2016a) puts forward the concept of “combinatoire straight” [straight matrix] as a system that organizes and controls union by marriage and filiation by means of social relations linked with gender, race, and class (p. 73). This matrix continuously produces groups of people considered to have differences on the basis of “nature” (Falquet, 2016a, p. 76) by means of a mechanism of naturalization that “masks the concrete legal, political, and historical foundations of social relations of “race” and sex” (Falquet, 2014, p. 253) and thus enables the “appropriation” and use of the same groups as “machines with labour power” (Guillaumin, 1992, as cited in Falquet, 2016a, p. 75). Falquet uses the term “structural social relation” as one that organizes the whole social system by constructing two sexes as two opposed social groups or classes and positioning them in the sexual division of labour as the sex class of women and the sex class of men (2016b, pp. 1–2). This idea of the construction of the two sexes as two classes is based on the work of the materialist feminists, who made a radical transformation in the concept of “labour” by including the dimension of “appropriation of bodies as machines meant for work” (Guillaumin, 1992, as cited in Falquet, 2016a, p. 75) and by showing that sexuality can be considered a kind of work (Falquet, 2016a; Tabet, 2004). This expansion in the scope of the concept thus made it possible for social relations of sex/gender and race, in addition to class, to enter the equation in the analyses of the exploitation of labour force (Falquet, 2016a). With an area of expertise on Latin-American and Caribbean feminist movements and their role in the questioning of neoliberal globalization, Falquet proposes this concept as a tool for analyzing social reproduction, the historical development of capitalism, as well as the current neoliberal reality where non-privileged women, racialized, migrant, and working class are used as labour

force and mostly perform the tasks of social reproduction, mainly “service” sector activities. (Falquet, 2016a, p. 75; 2016b, p. 1).

To summarize, in my dissertation, I examine the selected corpus of the Arab Canadian female artists Abla Farhoud, Nadia Ghalem, and Nadine Ltaif under two theoretical axes: intersectionality and materialist feminism. I base my analysis on an intersectional perspective to see how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and similar systems of power depend on and mutually construct one another, and these intersecting power relations, as a result, create complex, interdependent social inequalities (Collins, 2015, 2019) in the representations of migrant women’s lives. In my research, I use “race” in an expanded sense, following Falquet’s example, as “a social phenomenon created by structural social relations of ‘race’, organized especially around nationality, religion, skin colour, and immigration status” (2016b, p. 3). Because “intersectionality’s *raison d’être* lies in its attentiveness to power relations and social inequalities,” as Collins (2015) argues, an intersectional point of view enables me to detect and describe the social, political, or environmental conditions that contribute to making women vulnerable to subordination and oppression in the artistic representations of migration and exile. I then look into the how and why of these conditions by using the analytical tools of materialist feminist theory. Guillaumin’s (2003) concept of “sexage” helps me to analyze various kinds of social relationships women are in as a spouse, sister, or daughter, how their labour force and/or their entire personhood are appropriated, and what role being a migrant plays in this equation. In my research, I also employ Tabet’s (2004) concept of “conjugal amalgam” as a tool in the close examination of marriage relationships that enable men to appropriate women’s services such as sexual access, childcare, domestic service, and emotional labour by providing material support in exchange for them, and her concept of “sexual-economic exchange” to analyze relationships of

domination between men and women in general. Thus, an intersectional approach helps me to focus on the consequences, on the literary representations of the complexities of lived experiences, whereas a materialist feminist perspective helps me to make connections with the causes and foundations, to lift the curtain and see what is behind with regard to women's various conditions.

The corpus I examine in my dissertation is in French. Therefore, I will use the published translations of the works if they are available, and I will provide the translations myself where necessary. In the frame of research terminology, I use the term "migrant" to refer both to first-generation individuals who were born outside the host country and second-generation ones born in the host country but raised by foreign-born parents.

"Representation" is a central term underlying my dissertation since I hereby analyze how four Arab Canadian artists represent migrant women in their literary works. The concept of "representation" in the arts has been a focus of attention since antiquity; several theorists, including Plato and Aristotle, have been interested in defining and explaining this term. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) describes "representation" as "an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture" (p. 15). Hall also states that "representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language that enables us to refer to either the real world of objects, people, or events or to the imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people, and events" (p. 17).

Concerning the discussions on the purpose of literature and its conception as the transcription of a concrete experience, cultural geographer Marc Brosseau (1994) mentions two approaches to the perception of the same reality: objective and subjective, namely "viewing

literature as the reflection of reality” or “considering it as the reflection of the soul contemplating or experiencing this same reality” (p. 338). Though “literary truth has a universality: it evokes a response in Everyman’s breast while apparently concerned with the particular,” as Douglas C. D. Pocock (1981, p. 11) notes, I deploy the concept of “representation” as an individual’s insight and reflection on the world, in agreement with humanistic geography’s interpretation of the interplay and relationship between literature and reality (Pocock, 1981).

In my research, I use “representation” in the sense of depiction, the portrayal of an object, person, place, experience, emotion, or idea in written, visual, performed, or spoken language. Since the same object, landscape, event, people, emotion, experience, and idea may be represented in very different ways by different people, in the arts, the artist may aim to mirror the natural world as realistically as possible or may aim to convey thoughts, emotions, and experiences in a more abstract way. Despite acknowledging that literary and artistic accounts are noteworthy sources of information and can be a useful way of understanding values and ideas in society, I recognize that there cannot be a strict correspondence between the actual objects, landscapes, people, or events and their representations in literature and art. Because representation cannot reflect actual reality in its fullest sense, each artistic representation would offer a different construction of the world and experience in it based on the artist’s attitudes, beliefs, and values in the world. In my analysis of the selected works, I focus on the representations of migrant women, bearing in mind the fact that these representations are not neutral, but on the contrary, they carry some personal and cultural meanings with them, reflecting the artist’s way of envisioning them. Thus, I discuss these representations bearing in mind that they are the reflections of a soul contemplating or experiencing the world.

Another concept I use and discuss in my thesis is “context.” Based on Merriam-Webster’s definition of “context” as “the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs,” I use the term throughout my thesis to refer to the cultural, social, economic, political, and religious circumstances that form the setting for the literary works in my corpus of analysis. Not only the public and private spaces of everyday life but also the country of origin and the host country, here and there, are part of the contexts that I examine in these works. Sometimes, the “here” that I focus on is the host country, but in some cases, it is the home country, as in the case of Abba Farhoud’s novel *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017). Marc Brosseau (1994) argues that novels, in addition to being a source of information about places, help geographers gain a deeper understanding of a region's character, although they certainly acknowledge that the written and the actual landscapes cannot be completely matched. I also find the concept of “sense of place” used in humanistic geography important here (Brosseau, 1994, p. 334). Humanistic geographers have promoted research on the strong subjective meanings that experience gives to place. Accordingly, I discuss the contexts in my corpus of analysis in relation to the accounts of the female characters’ subjective experience of place, paying attention to the cultural or moral values attached to these contexts. Therefore, in agreement with what Brosseau (1994) indicates and as I mentioned above, what I do in my research is not “viewing literature as the reflection of reality” but “considering it as the reflection of the soul contemplating or experiencing this same reality” (p. 338).

In my analysis of contexts, I also refer to Gill Valentine’s (2007) work discussing how intersectionality can be used in feminist geography and how gender, class, race, and life stages are combined to shape different images and experiences of place, and different contexts. Emphasizing the role that space plays in the processes of identification and disidentification,

Valentine shows that “who we are” emerges in our interactions within specific spatial contexts and specific biographical moments. She also demonstrates how individuals see themselves differently in different spaces (e.g., in the space of the school, marital home, the Deaf club) and how “specific spaces (home, work, community) are produced and stabilized by the dominant groups who occupy them, such that they develop hegemonic cultures through which power operates to systematically define ways of being and to mark out those who are in place or out of place” (Valentine, 2007, p. 18). With this perspective on the subject-context relationship, I examine the representations of multiple and complex identities of migrant women by taking into consideration the way space shapes processes of subject formation and the way these dominant spatial orderings define who is in place or out of place, who belongs, and who does not.

“Identity” is another key term I employ and examine throughout my research. Though the concept of “identity” has been widely used and analyzed as a dependent and independent variable, as an explanatory tool, or as the subject of analysis itself across a wide range of social science and humanities fields, the full array of its meanings can be difficult to summarize in a short and adequate way (Fearon, 1999). Much of the current meaning of “identity” is primarily based on the work of psychologist Erik Erikson, who “conceptualized identity as resulting from a dynamic interplay between individual and context” (Erikson, 1950, as cited in Fearon, 1999; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006, p. 5). Thus, what we see as a person’s “identity” has multiple dimensions and is subject to continuous change under environmental conditions. James D. Fearon (1999) discusses the concept in two categories, “social” and “personal,” and defines “social” identity as “a social category, a group of people designated by a label (or labels) that is commonly used either by the people designated, others, or both” (p. 10). In this sense, social identity refers to race/ethnicity, gender, social class/socioeconomic status, sexual orientation,

(dis)abilities, and religion/religious beliefs and can include examples such as “American,” “French,” “Muslim,” “father,” “homosexual,” “worker,” “professor,” or “citizen” (Fearon, 1999). Social identities may include role identities such as “mother,” “father,” “student,” or “president,” where individuals are expected to act in certain ways and fulfill some functions (Fearon, 1999). As for “personal” identity, Fearon (1999) defines it as “a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguish her in socially relevant ways” that the individual may or may not take special pride in (p. 11). These values, beliefs, and goals the person holds, together with their belonging to various social categories, make up “the organization of self-understandings that define one’s ‘place in the world’” (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006, p. 5). In my thesis, I discuss these multiple identities, both personal and social, of migrant women in their representations in various contexts and examine them through the intersectional and materialist feminist lens.

The method I use in my analysis of the corpus is close reading, through which I focus on the elements such as theme, setting, character, plot, tone, imagery, diction, and style of the artists. Examining the diction, the linguistic choices, helps me better grasp the artists’ points of view. The repetition of some words and some images, along with the words and the images that have multiple meanings and connotations, offer me some other hints in the digging process. I pay special attention to the rhetorical devices used in the texts to see symbols or allusions to outside texts, as they might have the function of changing the interpretation of the whole work. Since the silences are as significant as the other elements of the work and might offer very important clues about the narrative, I also look into the elements or ideas the artists prefer not to include in their works. “The principal object of close reading is to unpack the text. Close readers linger over words, verbal images, elements of style, sentences, argument patterns, and entire paragraphs and

larger discursive units within the text to explore their significance on multiple levels,” James Jasinski (2001, p. 92) notes. Accordingly, my close reading process drawing on the intersectional and materialist feminist frameworks enables me to unpack the texts, see the common features the artists’ works share as well as the differing patterns, and finally get answers to the following research questions:

- How do Abba Farhoud, Nadia Ghalem, and Nadine Ltaif represent migration and exile as a female experience in their artistic works? How do they represent identities and contexts?
- How are factors including race, gender, class, religion, and sexuality involved in the experiences of the female characters, and how do they shape their experiences of exposure to discrimination or oppression? How do the artists represent the influence of ethnic and cultural identity on women’s subordination?
- How do women’s relationships to modes of production, the social classes they belong to, and the patriarchal and gendered social structures, practices, and relations they are subjected to inform their marginality and the different positionalities they occupy in the family, society, and state? In what contexts are those women depicted by the artists?

The sub-questions I focus on in my analysis to answer my above-mentioned questions are as follows:

- What kind of challenges and obstacles are migrant women facing, and what are their struggles?
- What positive, meaningful, and rewarding experiences are they finding in the migration process?
- How are these women represented by the artists?

- a) In terms of their physical characteristics.
- b) In terms of their mental state.

Chapter 3 Nadia Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981)

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze Nadia Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), a novel published almost 20 years after the independence of Algeria, the writer's home country. Nadia Ghalem was born in Oran, Algeria, in 1941, in a rather bourgeois environment composed of intellectuals (Rachédi, 2010). Having experienced the war and “a period of deep depression” as a teenager (Rachédi, 2010, p. 44), the author addresses the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) and its devastating effects as a dominant theme in her novel (Talahite-Moodley, 2021). Ghalem studies journalism in Algeria and completes her internship in France. After living in several parts of the world including, Niger, Ivory Coast, Germany, the United States, and Spain, Ghalem decides to go and live in Canada, a country that seems “much calmer” to her (Rachédi, 2010, p. 45). On December 31, 1965, in the middle of winter, Nadia Ghalem, aged 24, arrives in Montréal, an experience that gives her a chance to “start from scratch” (Rachédi, 2010, p. 45). Curious and eager for knowledge, in Montréal, she resumes studies in communication and begins a doctorate in literature and political science, which she does not continue. Ghalem also studies psychology but gives up after a while. A novelist, poet, and freelance journalist on radio and television, Ghalem is also a supporter of humanitarian causes, serving on several boards of directors, and a member of UNICEF (Rachédi, 2010).

In my analysis, I will first give an overview of Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981). Through a close reading of the novel, I will examine how the author represents exile from a female perspective, how she depicts the living conditions of women, her protagonist and others, as well as the different components of the women's identities that create their unique conditions

through their intersection. Then, I will continue with the recurring themes and motifs in the text, which I find relevant in terms of my materialist feminist and intersectional lens.

II. Overview of the Novel

Nadia Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) is a novel that displays the horrors of war as well as the writer's challenging systems based on power relations and their reflections on relationships between women and men. In the narrative, we see a female protagonist named Chafia, which means "healer" in Arabic. The protagonist is originally from the Arab Mediterranean country of Algeria, like Ghalem herself, and regarding the profession, the only information we get from the friend's account in the prologue is that she was a movie editor. Ghalem uses first-person narrator mode, the first singular person "I", to tell the story of Chafia, who is struggling with schizophrenia in a Montréal psychiatric hospital. Schizophrenia is what the doctors diagnosed as her psychological condition, but Chafia, in a battle with her situation on the one hand, gets deep into her mind, soul, heart, and past to face the underlying causes of her pathological dysfunction on the other hand.

In the first part of the text, the prologue, we see Chafia's friend, an unnamed narrator, explaining how she met Chafia and how this latter asked her to take a parcel including a few gifts, a letter, and a manuscript to her mother living in Paris. This friend also accepts Chafia's request to read out and partly translate the contents of the letter and the manuscript to the mother since she is illiterate. The prologue ends with Chafia's letter to her mother; what comes next is the manuscript, which is titled "Les jardins de cristal" and which constitutes the main body of the novel written in the first-person mode. Therefore, we see two different narrators in the story: the

first narrator is Chafia's friend in the prologue, whereas the second and principal narrator is Chafia, speaking in the main body of the narrative, the manuscript.

The manuscript is the protagonist's interior monologue and a dialogue with her mother at the same time, and it explores the themes of loss, violence, and traumas of war and exile, as well as the questioning of female identity and the inequalities women are subjected to. Having lost her country, her childhood, and her mental health, the protagonist also suffers from the separation from her mother, physically as well as mentally and emotionally. In this novel, which is the representation of migration and exile as a female experience, the narrator, with flashbacks about her past, explains how she experienced war in Algeria, her home country, in her wounded childhood, and exile later in her life and gives a detailed account of her madness and the treatment process in this long manuscript addressed to her mother. The narrator's journey to self-healing includes powerful feminist messages: the female voice in the text, through the dominant metaphor of a suffering mother, addresses the condition of women in her country and in general; the topic of female identity, femininity in the victim mode, which she questions through her mother's traditional role, is a leading theme in the narrative. In the text loaded with hallucinatory visions, including intense images and metaphors on female body parts such as the belly, uterus, procreation, and abortion, Ghalem questions the unequal relationship between men and women through her character searching for a female identity and freedom. After diving deep into the twists and turns of her mind and soul, after a painful introspection and auto-psychoanalysis process, Chafia settles accounts with herself, her mother, and life, and eventually, in agreement with her name, manages to heal herself.

As we look at the context before migration, we see the devastating effects of war, the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) that the protagonist experienced as an adolescent.

She frequently mentions the war and how it destroyed her childhood. The war is one of the principal causes of her trauma, leading to her illness, her madness. Throughout the novel, the protagonist examines her psychiatric condition, her situation at the hospital, and the doctors' attitude and treatment in depth. In this struggle for life, a struggle against death and madness, she feels like a tree with no roots, “une plante sans racines qui étend ses branches le plus loin qu’elle peut” [a rootless plant that stretches its branches as far as it can] (Les jardins, p. 12). Now that the mirrors of her childhood are broken, she is trying to rebuild her identity on the wrecks of this little sad girl of her childhood.

In addition to the memories of the war in Algeria and the exile she experiences afterward, we see her condition as a woman as another major cause of her past traumas. The female identity, as imposed on her, is an obstacle to her freedom, and she feels crushed under the oppression of the patriarchal order. The manuscript is addressed to the mother, who is at the centre of the narration, and Ghalem conveys her feminist messages through Chafia's questioning of the mother and the traditional role she accepted as a woman face-to-face with men and the rules they dictated. She tries to find her mother's identity; she tries to see if there is an “I” peculiar to her mother, any characteristic of hers that makes her more than being a mother, a wife, and a “domesticated animal” (Les jardins, p. 24).

Concerning the form, the novel includes no chapters; we see only the prologue, including the letter and the main text, the manuscript that bears the same title as the novel “Les jardins de cristal,” which includes parts divided by three asterisks (***) in itself. In a narrative style oscillating between prose and poetry, involving hallucinations and reality mixed together, Ghalem uses the metaphor of psychological illness to represent migration and exile as a feminine experience. We see a woman separated from her country and, at the same time, detached from

reality with hallucinations; in both cases, she lost her points of reference and is struggling to find them. Ghalem, in her poetic prose narrative, deploys several images involving glass, crystals, and mirrors, as well as metaphors related to body parts. The metaphor of “crystal gardens,” lending itself to the title of the novel, is very dominant in the text: This garden is where the narrator finds herself in moments of hallucinations. She feels herself to be a frog in this garden, a frog among other porcelain dolls, because she does not feel like she belongs there.

III. Critique of Patriarchy

Ghalem’s text can be considered a critique of the patriarchal system through the example of the mother, the kind of womanhood displayed by the mother, as well as the unequal relationship between the father and mother. The mother is represented as a figure whose personhood and femininity are defined only in terms of being a wife and mother. Her space is restricted by her home; her only occupation is taking care of the home and her child. Never questioning or rebelling against the rules set by the patriarchy embodied in the form of society, she never challenges the discriminatory and oppressive practices she is exposed to.

In her analysis of the place of women in the family and the state, women’s labour, paid or unpaid, and the sexual division of labour in the family, Christine Delphy (1984) suggests that there are two modes of production: the industrial mode and the family mode which includes domestic services, childrearing, and taking care of dependents, young or elderly. She refers to the industrial mode as the source of capitalist exploitation and to the family mode as the basis of patriarchal exploitation. Patriarchy based on a domestic mode of production is considered by Delphy (1984) as only one of the economic dimensions of women’s subordination, and general acts of violence as well as sexual violence committed by men are other material dimensions of

women's oppression. Marriage, Delphy (1984) argues, is a patriarchal system where men dominate their families and where husbands appropriate their wives' labour, and marriage, as a social organization, becomes a source of exploitation and oppression for women in this context.

Paola Tabet (2004) presents a similar perspective on the relationships between women and men in the family. Tabet's (2004) concept of "conjugal amalgam" can be used as a tool in the close examination of marriage relationships that enable men to appropriate women's services such as sexual access, childcare, domestic service, and emotional labour by providing material support in exchange for them. It is important to note that these activities that wives provide in a marriage relationship take place without any kind of measurement. We can read Ghalem's text as a critique of patriarchy since marriage, or "conjugal amalgam" in this case, is represented as an exploitative system that enables a man's control over his wife as well as over his daughter. This patriarchal family structure where the mother is subordinated and referred to as a "domesticated animal" is one of the major causes of the protagonist's traumas (Les jardins, p. 24). Chafia is having trouble understanding why her mother never rebelled against this patriarchal system within which she is locked up:

Mais je pense à toi, ma mère, et j'essai de comprendre pourquoi tu ne t'es jamais revoltée. Tu vois, moi je l'ai fait, j'ai sauté la clôture, j'ai couru pieds nus sur l'asphalte et j'ai frappé aux portes, à des portes qui restaient fermées. Puis on m'a ouvert, on avait peur, la mort rôdait autour de nous. Une femme ne se révolte pas. Sous peine de mort, j'ai couru, je me suis cachée et je me suis écorchée, me voilà prisonnière des nuits sans sommeil et de cette folie qui me rongent tranquillement. Soit, je n'ai peut-être pas gagné, mais je suis entrée dans les meandres sinueux de la folie qui me donne cette vision un peu

déformée mais si riche que je n'ai plus envie de redevenir normale et de rejoindre votre monde sans chaleur.

[But I am thinking of you, my mother, and I try to understand why you never rebelled. You see, I did it, I jumped over the fence, I ran barefoot on the asphalt, and I knocked on doors, on doors that remained closed. Then they let me in, we were scared, death was lurking around us. A woman does not rebel. Under penalty of death, I ran, I hid, and I got flayed, here I am, a prisoner of sleepless nights and this madness that is quietly gnawing at me. Well, maybe I didn't win, but I entered the winding twists and turns of madness which gives me this slightly distorted vision but so rich that I no longer want to become normal again and rejoin your world without warmth] (Les jardins, pp. 59–60).

In a mother-daughter relationship that oscillates between love and hate, between forgiveness and resentment, Chafia compares herself to her mother and wants to show her how she refused to surrender despite all obstacles, all challenges, and all the prices she paid in return. The price of this revolt is madness for the protagonist. This psychological condition brings about the days and nights at the hospital, the hallucinations, and moments of fantasy mixed with reality. However, this is what gives meaning and becomes an asset to Chafia's life. Whatever she goes through, that is worth it, she thinks.

Ghalem, through the character of Chafia, deplores the patriarchal system, as it is displayed not only within the family but also within society on a larger scale. Chafia refuses to adapt to her surroundings and dreams about a world without taboos and discriminatory practices against women, including those that limit women's mobility, and associate a woman's traveling on her own with the intention of seeking men. She tells about a memory of hers where she

cannot walk as a woman out in the street but disguises herself as an old girl with eyeglasses and a hair bun or a badly dressed little boy. She has to act in this way because she cannot be herself, she cannot travel alone; this camouflage gives her the freedom she cannot have otherwise.

Chafia, as a woman, cannot be herself in this world. Thirsty for freedom, she wants to realize her real potential as a woman and reacts against systems of power based on male supremacy that doom her to a life marked by forced pregnancy and motherhood:

Je suis pourvue de jambes puissantes qui me permettent des sauts vertigineux vers la liberté, et ces jambes s'ouvrent pour laisser passer vos embryons vagissants et ensanglantés que je propulse dans votre univers en espérant seulement que leurs points de chute soient couverts d'éclats de vie et de joie.

[I am equipped with powerful legs that allow me dizzying leaps towards freedom, and these legs open to let pass your wailing and bloody embryos, which I propel into your universe, hoping only that their points of fall are covered with shards of life and joy] (Les jardins, p. 72).

IV. Womanhood, Motherhood, Critique of War

We have mentioned above Chafia's ambiguous relationship with her mother, which shaped how the protagonist sees her and what she thinks about womanhood and motherhood. The protagonist describes motherhood as "l'amour-labeur" [love labour] (Les jardins, p. 67) and finds it weird the idea of raising little human beings, "des petits d'homme," instead of spending a life laughing, studying, and dancing (Les jardins, p. 42). The idea of being a mother and raising kids is considered to be the opposite of these activities; the two cannot co-exist. However, this is

not the only reason why Chafia keeps her distance from motherhood. She thinks that what these children will turn into in the future as they grow up—unhappy officials or soldiers trying to look “virile”— does not look promising to her in terms of a better world (*Les jardins*, p. 42).

Together with a critique of womanhood and motherhood, Ghalem also deplores power relations on a national and global scale and these power dynamics as the principal cause of wars and of the oppression of the weak by the strong, and the oppression of the poor by the rich. The principal character of the narrative resents her mother for not protecting her from the horrors of life. She did not warn her against the atrocities that await her; she did not even warn her against men or against sexuality. In this frame, the narrator speaks about being “confined in maternal or conjugal love and other duties she was not warned about” (*Les jardins*, p. 39). We do not know whether she got married or not, but we see that she gave birth to a baby and became a mother:

La guerre finie, je reçois une bombe dans le ventre, celle qui me procura la gamme la plus étendue de souffrances qu'un être humain puisse ressentir, jusqu'à l'explosion liquide de ce petit être vagissant qu'ils vont me coller au sein sans me demander mon avis.

[When the war was over, I received a bomb in my belly, the one that gave me the biggest suffering that a human being could feel, until the liquid explosion of this little wailing being that they were going to stick to my breast without asking my opinion] (*Les jardins*, p. 39).

This child the narrator gave birth to is a source of her anxieties and fears, even if this child will bring her joy later on. After becoming a mother, she will start getting to know her mother better, and will be able to take a fresh look at her. The motherhood tie that connects Chafia to her child will help her reconcile with the image of mother she has in her mind. Nonetheless, this baby is an

unwanted baby, and Chafia displays an emotional detachment by referring to it as “this little wailing being” (*Les jardins*, p. 39). She mentions having made love without knowing what love means. This is the time of war, and she states that she is not responsible for what was done to her. She also states that she neither wanted nor refused it and that this does not matter to her. We see the writer's choice to leave uncertainty over that point by not specifying in what way that sexual encounter took place, who the father of the child is, and where the child now is. Chafia does not say exactly what happened to her, but we can understand that she is talking about herself.

This uncertainty complements the narrative on Chafia's psychiatric condition, where she comes and goes between hallucinations and reality, and she struggles hard to find her way since she continues by saying that she neither loves nor hates anything in the world and that she neither wants to live nor die. Though this is an unexpected child, the narrator feels affection towards the baby and wants to protect him against the evils of the world; she wants to hide him deep in the forests where he will be safe, in a kind of utopian place where there is no war and everybody is safe and happy. Nevertheless, the world is not a safe place to raise children, and having a baby means living in worry, according to Chafia. A child is a source of fear and anxiety for the protagonist since she, for a second time, refers to babies as “bombs” in the belly:

Nous savons que l'homme que l'on aime peut nous mettre des bombes dans le ventre. A voir grandir les enfants, nous tremblons pour des trésors menacés. Nous déposons de la vie au coeur d'un monde pris dans les griffes d'une menace multiple and horrificante.

[We know that the man we love can put bombs in our belly. Watching children grow up, we tremble for threatened treasures. We put life in the heart of a world caught in the clutches of a multiple and horrifying threat] (Les jardins, p. 26).

The baby imagery also makes part of the narrator's hallucinatory visions, where she questions the paradoxical relationship between mother and child:

Ces feuilles de cristal qui me serviront a m'ouvrir les veines et faire courir mon sang comme une rivière d'alcool rouge dans laquelle je pourrais me noyer pour remonter au grain de raisin qui pend au bout de mon sein et qu'un bébé étrange est entrain de téter goulument, comme s'il suçait ma vie... Ah cette fascination d'injecter à un autre la sève que l'on porte en soi! Un partage d'amour et de haine.

[These crystal sheets that will serve me to open my veins and make my blood run like a river of red alcohol in which I could drown to go back up to the grape that hangs at the end of my breast and that a strange baby is sucking greedily, as if sucking my life... Ah this fascination of injecting into another the sap that one carries within oneself! A sharing of love and hate] (Les jardins, pp. 97–98).

The love and hatred feelings the protagonist feels towards her parents are now directed to her own child, in her vision. The breastfeeding activity is compared to the sucking of one's life, a metaphor that resonates with Chafia's views towards women: their traditional role stuck at home, between their husbands, children, and domestic chores, which she sees as the components of women's subordination sucking their life, leaving them no space to live a life of their own:

“Et cette distance qu'elle gardait avec moi, qu'en dire? Peut-on faire autrement que haïr l'enfant qu'on n'attendait pas et qui vient de briser votre jeunesse et transformer un instant d'amour en

long servage? [And this distance she kept with me, what can I say? Can you do anything but hate the child you weren't expecting and who has just shattered your youth and transformed a moment of love into long serfdom?], Chafia asks (*Les jardins*, p. 115). The reader thus finds out that Chafia, herself, is an unexpected child, and she, herself, has this feeling of having destroyed her mother's life and transformed it into a long slavery.

V. Recurrent Imagery and Metaphors

As mentioned above, Ghalem, in her poetic prose narrative, abundantly deploys images of glass, crystals, and mirrors as well as metaphors related to body parts, mostly in the context of a female body. The protagonist's childhood is symbolized by a garden, the garden of crystals, which lends itself to the title of the novel, *Les jardins de cristal*. This is where Chafia goes in her hallucinatory visions mixed with reality and revisits her memories, in which all feelings of innocence and purity were destroyed by the war. As Esma Lamia Azzouz (1998) and Roxana Ibrahim (2006) note, these symbols of glass and mirror Ghalem uses in her novel refer to protection and isolation as well as transparency and fluidity. Glass, as a tool for protection, is a place where the protagonist would like to retire and hide. However, these symbols can be interpreted as an illusion of accessibility and protection, too, according to Azzouz and Ibrahim. This refers to an illusion of protection because, though these glasses seem to be protecting from dangers, the dangers might not be so far away. This illusion means fragility in Chafia's case because her happiness crumbles when the glass shatters. When the war breaks out and the shards are scattered everywhere in Chafia's world, her life turns upside down.

These transparent, pure, limpid, and precious crystal gardens not only symbolize the fragility of the narrator's world, they also refer to the fragility of her mental state. Chafia, having

to walk on the fragments of glass, of madness, needs to pick them up one by one, namely heal herself stage by stage, to reconstruct a new self. The garden, which should be an oasis of happiness and tranquility, turns into a troublesome space for Chafia. Ghalem abolishes the garden as a space of refuge and reinstitutes it as an “anti-jardin” [anti-garden] where the protagonist feels ugly like a frog, as Ibrahim (2006) rightly notes (p. 154). Though at first glance, it might be hard to establish the link between a frog and a crystal garden, the writer’s choice of the image of “frog” makes sense when we consider the evolution of the protagonist; just like the different metamorphoses a frog goes through, Chafia also wants to go through metamorphoses, through change. The frog, a being that lives between two worlds, in the water and on the land, one that cannot find a balance between the two and is not comfortable in any of them, neither here nor elsewhere, symbolizes the narrator herself, who lives between the real world and the imaginary, between reality and madness, without being comfortable in either (Azzouz, 1998; Ibrahim, 2006). The metaphor of a “frog” in a “crystal garden” thus symbolizes the estrangement Chafia, as a woman, lives in this world. As she witnesses several instances of violence since her childhood, in terms of war as well as in terms of the relationship between women and men, Chafia feels she does not belong to this pitiless world; what she sees in the mirror is an ugly frog that cannot fit.

In the narrative, we see several examples of the metaphorical use of the human body, especially the female body and its constituents, with a particular focus on “belly” and “flesh”:

Vous continuez de rêver de statues figées, représentant des femmes si fortement éthérées qu’il leur sera toujours impossible de se conformer à cette image sans basculer dans la folie. Aucune femme ne peut être mère de vos enfants et gardienne de votre foyer en même temps que vierge immaculée aux seins durs et au ventre plat, sans exploser

silencieusement en mille insidieuses violences impossibles à évaluer tant elles se répercutent à travers son monde à elle.

[You keep dreaming of frozen statues, representing women so strongly ethereal that it will always be impossible for them to conform to this image without going mad. No woman can be the mother of your children and guardian of your home at the same time as an immaculate virgin with hard breasts and a flat belly without silently exploding into a thousand insidious violences impossible to assess as they reverberate through her own world] (Les jardins, p. 66).

Chafia deplores the ideal image of femininity imposed on women, one that is impossible for them to reach. The endeavor to attain these unachievable standards is a push toward madness for women. This is not only the feminine beauty ideal and a perfect body form that are expected from women; they are also expected to perform affective labour, including domestic work, in a perfect manner. They need to look after family members, and they need to do this lovingly and caringly. Trying to attain this far ideal is an experience that would ruin women, a state of devastation they would suffer in silence. The protagonist also criticizes the tendency to attach value to women as long as they are young and beautiful and as long as they have sexual relationships with men. This criticism is in line with Paola Tabet's (2004, 2012) analysis, which theorizes relationships of domination between men and women in the frame of a continuous economic-sexual exchange as a form of transactional sex that goes beyond prostitution or sex work.

According to the Italian anthropologist, relations between men and women, and sex in particular, include power dynamics, which also have an economic dimension, and women's

sexual acts in these relations, also within the institution of marriage, are services for which men pay in various forms. Tabet claims that this sexual-economic exchange is “a great scam based on the most complex, solid, and durable class relationship of all times, the relationship between men and women, a scam that is at work even today” (2004, p. 169, translation mine). Tabet (1998) also offers another perspective in the criticism of the naturalist discourse, which bases the sexual division of labour on reproduction. By analyzing the historical distribution of tools and weapons to be used by men and women and showing that it precedes the division of labour, Tabet (1998) argues that the division of labour is not neutral but directed and asymmetrical, even in supposedly egalitarian societies; she posits that this is a relationship not of reciprocity or complementarity but of domination. This argument of Tabet that shows how this distribution organizes reproduction and excludes women from production echoes in the voice of Chafia in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981). The protagonist condemns the patriarchal order, where women are given fewer opportunities than men to thrive and make their mark on the world, as well as the ideology that makes women valuable only for their role in the sexual exchange:

On peut être mère de famille et féministe dans la vie et n’aimer que les hommes dans le secret de son cœur, parce que l'Histoire leur a donné la part du lion et parce qu’il y a plus d’hommes que de femmes qui fascinent les hommes, ou encore parce que celles-là cessent de fasciner ceux-ci dès qu’elles ne sont plus jeunes ou belles, et qu’elles n’ont plus qu’à disparaître si elles s’absentent du lit ou s’écartent des amours qui les avaient fait chanter.

[You can be a mother and a feminist in life and only love men in the secret of your heart, because History has given them the lion's share and because there are more men than

women who fascinate men, or because they cease to fascinate them as soon as they are no longer young or beautiful, and they only have to disappear if they leave the bed or step aside from the loves that had made them sing] (*Les jardins*, p. 132).

Ghalem makes references to body parts in the context of the father-mother relationship as well: “Cette image de père qui offre une fleur avec la méfiance luisante au fond des yeux. Celle aussi de mère, et ses mains sentant la vanille et l’eau de vaisselle, mère en longue robe protégeant sa peau, son corps. [This image of father offering a flower with distrust shining deep in his eyes. That of mother too, and her hands smelling of vanilla and dishwater, mother in a long dress protecting her skin, her body (*Les jardins*, p. 74).

For Chafia, the father is the symbol of toxic masculinity; even when he is performing a gentlemanly act of offering flowers, the daughter reads untrustworthiness in his eyes, deep in his soul. What Chafia sees in this romantic scene is nothing but a scam, a scam which, as Tabet (2004) theorizes, is based on a sexual-economic exchange relationship between men and women, a scam that operates even in our day. What Chafia sees here is a relationship based on profit since the woman is a self-sacrificing stay-at-home mother with hands smelling vanillin and dishwater, with a life spent at home, especially in the kitchen. The mother is depicted with a long dress protecting her skin and her body because the narrator, as a child, sees a mother in need of protection, a vulnerable woman who can be physically hurt.

Chafia’s words “Il y a dans ma gorge des éclats de cristal qui blessent les chairs et me renvoient des résonances de douleur jusque dans le creux du ventre.” [There are crystal shards in my throat that hurt my flesh and send resonances of pain up to the pit of my stomach] show how she is hurt by being in these crystal gardens, in this state of madness between imagination and reality (*Les jardins*, p. 13). These crystal shards hurt her throat because what she feels, what she

says, and the way she expresses herself and breaks the mold are not painless. We see again one of the writer's many references to “ventre” [belly/womb], being the symbol of femininity, reproduction, of maternity. The pain caused by her utterances and her resistance to patriarchal order echoes in her womb; the resistance growing in Chafia like a baby will ultimately give birth to the product of her struggles: freedom.

Privez les femmes de leur âme et vous signez un pacte avec la mort. [When you deprive women of their soul, you sign a pact with death.] (Les jardins, p. 66)

The notion of freedom is a recurrent theme in the text. Ghalem represents Chafia's struggle with madness in exile as a woman's search for freedom and female identity, her quest for a free “I.” As Anissa Talahite-Moodley (2021) notes, writers and artists make use of the metaphors of borders and borderlines to address topics such as identity and journeys into oneself. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldua's work (1987) that distinguishes borders from borderlands and considers borders as a line separating people and borderlands as vague places that have an undetermined nature, Talahite-Moodley regards these liminal spaces as places where individuals can deconstruct and reconstruct their identities. In this frame, a borderland that includes difficulties and limitations in its nature also offers opportunities for communication and dialogue between different cultures and people, as well as enables transitions and transformations, mentally, physically, and emotionally, due to its fluid character. Talahite-Moodley (2021) refers to Ghalem's works as “products of borderland aesthetics” not only because the writer explores several geographical locations and countries in her narratives and sets those places as the settings of her fiction but also because her works set examples for blurring of borders in genre, between

prose, poetry, and autobiography (p. 106). Ghalem, in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), creates the character of Chafia, both with her real and symbolic border crossing, as an exiled gendered subject who is in the process of transition and self-transformation on her way to reconstructing her identity.

VI. Women-Men as a Class

Ghalem, throughout the novel, speaks of women and men as two classes and mentions the condition of women as a class in several ways. Through the protagonist's mother's subordinate position in particular, Ghalem addresses women's problems and questions why the class of women is subordinated by the class of men. On the same note, Delphy (1984) addresses sexuality as a place of class struggle that takes place not between the proletarians and the capitalists but between "social men" and "social women" (p. 217). The French sociologist and theorist uses the concept of "class" to refer to men and women because she posits that these two groups are connected to one another through a relationship of domination, and they cannot be considered out of this relationship. In her article "The Main Enemy" (1984), Delphy theorizes the oppression of the class of women in the context of the domestic economy. She argues that women share a class position, and with regard to this position they occupy, their main enemy is not capital but patriarchy since their labour is appropriated and exploited in marriage. "The furnishing of unpaid labour within the framework of a total and personal relationship (marriage) constitutes precisely a relationship of slavery," Delphy states, adding that all women, at some point in their life, are destined to enter into this relation of production and become members of this "caste" (p. 71).

In *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), Ghalem represents the relationship between husband and wife as a master-slave relationship, and the mother's life is compared to a life of long slavery in the eyes of the little girl. We see that the narrator mentions her father only in a few places. Though she does not talk about him in depth, from the little information she gives, we can understand that the father-daughter relationship is not good, and the protagonist deplores the kind of man her father is. He is neither an exemplary man nor a good husband to her mother. However, her father is not the only troublesome man in the world; men are the source of aggression and violence toward women. They are the ones who produce the societal order where women exist only as ruled and dominated beings.

Il y a des hommes qui pensent “Je te fais bien l’amour, je te protège, tu es ma créature.”

Ceux-là m’agacent. Puis il y a ceux qui disent: “Tu es ma créature, parce que je suis un homme.” Ceux-là, je les fuis.

[There are men who think “I make love to you, I protect you, you are my creature.” These annoy me. Then there are those who say, “You are my creature, because I am a man.”

Those, I run away from them] (*Les jardins*, pp. 63–64).

This domination and appropriation relationship between men and women is conceptualized by Colette Guillaumin (2003) with the term “sexage.” French sociologist addresses women's subordination and oppression in the frame of the concepts of “sex” and “race” that she analyzes as socially and historically constructed categories. Through a materialist feminist perspective, Guillaumin argues that the idea of nature was invented to create groups that are subject to certain types of relationships (dependence, exploitation) and thus to create relationships of power that enable their domination and appropriation (slavery, marriage, migrant labour). She posits that the

idea of a natural group of “race” and “sex” is invented for material purposes, the former for the appropriation of people (as slaves and labourers) and the latter for the appropriation of the bodies of women (for their labour power and other purposes). According to Guillaumin, who links the appropriation of women to their being used as slaves, this relation of “sexage” can take place in several forms, such as the appropriation of their body (sexual obligation), the appropriation of the products of the body (children), and the physical charge of looking after family members. This relationship of “sexage,” the appropriation of physical, emotional, and intellectual labour of women with no payment, can be seen within the family or in other institutions (Guillaumin, 2003; Juteau, 2016). In Ghalem’s narrative, Chafia questions the “sexage” relationship the mother is exposed to as a wife and the hierarchical position the mother occupies in this relationship that forces her to be submissive face-to-face with the male domination imposed on her by society. Chafia also deplores the “sexage” relationship between men and women in society that manifests itself in the show of force, including all sorts of violence against women.

Confronting the reality of this relationship of “sexage” between men and women, Chafia wants to avoid men whom she considers having nothing but sex in mind. The narrator thinks that men with [heads in the clouds] “la tête dans les nuages” are [incapable of setting the relationship between sexual relationship and child] “incapables de faire le lien entre la relation sexuelle et sa conséquence” (Les jardins, p. 65). She thinks bringing a child to this world full of wars, disasters, and threats for today and tomorrow is nothing but a tragedy. However, the irresponsibility of men is not limited to the conception of a baby; they also abandon the mother to her fate, face to face with the sole charge of the child. The narrator has learned the hard way the reality of men who seduce women, seed them, and leave them as if it is women who have to pay the price for their pleasure: “Le père laisse tomber celle qui enfante, comme s’il n’y avait pas

de plaisir sans punition. Pour la femme en tout cas.” [The father drops the one who gives birth, as if there were no pleasure without punishment. That is always the case for the woman] (Les jardins, p. 65). The narrator compares irresponsible men who [wash their hands of the fate of their sperm] “se lavent les mains du sort de leurs spermatozoïdes” to Pontius Pilate, the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judaea, who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus (Les jardins, p. 66). According to the Gospel of Matthew, Pilate washed his hands in front of the multitude and announced, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves” (Klein, 2021). Thus, he refused to accept responsibility for his act. What men, following the example of Pilate, do today is a crime as big as his, according to the protagonist.

Chafia speaks on behalf of all women by using the pronoun “nous” [we]. She wants to warn and make a wake-up call for her sisters. Women look at the world in an “awkward and naïve” way, the narrator thinks, which makes them susceptible to being deceived by men (Les jardins, p. 25). She does not trust men; “nous savons que la méfiance est écrite in our viscères” [we know that mistrust is written in our viscera], she says and adds:

Nous déposons de la vie au coeur d’un monde pris dans les griffes d’une menace multiple et horrifiante. Nous vivons sur une planète que l’homme s’acharne à inséminer sans calculer les risques de ses actes. Et pourtant, chacun pleure sur des forêts avortées, sur des animaux avortés, sur des rivières avortées.

[We lay down life in the heart of a world caught in the clutches of multiple and horrifying threat. We live on a planet that man strives to inseminate without calculating the risks of his actions. And yet, everyone cries over aborted forests, over aborted animals, over aborted rivers] (Les jardins, p. 26).

The world is thus represented by the author as a place where women do not feel safe, are under threat, and consequently, are not able to live a decent life. The reason for this condition of women is that the world is a place where men act recklessly. In this frame, Ghalem intends to express her environmental concerns in addition to her feminist critique. Deploring irresponsible human activities that threaten the environment, the writer uses vocabulary associated with male and female sexuality. Human being's polluting the world is associated with men's polluting women by inseminating them. On the same note, we see the use of the word "aborted" for the mournful consequences of the acts in both cases: aborted forests in parallel with aborted children.

We see other references by Ghalem to "abortion" and "men's inseminating women" in a similar context. This time, it is about a poor young girl's having been subjected to rape and her obligation to have an illegal abortion under unsafe conditions. The author depicts the desperate girl trapped in this horrible situation as another member of the class of women being violated by the class of men. The same man will continue deceiving other women, committing psychological and sexual violence against them, and ruining their lives:

Hier, une pauvre jeune fille a payé une pauvre femme pour tirer d'elle des secrets obscurs. Elle n'enfantera pas le petit de la violence. La jeune fille a vu le corps de son fils dans une mare d'eau rougie et elle s'en est allée en pleurant, les mains sur ses flancs écorchés. Et l'homme qui la suivait avait un regard bleu qui ment et des promesses d'amour qui ne seront jamais tenues, car l'homme qui la suivait suivra d'autres femmes pour les ensemer à leur tour et les rejeter, meurtries. Dans les yeux de cet homme-là luisait comme un éclat de métal. Mais à pleurer de mère en fille nous risquons de faire

une chaîne de larmes qui nous retiendra prisonnières de la même eau empoisonnée et qui risque de nous noyer.

[Yesterday a poor young girl paid a poor woman to extract dark secrets from her. She will not give birth to the child of violence. The young girl saw her son's body in a pool of reddened water, and she went away crying, her hands on her scratched sides. And the man who followed her had lying blue eyes and promises of love that will never be kept, because the man who followed her will follow other women to seed them in turn and reject them, bruised. In the eyes of this man was shining like a shard of metal. But crying from mother to daughter, we risk making a chain of tears that will keep us prisoners of the same poisoned water and that risks drowning us] (Les jardins, p. 26).

However, the protagonist refuses to surrender to this reality that seems to be an inevitable destiny for women, an inescapable inheritance from mothers to daughters. In this phenomenon that Azzouz (1998) calls an “histoire cyclique” [cyclical history], the cyclical and hereditary curse passes from mother to daughter (p. 42). Mothers want to transmit the abuses committed against them; they want to transmit through blood this tradition of submission, which they, themselves, have inherited. What the mother experiences, she makes the daughter experience it, as if she cannot realize that there could be another way of living, another way of looking at and experiencing the world. Motherhood, experienced like a prison, becomes an inevitable destiny for all women in this way. The patriarchal systems of power, woven with fine and most of the time invisible threads, make women victims as well as active perpetrators—unwitting or voluntary—of the same victimhood. Chafia refuses to obey this chain of curses she inherits from her mother; she criticizes forced reproduction and forced motherhood as imposed by society.

Tabet (1998) discusses sexuality and reproduction not as biological facts but as socially constructed relations. She calls the common interventions on sexuality and reproduction “domestication” and argues that these interventions result in forced reproduction and thus enable men to appropriate women’s sexuality and reproduction through marriage, kinship, and control (Leonard & Adkins, 2005). In Tabet’s theorization of reproduction as socially organized work, the exploited body, the work (physical or affective labour, including breast-feeding, for instance), and the child(ren) of women manifest themselves as the outcomes of this work subject to relations of power and manipulation. In this context, the marriage institution, as a form of regulation of sexuality and reproduction, becomes a means of men’s appropriating women’s services, such as sexual access, childcare, domestic service, and emotional labour, in exchange for material support. It is this patriarchal system that transforms women into domestic animals that the protagonist deplores and refuses to be another perpetrator or another consenting victim of. Through the voice of Chafia, Ghalem calls on women in general and Algerian women in particular to take control of their lives. Grieving and crying passively will do nothing but imprison women in this tragedy; they need to take action; this is the message Ghalem gives to the world. In addition, she is hopeful about the future condition of women: “Je sais que d'autres femmes vivent des situations semblables ou pires que la mienne, mais je sais aussi que jamais autant d'espoirs n'ont été si près de se réaliser.” [I know that other women are going through similar or worse situations than mine, but I also know that never have so many hopes been so close to getting real] (Les jardins, p. 79).

VII. Women as Sisters

In the narrative, we see that men are depicted as beings seducing women and then abandoning them to their miserable fate, and for this reason, we see that Chafia prefers contact with women instead of men. The narrator underscores the importance of sisterhood and the solidarity among women in many places. In her most difficult moments, it is the women that she can get support from. She finds peace among her Algerian female friends in exile like herself, such as Hayat, whose name means “life” in Arabic, and Latifa, whose name means “gentle.” These friends have dreams of their own: After finishing her studies, Hayat looks forward to getting back to Algeria and building community houses there: “Victoire sur le voile et la timidité, elle ira avec son casque et ses bottes sur les chantiers discuter avec les ingénieurs et les ouvriers.” [With a victory over the veil and shyness, she will go with her helmet and her boots to the building sites to discuss with the engineers and the workers], the protagonist comments (Les jardins, p. 125). Hayat is a symbol of success for the narrator since she manages to overcome her timidity and fears as well as stops wearing a headscarf, which she considers obstacles to a woman’s achievements. As for Latifa, she is hungry for freedom, for she was born in prison. Chafia finds in these female friends a comfort that cannot be found in men and regards the friendship among women as a real one, as one where women can be their real selves because it does not contain any sexual give-and-take, any material profit; there is nothing to expect in return in this relationship.

Though what Ghalem represents here is not a lesbian relationship between women, the protagonist's questioning the definition of womanhood as imposed by society and the oppression of the class of women by the class of men alludes to Monique Wittig’s rejection of the concept of “woman” through a materialist feminist perspective. Challenging naturalist assumptions on “sex”

and the category of “woman,” Wittig (1992) posits that “sex” is a political category constructed as a product of power relations between the two groups “men” and “women,” and the categories such as male/female, masculine/feminine are created and naturalized to enable the domination of one group over the other. Wittig’s argument is noteworthy in terms of revealing an “ideology of sexual difference” used to justify the exploitation of women as well as in subverting the commonly accepted causal relationship between sex and oppression: “For there is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary” (Wittig, 1992, p. 2). Wittig also argues that “lesbians are not women” (1992, p. 32) to point out their nonconformity with the socially constructed category “woman,” which has a meaning only in the heterosexual system, a social organization that enables the control of the female body and the subjugation of women.

In the text, Ghalem puts a strong emphasis on the pure and sincere friendship between women. We see another example of this close relationship when the protagonist gets the support of a female friend who helps her through an unintended pregnancy and abortion:

J’ai une amie prostituée qui connaît d’assez bonnes recettes. C’est elle qui m’a appris combien l’on pouvait s’aimer et s’entraider entre femmes, sans cette négociation sexuelle qui perturbe nos relations amicales avec l’autre sexe, sans être confrontées à des messages à double sens qui nous empêchent d’exprimer nos vrais sentiments.

[I have a prostitute friend who knows some pretty good recipes. It was she who taught me how much we could love and help each other between women without this sexual negotiation that disturbs our friendly relations with the opposite sex, without being

confronted with two-way messages that prevent us from expressing our true feelings]
(*Les jardins*, pp. 65–66).

If it is in women that women can find true friendship and support, this fact becomes the narrator's response to Virginia Woolf, who said, "In fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (1938, p. 166). In a similar way, Chafia's perspective echoes the expression "A woman is a homeland to a woman," which is the English translation of the famous phrase "Kadın Kadının Yurdudur" in Turkish. This is a popular saying in Turkey's contemporary feminist movement, a rhyming dictum expressed with reference to "Homo homini lupus est," the Latin proverb meaning "A man is a wolf to another man," usually attributed to the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). This vision, which aims to bring together and build a solidarity network among all women, is what Chafia feels deep in her heart. The protagonist needs to associate herself with her sisters because it is in the mirror of these other women that she will be able to see her true self and find her identity. As her conception of herself, of her body and mind, is totally upset, she will be able to recognize herself or reconstruct herself only in relation to her exterior. The protagonist is in search of reconciliation with her mother, and in this way, she is finding her real place in the class of women. Trying to raise awareness and draw attention to the patriarchal system that imposes forced motherhood on women, Chafia takes a step to connect with her mother and other women who are destined to live in a vegetative state with a numbed consciousness or a total lack of awareness about their condition:

Il manque à mon univers intérieur des voix de femmes qui m'aideraient à me reconnaître davantage dans mon corps marqué par les grossesses et le temps. Je suis distancée par ces esprits qui m'éloignent de ma peau terrestre et si je m'y réfère et les poursuis c'est peut-

être qu'à travers eux je cherche à retrouver la voix de ma mère et celle des autres femmes si proches et pourtant absentes, qu'on oblige à exister seulement dans la futilité du quotidien et qu'on destine exclusivement à une vie végétative où les nourritures concrètes et la reproduction sont primordiales.

[My inner universe lacks female voices that would help me recognize myself more in my body, which is marked by pregnancy and time. I was made to be distant from these spirits who take me away from my earthly skin, and if I refer to them and pursue them, it is perhaps that through them I seek to find the voice of my mother and that of other women so close and yet absent, forced to exist only in the futility of everyday life and destined exclusively for a vegetative life where concrete foods and reproduction are primordial]

(Les jardins, p. 132).

Despite the opposition between the narrator and her mother in terms of the definition of womanhood, which creates a high awareness in her, Chafia finds role models in her female ancestors; she sees herself in the mirror of these women in the past, young and old, associates herself with them, and feels their support in her struggle for freedom today, on the way to reconstruct the "I" and her feminine identity. She sees that she is not alone on this path; she gets inspiration and energy from the other women:

Je compte beaucoup plus sur l'indulgence de ces vieilles femmes dont les mains parfumées préparaient les potions magiques capables de corriger toutes les erreurs, de guérir les amours malheureuses et de rendre les hommes tendres et passionnés; sur celle des autres aussi, les plus jeunes qui se sont lancées à corps perdu vers une liberté trop longtemps espérée et qui ressentent parfois les fatigues des pionnières fières de leurs

erreurs et de leurs réussites et qui nous donnent à toutes, avec cette arrogance un peu naïve, le pouvoir de dire Je, même si nous ne sommes pas tout à fait sûres d'exister.

[I rely much more on the leniency of those old women whose perfumed hands were preparing the magic potions capable of correcting all errors, of curing unhappy loves, and of making men tender and passionate; on that of the others, too, the youngest who have thrown themselves headlong into a freedom too long hoped for and who sometimes feel the fatigue of pioneers proud of their mistakes and their successes and who give to all of us, with this somewhat naïve arrogance, the power to say I, even if we are not entirely sure that we exist] (Les jardins, p. 125).

With the power she inherited from her sisters in the past, Chafia is happy for herself for taking the hard route, the route to freedom, one that is dangerous and pushes her into the depths of madness, but at the same time a route that freed her from her shackles: “J'ai l'impression d'avoir volé du feu à des puissances inconnues,” [I feel like I stole fire from unknown powers,] she says proudly (Les jardins, p. 60). She is happy for standing up for her own rights and the rights of other women, for being a voice and an example to them in reclaiming a distinct identity. She feels that she contributed to the liberation of women just like Prometheus, who stole the fire from the gods and gave it to humanity for their progress and civilization. However, she worries about her sisters today; she wants to instill a feminist consciousness in them but also warns them against the difficulties that await them on this mission toward liberty:

Mais qu'advient-il de mes sœurs? Des vautours d'acier pourfendent le ciel avec, dans leur ventre, des petites filles en dentelles blanches qui ont désobéi et qui sont allées vers l'inconnu sans jeter un regard en arrière. Comment sauver les petites filles des griffes des

vautours? Il faudrait que les petites filles soient elles-même bien décidées à s'en sortir, car le vol plané vers la liberté est difficile, on ne sait jamais sur quoi l'on va atterrir, on ne sait jamais non plus si l'on ne va pas tomber comme pierre sur roche.

[But what about my sisters? Steel vultures split the sky with, in their bellies, little girls in white lace who have disobeyed and who have gone into the unknown without looking back. How to save little girls from the clutches of vultures? The little girls themselves should be determined to get out of it, because gliding towards freedom is difficult; you never know what you're going to land on, and you never know whether you will fall like stone on rock or not] (Les jardins, p. 60).

As a member of the class of women, the narrator puts her struggle to find her identity and her femininity and to acquire her freedom on the same page as the common struggle of all women. She feels she is not alone in her fight against madness and the feeling of powerlessness; she is not alone among all these women from the past and in the future. She tries to inscribe her "I" among theirs, and within this class of women, Chafia is finally able to find her points of reference and strong cornerstones to cement her personality. Thus, by addressing female voices in the past and present, Chafia manages to establish communication, establish continuity between women, and build sisterhood solidarity. This is where she, herself, gets power from; it is with the help of this communication with women, including her mother, that the protagonist can actually rebuild herself. On her route to healing, she recognizes and situates herself in relation to other women, and she finally manages to hear her own voice, the voice that allows her to be aware of her own existence; it makes her feel that she exists for the first time. She finally dares to say "I"; this is the end of her search and the beginning of a feminine identity of her own, the beginning of

freedom. All these challenges, questionings, conflicts, and madness she has experienced so far finally bear fruit: freedom.

VIII. Intersectional Perspective

a) Gender

Gender manifests itself as a strong and obvious marker throughout the novel; it is the protagonist's identity as a woman that the novel focuses predominantly on. The materialist feminist analysis in the above sections puts the gender and sexuality elements in the novel under scrutiny. The gender position in the family, the marital status together with gender, becomes a disempowering factor for Chafia's mother. With the tie of marriage, the family becomes a place of limited freedom for her. Her role in society is limited to a position of motherhood and homemaker. Ghalem represents the mother as one who has a life only within the walls of the home. We do not see any reference that shows the mother has a life outside the house. This is the same tie of marriage that positions the mother in a relationship of slave and master face-to-face with the husband, according to the protagonist.

b) Sexuality

We see sexuality as a factor that shapes the character's formation in the novel. The theme of motherhood, explored in its aspects related to sexuality as well as gender, is very dominant in the text. The character's exposure to a sexual relationship mentioned in very unclear terms and later to an unwanted pregnancy and childbirth makes her condition even more vulnerable. Recurring metaphorical references and images related to body parts, female reproduction, and abortion underscore the impact of the sexual identity of the protagonist on the oppression she is

subjected to. The images related to “ventre” [belly/womb], being the symbol of femininity, reproduction, and maternity, are abundant in the text. Except for one reference to Algeria with the metaphor of “belly/ abdomen”, the protagonist/writer’s home country, where it is compared to the mother’s abdomen, warm and mysterious, “whose mark you bear on yourself forever and wherever you go” (Les jardins, p. 123), all the other uses of the image of “belly/ abdomen” mostly have negative connotations:

Je suis une femme aux seins lourds, au coeur gros et au ventre vidé de naissances inachevées. Je suis la trace de cette lourde vie des bébés qui compressent les muscles et irradiant leurs fourmillements douloureux jusque dans le creux des reins. Je suis là, bête et sauvage et femme.

[I am a woman with heavy breasts, a big heart, and a belly emptied of unfinished births. I follow the traces of this heavy life of babies who compress the muscles and radiate their painful tingling up to the hollow of the kidneys. Here I am, beast and wild and woman] (Les jardins, p. 13).

The breasts, a symbol of femininity, are heavy for Chafia, just like womanhood itself, which is heavy to carry, a burden. On the other hand, face-to-face with this burden, Chafia also possesses a big heart, which is proof of her courage to face the imposed realities of the female condition, question, and challenge them. She resists at the expense of being regarded as unfit for society.

We see another reference Ghalem makes to “ventre” [belly], this time in the context of abortions. The subject of abortion, a controversial and delicate issue in many societies, particularly in conservative ones like her home country, is addressed by the writer in several places in the novel. The topic is explored in the frame of desperate women who are abandoned

by the father of the baby and who are obliged to experience the process under hard circumstances. The unborn babies, of hers and of other women, are a heavy burden and a source of pain for the protagonist. She feels the pain that all these lonely and isolated women, all single mothers suffer and wants to bring to light the destitution they face. This is the context that makes her question who she is; “et si j’étais une mutante?” [what if I were a mutant?] (Les jardins, p. 25) This self-questioning stems from her feeling that she fails to fit in the category of “woman” defined and imposed by patriarchal order; she is not tamed, not a “domesticated animal” (Les jardins, p. 24), she does not obey, and she challenges the definitions. Does she really belong to this world? This is what she wants to know, feeling estranged and not in conformity with the realities of the outside world. Ghalem’s metaphor of a frog speaking to the porcelain dolls in the crystal gardens, referring to Chafia’s estrangement in this world order, makes sense in this context. In the frame of the definition of “woman,” the narrator makes a comparison between her body and that of her mother; she considers the latter as one that meets societal norms and expectations: An ideal woman is the one who gives birth to and takes care of babies, who feels the maternal pleasure of holding them in her arms and breastfeeding; a woman becomes complete with motherhood, as social norms dictate:

Ce mince corps qui est le mien a une formidable résistance aux intempéries de la vie.

Autant que ton corps à toi, chère mère, ton corps de femme accomplie, avec ce large bassin qui a porté des bébés et ce sein que tu as dû donner avec un certain plaisir.

[This slender body of mine has tremendous resistance to the tempests of life. As much as your own body, dear mother, your body as an accomplished woman, with that wide

pelvis that has borne babies and that breast that you must have given with a certain pleasure] (Les jardins, p. 25).

Ghalem, in her novel, represents womanhood as a heavy load to carry in Algerian society. The expectations from the woman, the duties imposed on her, as well as the bans that limit her free existence and put her in a dominated position, all make it hard to be a woman. In this context, the protagonist mentions the heaviness and difficulty of possessing a female body: “Et ma chair de femme me pend au flanc comme d’anciens bijoux lourds.” [And my flesh of woman hangs from my side like old heavy jewels] (Les Jardins, p. 14). The female body is marked with childbirths, and this is the destiny waiting for the protagonist sooner or later, but Chafia has no intention of surrendering to this fate:

Toi et tes chairs dilatées par la blessure des enfantements. L’héritage que tu me laisses doit être sournoisement caché quelque part au fond de mon ventre et je le saurai quand j’aurai moi aussi vieilli comme toi. Mais ne te fais pas d’illusion, je me débattrai avant.

[You and your flesh dilated by the wound of childbirths. The legacy you leave me must be slyly hidden somewhere deep in my belly, and I will know it when I too have aged like you. But have no illusions; I will struggle first] (Les jardins, p. 21).

c) Class

Ghalem’s *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) provides the reader with limited information about the social class markers related to the characters. No information is given about the income of the parents or the protagonist as an adult. The father is portrayed as the sole breadwinner, and the mother has no access to production means within or outside the home. Concerning the

education level of the family, the mother, a housewife, is a woman raised with sisters. Right at the beginning of the novel, we, as the readers, are informed that she is illiterate because this is Chafia's friend who undertook the task of reading out the contents of the letter and the manuscript to the mother, so we can conclude that she is not an educated woman. We do not have any information about the father's educational level, but we know that he is a soldier who fought in the war. The mother's being uneducated and lacking economic power can be regarded as one of the factors that cause her subordination. Her economic conditions make her dependent on her husband's financial means and limit her existence to a life within the borders of the house.

d) Ethnic and Cultural Identity

When we look at the ethnic and cultural identity of the protagonist and her mother, we see that it is depicted as a strong marker, one that positions both women in a life full of hardships and adversities. First of all, the mother and daughter were both subjected to violence because of the atrocities of the civil war that they had to experience in their country. In addition, we see the mother being exposed to oppression due to her multiple identities: Being a woman in Algerian society is represented by Ghalem as femininity in the victim mode. The patriarchal and gendered social structures, practices, and relations in this culture inform the mother's place in the family and society. She has a limited place in society due to her household responsibilities, which leave her almost no room for having a role other than motherhood. Ghalem represents the Algerian ethnic and cultural background as one that supports and maintains a patriarchal societal order and limits women's existence as free individuals. This patriarchal family structure where the mother is subordinated and referred to as a "domesticated animal" is one of the major causes of the protagonist's traumas (Les jardins, p. 24).

Chafia, as a child, had to witness her mother's subordination and subjection to domestic violence due to the patriarchal rules and traditions of her society, which caused her exposure to psychological violence. As the mother was beaten by her husband, the other women around her told her to stop crying since that would scare the little girl (Les jardins, pp. 11–12). It was her mother who was beaten, but the narrator was feeling the pain in her own head. Chafia expresses her hatred towards her mother and father since this is a relationship of master and slave in the eyes of the little girl: "La mère a trouvé son maître" [The mother has found her master] (Les jardins, p. 11). Ghalem portrays the image of the father as a cold one, cold like war, with no tenderness and no kindness. This father image with walls around him pushes the protagonist into building her cage of glass filled with several images. She has feelings of both love and hatred towards her parents since none of them represents an ideal woman or man model or ideal parent for her, nor does their relationship as a couple. Chafia remembers her mother with her sobbing that hurts her ears, her history of washing the dishes, cooking, taking care of the babies, and fatigue— a whole loop of domestic chores and responsibilities. This is a mother who never had the luxury of even daydreaming.

Vous faites partie des animaux domestiqués de l'Homme, de mon père. Vous êtes domestiquée. Vous ne vous révoltez même pas. J'espérais ne pas vous ressembler... Vous n'êtes jamais allée au bal ni au cinéma avec la conscience tranquille, et vous vous êtes privée de toutes ces futilités qui adoucissent la vie laborieuse des femmes.

[You are one of the domesticated animals of Mankind, of my father. You are domesticated. You don't even rebel. I was hoping I didn't look like you. You have never

gone to the ball or the cinema with a clear conscience, and you have deprived yourself of all those trivialities that sweeten the laborious lives of women] (Les jardins, p. 24).

We see that the narrator did not inherit the religious faith and submission that her mother wanted to instill in her. Chafia is angry, and as a woman, she refuses to accept the definition of womanhood imposed on her by her ethnicity and culture and her mother's fate, which is a life with no meaning. Chafia conducts inductive reasoning based on the example of woman she sees in her mother and her observations in life, and she makes a generalization about all women, about the class of women; she insists on her comparison of "women" to "domesticated animals": "N'importe quelle bête a le droit de se coucher quand elle ne veut plus marcher, n'importe laquelle sauf les animaux domestiques. Et les femmes sont domestiques. Lever, cuisine, vaisselle, lessive, ménage, éducation des enfants bouffeurs d'énergie." [Any animal has the right to lie down when it no longer wants to walk, any animal except domestic animals. And women are servants. Getting up, cooking, washing up, laundry, cleaning, education of energy-guzzling children] (Les jardins, p. 39).

e) Religion

Religion, too, is represented by Ghalem as a factor that shapes the mother's character. The religion the mother is a member of is not openly mentioned, but considering the fact that she was raised with sisters, we can infer that she is a Christian. However, rather than being a follower of a specific religion, it is this character's being a believer, a woman with a strong faith, that Ghalem emphasizes. This particular set of intersecting factors of religion and gender is what constrains this character's lived experience. Being a believer prevents the mother from questioning the subordination and oppression she is subject to. The mother, with this fully

submissive position she assumes, is a wound for the narrator—a wound that, once treated and cured, will lead Chafia to her rebirth. Chafia has an ambiguous relationship with her mother, who is now old and not strong anymore. She loves her, but at the same time, she criticizes her for surrendering to the rules of her society without any revolt; she could not revolt and wants to inculcate this into her daughter as well: “I may have loved you, but I never understood you” (Les jardins, p. 19), she says to her mother and tries to get to know her mother as a woman:

“Et tes idées à toi, maman?

Je suis une femme. Ma maison est propre. Mes enfants sont élevés.

Et ton existence à toi?

C’est le destin.

Tu es sans révolte?

Je suis entre les mains de Dieu.”

[What about your own ideas, mom?

I’m a woman. My house is clean. My children are raised.

And your own existence?

It’s fate.

Aren’t you rebellious?

I am in the hands of God.] (Les jardins, p. 19)

The household responsibilities are what the mother understands as being a woman. Having been raised with sisters, she is a believer, she has a strong faith, and she does not question what her existence means within this state of full submission to her faith. She is the one “who knew so well how to lock herself in the solid stone of her faith” (Les jardins, p. 20). Chafia is trying to

understand where her mother draws this faith, which enabled her to endure all the suffering and humiliation. She rises against this belief, which makes the mother digest her misfortunes, and she protests her mother, who seemed to have answers to all the questions in the world—answers that she drew from her age-old hereditary faith. We see this excessive faith of the mother as one of the underlying reasons for the discord between the mother and daughter. Trying to understand the mother's ideas about giving birth, love, and happiness, Chafia also asks her mom the meaning of freedom, where we see the writer's preference of using the word "LA LIBERTÉ" in capital letters to emphasize the importance (Les jardins, p. 20). "Is freedom also in the hands of God", she asks, questioning the relationship between religion, faith, and women's condition. She questions the language that the mother uses to talk to God and the language of her own heart—what she really wants. What the mother wants, what she feels in the depths of her being—this is what Chafia is trying to excavate and find. As she searches for the hidden "I" of her mother, what she eventually finds is her own "I," one who opposes harshly to that of the mother. Unlike the mother, Chafia finds herself as a woman who managed to get rid of and liberate herself of the social and familial constraints that were hindering her from discovering her own feminine individuality.

f) *Migrant Identity*

Ghalem, in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), represents migration and exile as a feminine experience. We see Chafia as a woman who experienced the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) and felt its devastating effects on her life as a child. This war that destroyed her childhood is one of the principal causes of her trauma leading to her illness, her madness. The war that resulted in Chafia's exile to a new country added another dimension to the character's

identity: being a migrant. In her exilic experience, the protagonist is struggling for life against death and madness in a state of mind and psychology where she feels like “a rootless plant that spreads its branches as far as it can” [Une plante sans racines qui étend ses branches le plus loin qu’elle peut] (Les jardins, p. 12)”. She is trying to rebuild her identity on the wreckage of this little sad girl of her childhood. She is trying to rebuild a female identity, but she is trying to do that in exile, far from her roots, far from the anchor points that give strength to a person under normal circumstances. Home is a place where one would feel the most comfortable, the strongest, and the furthest from dangers and fears. Despite the paradoxical relationship with the home, which is not heaven for the narrator, being far from home is a case that puts an extra burden on her shoulders and positions her in a double challenge: being a woman and being an exile at the same time. She needs to struggle for identity reconstruction, but she needs to do that in a new place where she does not have points of reference. This is one aspect of the narrator’s situation: struggling with two marginalizing social statuses at one time.

On the other hand, what puts her in a difficult situation is, at the same time, a context that facilitates her struggle with finding her female identity. It is hard to be far from home, from the anchor points she has known until that time, but this is also what the protagonist needs: distancing herself from all the knowledge of her past, her social and cultural background, and her experiences. A questioning of everything she has seen, heard, and witnessed as Chafia until that day needs to be carefully analyzed: What is worth being kept should be kept, but anything that prevents her from being her true self or from being a free individual should be rejected. This is the exilic situation that provides the character with such a liberating context: to have agency and the ability to choose the path she wants. Therefore, a migrant identity is both a challenge and a liberating experience for Chafia. Having a migrant identity, though a challenging one at the

beginning of her mental and psychological journey, brings Chafia positive, meaningful, and rewarding experiences in the end.

g) Mental Illness

Another identity marker that intersects with the others and shapes the protagonist's experience is her mental illness, schizophrenia, as diagnosed by the doctors. We need to note that her mental condition looks like what the doctors diagnosed as schizophrenia, but the text also leads the reader to think of this psychological and mental state as a natural outcome of past experiences and as an introspection process the narrator finds herself in. In terms of intersectional analysis, we can consider mental health as one of the identity markers since it oftentimes does not exist separately from other identity markers and can be impacted by gender, sexuality, age, religion, and more. In this novel, though we are not given the exact causes of Chafia's illness, there are strong indicators that show it might have been caused by a total of her experiences throughout her life: being a woman who has witnessed war, discrimination, and violence against women, and being in exile. The impact of the illness on the protagonist follows a similar path to that of the exilic experience. The madness that has a debilitating effect on the character ultimately turns out to be a context of self-creation, a context of finding her real self in the case of Chafia. The madness and exilic experience go hand in hand. They both tear the narrator from her roots and shake her up until her very cells, mentally, bodily, and emotionally, and like a phoenix that is born from her ashes, Chafia goes through a transformation that allows her to find her real identity.

Suffering from schizophrenia, the protagonist is at the hospital, which is actually her route to self-healing through questioning. It is useful to remember that Ghalem gave her

character the name “Chafia,” which means “healer” in Arabic, and this is exactly what the protagonist does: heal herself. What Chafia finds in exile is a state of madness that takes her to question the war that steals her childhood from her as well as her mother, father, and the patriarchal order that limits women's freedom. The exilic experience and the medical condition the narrator goes through become a quest for identity, a struggle to reconstruct her true self. She is fragile, she is unstable, but she is strong at the same time at this symbolic and physical borderland, at this position of duality where she is neither here nor there (Anzaldua, 1987; Talahite-Moodley, 2021). As a person trying to find a place to hold onto with her trembling knees, Chafia is looking for points of reference; she compares everything she comes across with what she previously saw. Despite having finally managed to tame the sorrow of separation from her roots, she still suffers from her connection to her mother and to her “féminité-victim” “femininity in the victim mode” (Les jardins, p. 21).

“Quand vous prétendez que toute révolte chez une femme devient folie, cela me donne le goût d’arrêter mon délire, ne serait-ce que pour vous prouver que vous vous trompez. Mais comment arrête-t-on la tempête?” [When you claim that any revolt in a woman becomes madness, it makes me want to stop my delirium, if only to prove to you that you are wrong. But how do you stop the storm?] Chafia asks concerning her madness (Les jardins, p. 63). Madness is a way for the protagonist to be herself, to find herself; this is how she can ask the right questions and look for their answers. This is the reason why she feels like a frog speaking to the porcelain dolls in the gardens of crystal. Being mad, in a state of schizophrenia, gives Chafia the right to be free, to rebel, and to express herself as she likes; thus, no one questions or condemns her ideas and behaviors. This is an opportunity she did not have at the place she once called “home,” as the father figure she had did not allow her to express her desires: “J’aimais un rôle

de bonhomme qui jouait au papa, il fallait que tout désir soit sous-entendu et non point exprimé, comme si l'expression du désir n'était pas un élément de sa réalisation. Mais que vaut le désir sans réalisation?" [I loved a funny guy who played dad; all desire had to be implied and not expressed, as if the expression of desire was not an element of its realization. But what is desire without fulfillment?] (*Les jardins*, pp. 64–65). Through this process of madness where she can question all knowledge and values she acquired until that time, after facing everything and everyone that caused her trouble and anxiety (war, father, men, mother), Chafia finally manages to heal her wounds and recovers from her traumas (war, exile, patriarchal order). She gets to know herself better through the mirrors of her mother and other women, and she reconstructs her identity and femininity in this way. Thus, exile as a feminine experience is represented as a liberating one by Ghalem: Though the route is hard and painful for her protagonist, this is in Québec, in exile, where she manages to reconstruct her identity and be her true self. This is how she can leave behind a childhood marked by war and a shocking and tumultuous past and start a new life.

Chafia's mental illness reminds us of the "mad woman" metaphor, a female literary tradition we see in the works of women writers, including Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath (Gilbert & Gubar, 1980). This trope, accompanied by images of enclosure and escape and manifesting itself in the female character's having a mad double self that serves as "asocial surrogates for docile selves," finds its roots in nineteenth-century women writers' need to breathe in an overwhelmingly male-dominated society and break free from literary and social confinement imposed on them (Gilbert & Gubar, 1980, p. xi). On a similar note, in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), Chafia's "madness" enables the protagonist to question and challenge the rigid patriarchal frameworks and shows itself not as a debilitating

condition but, on the contrary, an empowering one for a woman. The physical, mental, and emotional entrapment of the woman in the patriarchal system can be defied, in Ghalem's imaginary, through another form of entrapment, an entrapment within the walls of a psychiatric hospital, which gives a voice to the disenfranchised and to the marginalized.

IX. Partial Conclusion

In *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), Ghalem portrays exile through the eyes of her female protagonist, Chafia. The author uses the metaphor of madness as a background for the exilic experience and offers an open critique of war as well as the patriarchal system that positions women in a subordinate and subjugated position. The narrative, unfolding as the protagonist's interior monologue and dialogue with her mother, explores the themes of exile, loss, violence, and the traumas of war. The text is also a questioning of female identity, and the inequalities women are subjected to in family and society and includes powerful messages mirroring the author's feminist perspective.

Ghalem's text is a critique of a world order ruled and dominated by men, and the author condemns men as a class for inflicting oppression and violence on women. What Ghalem's protagonist first faces in her quest for identity is the submissive role her mother adopts as a woman in family and society. Chafia heavily criticizes this concept of womanhood that she sees in the example of her mother and firmly rejects the idea of having such a dominated position in a patriarchal order. In addition, Ghalem, through her character Chafia, challenges the notion of femininity and the role of motherhood imposed on women and thoroughly questions this heavy responsibility that obstructs women's empowerment. What Ghalem deplores in this context is also women's complicity in their own subordination and oppression, a cyclical history (Azzouz,

1998, p. 42) that passes from mother to daughter. The feminist viewpoint is not only based on a critique of patriarchy, but the text also highlights the importance of sisterhood and solidarity among women as a way out, as a remedy. The narrator gets to know herself better through the mirror of her female ancestors, women in the past, and derives strength from them as well as from her sisters today and in the future. Ghalem thus stresses how women can and should support each other as an act of resistance against male domination and violence.

In Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), the exilic experience and the medical condition of the protagonist are portrayed as a background where the female protagonist undertakes a quest for identity and a struggle to reconstruct her true self. The madness, the psychological condition, is used as a metaphor by the author to refer to women's challenging the subjugation imposed on them and their endeavor to reach their true potential. In this framework, Ghalem represents exile as a liberating experience for women, a context, that despite all its challenges, fosters women's self-determination and agency. In this process of searching and finding a path of her own, Ghalem's protagonist resets all her previous mindset, questions every piece of knowledge and experience she has had until that time, and manages to heal herself by ultimately reaching out to Chafia, who she really is and wants to be.

Chapter 4 Nadia Ghalem's *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010)

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine Nadia Ghalem's *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), a novel written almost 30 years after *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), the text that is the subject of my analysis in the previous chapter. I will address the questions of how Ghalem represents migration and exile as a female experience and in what contexts she portrays women and their living conditions. In the frame of my analysis, I will first provide an overview of the novel in terms of its form and content, with reference to the autobiographical elements as well as themes, symbols, motifs, and stylistic devices used by the author. I will then undertake a close reading of the text through a materialist feminist lens by focusing on how the author depicts women and the social classes they belong to and examine how the patriarchal and gendered social structures, practices, and relations the women are subjected to inform their marginality and the different positionalities they occupy in the family and society. In this frame, I will deal with Ghalem's depiction of the female protagonist and the mother figure and the role they play in the configuration of the story as well as the female characters, from the past to the present day, to whom the author refers in the text. An intersectional analysis where I will explore how factors including ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and sexuality are involved in the experiences of the female characters and how they shape their experiences of exposure to discrimination or oppression will be my point of focus in the following section.

II. Overview of the Novel

In Nadia Ghalem's *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), Algeria, the writer's home country, and memory occupy an important place, just like in her novel *Les jardins de cristal*

(1981). Ghalem similarly explores the themes of war, loss, exile, and women, but this time she builds her narrative on the theme of traveling. As Ghalem's father is an officer, she and her family travel constantly to different countries, and thus, the text has strong autobiographical resonances with the life of the writer, who, in her youth, travels to Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America before settling in Québec in 1965 (Rachédi, 2010). The text is narrated from the beginning to the end by a female "I," the nameless protagonist, who lived until adolescence in her home city of Oran, Algeria, and is now located in Montréal. Only in the middle of the story do we learn that the narrator is a doctor, and traveling to the countries in war via an NGO constitutes some part of her overall journeys. The protagonist travels from Africa to Europe and North America, from the Louisiana Bayous to Andalusia, and revisits the memories of her youth in Algeria and her unforgotten first love, Fodhil, who one morning took a train and never returned.

Based on the trauma of adolescence interrupted by the Algerian war (1954–1962), Ghalem's text depicts a continuous migration to different locations, a continuous come-and-go between the home country and these different locations, and a plurality and richness of cultures. The narrator's journeys do not follow a linear trajectory with a specific place of departure and arrival. Traveling is configured as a way of threading the multiplicity of peoples, places, and cultures to one another, and the narrative is thus intended to serve as a bridge, especially between the West and the Arab-Muslim world, often regarded as opposed. Throughout the novel, we see Ghalem's focus on a rich and diverse Arab-Andalusian Spain of the past. The text includes several references to Andalusia, the southernmost autonomous community in Peninsular Spain today, which also makes part of Al-Andalus, the Arab Muslim-controlled areas of the Iberian Peninsula for nearly 800 years during the Medieval era. The narrator frequently refers to this

period of Al-Andalus known for its civilization that made great contributions to science, technology, algebra, engineering, and medicine, as well as poetry, alchemy, and philosophy.

Ghalem, in this novel, too, gives several political messages in the context of war as well as in the context of women's place in family and society. The psychiatric illness in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) and the theme of traveling in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) are the two background elements Ghalem uses to represent examples of social pressure on women in patriarchal culture. The figure of Fodhil, repeatedly appearing throughout this novel as a central motif and accompanying the protagonist like a ghost wherever she goes, in all her journeys, is associated with the tree of mimosas, which the narrator calls “the tree of memories” and with the native country torn by war. The mimosa plant, native to North Africa, Asia, and the Middle East and known as the symbol of the strength and sensibility of women, indeed fits this narrative that aims for female empowerment through examples of strong women from today and across history.

The text is written mainly in prose with bits of poetry at places, and this duality of form resonates with the hybrid quality of the “écriture migrante” (Lequin, 2001). There are three forms of typography in the novel: most of the text is written in block type, but Ghalem uses italics at several places, such as when the narrator remembers the past in Algeria, the country of origin, and Fodhil; these italicized parts serve as flashbacks for the narrative. As a third form, we see poems scattered through the narrative, which evoke impressions and images that complement the epigraph: “To say the unspeakable,” as Anissa Talahite-Moodley notes (2016, p. 133). There is not a specific storyline that starts and comes to an end within the narrative; the text, in the setting of the narrator's travel accounts, puts the reader in dialogue with a series of characters, mostly not related to each other, told one after the other. We do not see any chronological order

for the protagonist's journeys in the narrative. They are detached from each other without any apparent temporal relation of posteriority or anteriority with one another.

III. Materialist Feminist Perspective

The central motif of the multiple journeys and memorial displacements of the writer, besides being used to connect different people, geographies, and cultures, also provides the writer with a context to make a critique of war, the divisions and inequalities between people, particularly between men and women, and to communicate her many feminist and political messages through the female characters dispersed throughout the story. The numerous travels the protagonist takes around the world add to her political consciousness, and with these journeys in the background, she questions women's place in a society configured with patriarchal modes of belonging and the traditional discourses of womanhood that position them in a hierarchical relationship with men. Ghalem puts women, whether these are the elders, friends, or other female figures from antiquity to the present day, in the narrative not only to create a historical continuity between the ancient Mediterranean world and North Africa today but also to listen to and give voice to women as marginalized individuals, each having a story, a vision, and a message to share with the world. Ghalem, by representing the suffering of women, undertakes a political mission and wants to draw attention to the economic and social conditions of women in the context of migration and exile.

IV. Critique of War

Nadia Ghalem is both a writer and a journalist, and as we previously mentioned, this work has strong autobiographical resonances with the writer's life. The author, with a high sense

of responsibility and personal conscience originating from her journalism profession, endeavors to address as many social problems as she can and wants to shed light on instances of injustice, inequality, and discrimination in her text. The novel includes numerous examples of societal issues, mostly on war and women's place in society, given one after the other without giving too much detail for any of them. This element shows Ghalem's passion to present and highlight injustices in the world to the fullest extent and reminds of the way a broadcast journalist would do in presenting the news one after the other. Though the protagonist of *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) is not represented as a journalist, Ghalem makes her character speak in a way to highlight the role journalism plays in society: The protagonist mentions her father's advice to her about the importance of bearing witness to the atrocities of violence caused by war:

Je me souviens de ma jeunesse, j'entendais mon père déclarer: tant que le monde ne saura pas ce que nous fait vivre la guerre, nous continuerons à souffrir. Alors, oui il faut faire savoir au monde, devenir journaliste, montrer des images et faire entendre du son pour que tout le monde sache qu'il existe ici des gens qui sont malheureux quotidiennement.

[I remember when I was young, I heard my father say: as long as the world does not know what war makes us live with, we will continue to suffer. So, yes, you have to let the world know, become a journalist, show images, and make sound heard so that everyone knows that there are people here who are unhappy every day] (*L'amour*, p. 98).

Ghalem exhibits acute awareness of social inequalities and displays a political consciousness in making a critique of war and power relations between individuals, men and women, as well as between countries, through her protagonist's travels all over the world and through her

characters, who are victims of war and suffer injustice. One of these characters victimized by war is Mina, a 9–10-year-old refugee girl the narrator meets during her stay in an African country where she is working as a doctor for an NGO. Ghalem portrays this character as a girl who, after losing her family and having to leave her village because of the war, is pushed into prostitution. The narrator takes this girl under her protection, takes care of her, and treats her, but she cannot save her from the HIV she contracts during her flight. Another victim of war that Ghalem mentions in her text is a boy called Mimo. The narrator meets this boy at a refugee camp where she works as a doctor, adopts him, and lives with him in a village in Africa. As stated above, Ghalem mentions these instances shortly, without providing too many details.

V. Mother

As in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), the mother has an important place in this novel, too, but her position is not as central as in the former. This time, we see her as a well-educated and self-confident figure who received her education at a Catholic missionary boarding school and who can speak Spanish very well, which allows her to easily navigate between different cultures. The narrator's mother comes from Algeria to visit her daughter, who is staying in Spain, and she is described as a person who is quite familiar with the Spanish culture: "Madrid est à ma mère. L'Espagne est à ma mère comme si elle y avait vécu toujours" [Madrid belongs to my mother. Spain belongs to my mother as if she had always lived there] (*L'amour*, p. 18). The mother does not feel like a stranger there; it is as if Spain were her home. The mother feels liberated in Spain, walking joyfully in the streets of Madrid and Toledo, speaking to the merchants in Spanish. She also feels free since she stops wearing the hijab for the first time, from which we can infer that

she is not wearing it out of her own free will but, on the contrary, as a requirement imposed on her.

Nous sortons avec ma mère à Madrid. Elle marche avec assurance. Sans voile, pour la première fois de sa vie. Comme tout le monde, j'admire son aisance, comme si elle avait toujours arpenté ainsi la chaussée de la Puerta del sol ou les pavés de Tolède.

[We are going out with my mother in Madrid. She walks confidently. Without a veil, for the first time in her life. Like everyone else, I admire her ease, as if she had always walked the pavement of the Puerta del Sol or the cobblestones of Toledo] (*L'amour*, p. 18).

In *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), we see that both the narrator and her mother feel perfectly comfortable in different lands, face-to-face with various cultures and peoples. The mother and daughter's disposition to easily cross borders is associated with a tradition of their nomadic history, according to Anissa Talahite-Moodley (2021). However, it is also the hometown's strong historical and cultural ties with Spain that make the mother feel so at home, and comfortable communicating with people. The figure of the mother we see here is admired by the daughter, unlike the mother figure in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981). The mother here knows how to speak in public, what to say and what not to say, and the narrator is proud of her mother, her charisma, her power to seduce people, and her influence on others. We cannot say that the protagonist of *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) is ashamed of her mother, but she is in full discord with the femininity represented by her, and she does not want to resemble her mother in any way.

The mother's dynamic and liberated image, which the daughter is extremely proud of, does not conform to the traditional image of motherhood and is opposite to the mother-daughter relationship we see in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981). This also goes against the traditional conception of the mother as a symbol of attachment to the country and culture of origin, as Talahite-Moodley (2016) notes. The mother figure Ghalem portrays in this novel is a mother open to change with an identity bearing plural aspects, just like the plurality that exists in the interaction of the Spanish and Algerian cultures.

The narrator's words "Elle n'est pas seulement ma mère mais aussi ma compagne de lutte" [She is not only my mother but also my companion in struggle] also show the respect and appreciation she feels towards her mother (*L'amour*, p. 20). The narrator describes her mother as her "companion in struggle" because her mother is a woman who resists the patriarchal rules of her family and society and develops a form of agency together with the grandmother. Following the protagonist's father's death, the mother and grandmother, these two women of the family, make a plan to enable the protagonist, an adolescent at that time, to escape to another city and study there, a plan that will be kept a secret from the male members of the family, brothers and uncles. The mother figure is thus depicted as a strong woman who does not surrender to male oppression but instead makes choices and takes agency.

VI. Women

Ghalem deploys several female characters in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010). We see that historical mythical figures in the past, such as Hypatia, Nefertiti, and Scheherazade, known for their achievements or resistance to male power, are juxtaposed with modern-day women in an effort to convey feminist messages. The writer, via her account of memories and

sensations she takes from collective memory, manages to weave together women from different geographies and different periods of time, underscores the multitude of identities that also make part of her own experience, and thus breaks down borders, according to Talahite-Moodley (2021). Drawing on Gloria Anzaldua's (1987, p. 99) work, Talahite-Moodley (2021) states that Ghalem, through the juxtapositions of the imaginary borderlands between various countries, cultures, and histories she created, positions her characters at the "consciousness of the Borderlands" in their effort to cross the "border within the self." Ghalem's characters, in their border crossing, do not lose their identity and acquire a new one; instead, they are situated in a continuous ebb and flow of identities, which is the reflection of the writer's refusal of fixed discourses of identity and which allow Ghalem to denounce and deconstruct the narratives that feed hegemonic relationships of power with their rigid and hierarchical borders, Talahite-Moodley (2021) argues. Talahite-Moodley (2021) also draws attention to the transformative potential of the borders and borderlands in Ghalem's works, where individuals can contemplate "the border within themselves," which might allow them to reorient and transform themselves.

As mentioned above, "war" manifests itself as a leading theme in Ghalem's *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) as well as in her *Les jardins de cristal* (1981). Having experienced the Algerian War of Independence as an adolescent, the author offers a sharp critique of war and its atrocities in both novels. Ryne Seferdjeli (2016), in her analysis titled "A War over the People: The Algerian War of Independence, 1954–1962," provides an overview of the war and cites the large-scale participation of women in many different forms as a particularly remarkable feature of the Algerian War. Women's involvement and the significant role they played in the Algerian national independence movement are alluded to by Ghalem through her reference to a female pioneer of Algerian patriotism and nationalism: *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) is

dedicated [to Ftéma, the disarmed resistance fighter] “À Ftéma, la résistante désarmée” (p. 7). The author’s reference to “Ftéma” might be read as an inspiration from Fatma N’Soumer (1830–1863), “a freedom fighter and mythical figure known as ‘The Disobedient,’ ‘The Rebellious’ and ‘Djurdjura’s Joan of Arc’ for her struggle against the French conquest of Algeria” (Delajoux, 2022). This legendary female figure who defied the French colonial army in Algeria is a symbol of female strength, breaking the social and political codes of her era (Delajoux, 2022).

Indeed, this dedication of Ghalem makes sense since the whole narrative is full of examples of women, of female characters or figures fighting for equality, fighting for freedom like Ftéma. Women occupy a central position in this novel, just like in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981); Ghalem gives voice to women from all walks of life and represents them as border crossers (Talahite-Moodley, 2016) and pioneers, as well as women who are subordinated and oppressed. In cases where women find themselves in difficult situations, marginalized, and oppressed, help and support come from other women, family members, or friends. The idea of sisterhood is emphasized in the narrative, where we see several examples of resistance to patriarchy and solidarity between female characters for this common goal.

Instead of the mother figure in the leading role and instead of a story focusing mainly on her as in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), we see, in this text, several female characters and their stories juxtaposed from the past to the present day. In addition to the mother figure that we discussed above, the grandmother, a knowledgeable, self-sufficient, and strong character, is another female figure that shapes the protagonist’s childhood and adolescence, which are marked by the violence of war. Advising the protagonist to always remember her origins, the grandmother is an exemplary woman who leaves her words of wisdom as heritage, as a treasury for her granddaughter. Ghalem depicts the grandmother figure as a symbol of power, strength,

and wisdom and as a person who bears certain traits very close to women of the First Nations in Canada. The grandmother, a transmitter of traditional knowledge and practices, is a woman who does not hesitate to leave home for days to go hunting and fishing and who teaches her granddaughter many skills about life in nature: “Elle m'avait enseigné les techniques des pièges et des collets, à cueillir les herbes au printemps, à trouver de l'anis et des guimauves. Les remèdes traditionnels n'avaient pas de secret pour elle. J'admirais son ingéniosité.” [She had taught me the techniques of traps and snares, of picking herbs in the spring, of finding anise, and marshmallows. Traditional remedies held no secrets for her. I admired her ingenuity] (L'amour, p. 87).

The grandmother figure is also significant in terms of her ability to take agency as a woman and resist the patriarchal codes of her society. Following the death of the narrator's father, real collaboration is established among the women of the family; the mother and grandmother make a plan and help the protagonist escape to the city so that she can study there. They arrange this displacement in such a way that neither her uncles nor brothers find out anything about the issue. Here, we see how family and society are structured in a way that controls women's lives and holds them within certain limits. This is the collaboration of the mother and grandmother; this is the female solidarity against men that makes it possible for the narrator to study science in the first place, and then medicine.

Another strong woman in the protagonist's life is Amti, her aunt, who serves as a transmitter of culture among other adults of the extended family, nourishing the young with intelligence and poetry and having exchanges about the history of their country with roots from Baghdad to Andalusia. Amti, meaning “my aunt” in Arabic, tells them stories in the sweet nights of childhood about three important female figures of the past: Nefertiti, the powerful queen of

Ancient Egypt (Mark, 2014), Hypatia, the Greek mathematician, philosopher, and the last female scholar of antiquity tragically murdered in the hands of the religious fanatics (Mark, 2009), and thirdly, Scheherazade, the major female character and the storyteller in the frame narrative of the Middle Eastern collection of tales known as *the Thousand and One Nights* (1912). Ghalem, through the voice of Amti, who has the role of transmitting culture orally, connects these three powerful female figures of the Mediterranean civilization, all part of the collective memory, to today and presents them as role models for women of our time. In a chorus of voices from history, like in a theatrical production where each actor and actress take their turn and give their messages to humanity, these female figures also take the floor and speak: It is through these stories that the narrator and other children of the extended family learn that human beings should acquire knowledge of history and religions to counteract the superstitions, the bigotry, and the politics disguised as religion; it is again in the same context that Nefertiti conveys her message about justice, about giving their rights to mothers and women. Ghalem, in this way, wants to underline the role women play in transmitting the culture in Algeria: “Cette érudition que les femmes transmettaient par voie orale pour que les jeunes connaissent l’histoire de leur pays et de leurs origins” [This erudition that women transmitted orally so that young people know the history of their country and their origins] (*L’amour*, p. 57).

As we mentioned in the discussion of the mother figure above, women in *L’amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) do not display attachment to the country of origin, as Talahite-Moodley (2016) notes and gives the example of Virginia Woolf stating that her “country is the whole world” (1938, p. 166). Léda is one of the female characters in the stories the protagonist tells about her ancestors. After being kidnapped by a man madly in love with her, she decides to live until the end of her life in the Sahara Desert to flee the honor-based violence of her father

and brothers following her. We also see the two granddaughters of Léda as examples of women who can easily cross borders by going after their husbands thousands of miles away from their native land. One of these granddaughters gives birth to a daughter, Narrimen, who will also continue this heritage of her female ancestors and will opt for a nomadic life in the desert together with the Tuaregs. Instead of a heritage of unhappiness and a chain of misfortune passing from generation to generation, from women to their daughters, as we see in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), Ghalem this time talks about a tradition of traveling, a tradition of crossing borders that women inherit from their mothers and grandmothers.

In Ghalem's portrayal of female characters in the novel, we see the familial and societal constraints being imposed on women. In addition to the oppression of the narrator in her early life that prevents her from traveling and studying freely, the author also highlights the story of Narrimen, the adopted grandniece of Aunt Faten, to point to the material conditions of women's subordination. We see Narrimen as a modern woman with an interest in classical poetry who holds a medical degree and refuses to get married in order to pursue her dream, which is living and traveling freely in the desert with the Tuaregs and treating them as a doctor. The pressure of patriarchal culture and society on women presents itself clearly in the case of Narrimen, who is banned from staying single and living a life of her choice with the Tuaregs in the deserts. When Narrimen says that she does not want to get married, Aunt Faten replies, "Tu es folle? Une femme doit se marier et avoir des enfants" [Are you insane? A woman must marry and have children] (*L'amour*, p. 58) and tries to persuade her adopted grandniece to follow the cultural traditions and obey the rules because, in the opposite case, Narrimen's not getting married and traveling to the desert by herself to pursue her dream would be a dishonor to the family:

Tu es de bonne famille, que faire? Ni tes frères ni aucun homme de chez nous n'accepteront un tel déshonneur. Que tu te perdes, seule sur les routes, sans un homme "pour couvrir ta tête" (elle parlait ainsi pour dire "sauver ton honneur").

[You are from a good family; what can you do? Neither your brothers nor any of us will accept such dishonor. That you get lost, alone on the roads, without a man "to cover your head" (she spoke thus to say "save your honor")]

 (L'amour, p. 58).

Despite all efforts, Narrimen does not change her mind, and the helping hand comes from Aunt Faten, who finds a way for her adopted grandniece to realize her dream: to persuade an uncle-in-law, a widower with two kids who is also a Tuareg, to take Narrimen "sous son aile" [under his wing] through a pretend marriage, and the reality will be kept a secret from everyone else (L'amour, p. 59). "Elle redevint 'fille du vent', comme s'appellent eux-mêmes les Tuaregs, qui disent aussi qu'ils sont des gens libres. Peut-être les derniers humains encore libres sur cette planète." [She again became 'daughter of the wind', as the Tuaregs call themselves, who also say that they are free people. Perhaps the last free humans left on this planet], the narrator tells (L'amour, p. 59). This solution, found to be the only way for Narrimen to realize her dream of becoming the "daughter of the wind," displays how women are appropriated by men, how society, which is organized according to the power hierarchy between men and women, enslaves even an educated woman, and prohibits her from living her life the way she wants for fear of causing a scandal. As is the case with the protagonist's life, where a female alliance is established to enable her to escape to the city and study, in Narrimen's case, too, a secret plan and female cooperation are required to enable a woman to breathe.

We can analyze the oppression of women as represented in Ghalem's female characters from the perspective provided by Colette Guillaumin's concept of "sexage," which links the appropriation of women to their being used as slaves (2003). Guillaumin uses "sexage" in the context of men's appropriating the time, the body (sexual obligation) of women as well as the products of their body (children), and in the context of imposing on women the physical charge of looking after family members. Ghalem, in this novel, does not represent men and women in a husband-and-wife relationship. The many examples of female subordination and oppression in the text point to the pressure of society on women. We see some examples of oppression within the family, but these acts of pressure or coercion are displayed by other male members of the family, fathers, brothers, and uncles. Guillaumin's concept of "sexage" can be seen as the appropriation of women's self-ownership; women cannot exercise agency, and they do not have control over their own bodies and over their own lives.

What lies beneath the systemic oppression of women is the social construction of men and women as two natural groups on the basis of their bodily characteristics, and thus the division of society into two classes, the class of men and women, according to Monique Wittig (1992). Furthering her analysis of the class struggle relationship between these two groups, the French social theorist historicizes and denaturalizes the concept of "womanhood" and points to its creation for political and ideological purposes. Arguing that the category of "woman" is constructed in a way to enable an exploitative relation of domination between men and women, Wittig (1992) notes that "the ideology of sexual difference functions as censorship in our culture by masking, on the ground of nature, the social opposition between men and women. Masculine/feminine, male/female are the categories which serve to conceal the fact that social differences always belong to an economic, political, ideological order (p. 2)". Wittig (1992)

considers heterosexuality as the basis of this division of society into two sexes, into a relationship of a man and woman that provides a way of controlling women and their functioning in society, into a relationship of master and slave. As represented in the novel, in the case of Narrimen, the patriarchal system requires a heterosexual order for the reinforcement of its norms. Narrimen is not allowed to stay celibate, free from male control. Marriage, which is configured as a system of domination in its heterosexual form, is mandated by society on the woman, according to the materialist feminist perspective. Accordingly, Wittig sees lesbianism as a way of breaking free from the politically and ideologically constructed class of “women” by declaring that “lesbians are not women” (1992, p. 32). “Lesbians are not women” because they do not conform to the socially constructed definition of womanhood, with the category of “woman” in relation to the category of “man.” As for Narrimen, she does not refuse womanhood, but she challenges the imposed ideas on womanhood, the idea of femininity created by society, and refuses to surrender to a social contract that will limit her freedom. Even though she eventually must give in to social expectations and accept a fake marriage, she takes agency and defends her autonomy as much as she can under her cultural conditions.

On the same note, Nicole-Claude Mathieu (1991, 2005) underscores the cultural construction of “sex” and emphasizes how the ideology of the biological definition of “sex” is used to create a hierarchy between “men” and “women” and thus enables the oppression of one group by the other. It is for this reason that Mathieu prefers to use the term “social sex” as a reconceptualization of “gender” in order to emphasize the socially constructed nature of the categories man/woman and the ideological definition given to sex, particularly that of women (Mathieu, 1991). From a materialist and anti-naturalist perspective, Mathieu conceptualizes “sex-class identity” (*identité de sexe*), which is an identity of resistance bringing to light the dynamics

of oppression. This identity based on class consciousness points to a dialectical opposition between men and women as separate classes and to the exploitation of the class of the sex “woman” by the class of the sex “man” (Leonard & Adkins, 2005). We see the traits of this “sex-class identity” in Ghalem’s representation of female resistance in her characters in *L’amour au temps des mimosas* (2010). As mentioned above, Ghalem deploys several female characters with a diversity of conditions and experiences, one after the other, in the text. She represents them as pioneers, as outstanding figures of the past, as valuable pieces of the female collective memory, as well as family members, as symbols of intelligence and wisdom.

The women in Ghalem’s text are portrayed as being subject to violence, inequalities, and oppression, too. However, Ghalem uses these examples to emphasize female agency; whenever these women are represented as subordinated and oppressed in the novel, it is women, educated or uneducated, but all of them possessing wisdom and intelligence, who take a step as feminist activists and give a helping hand to women in need. Mathieu's “sex-class identity” manifests itself in the consciousness and resistance elements these characters show in their decision-making and their acts of solidarity with women. In the early life of the protagonist of the text, we see the mother and grandmother exercising agency by making a secret plan that will allow her to escape and study medicine in another city. In Narrimen’s case, it is Aunt Faten who finds a solution, though not an ideal one, to help her adopted grandniece. Making a pretend marriage is what will allow the young woman to pursue her dreams and live in the deserts with the Tuaregs. We see examples of female resistance in Aunt Amti’s stories, such as Scheherazade, the heroine of *The Thousand and One Nights* (1912), who rebels against the male power with her intelligence by telling tales to King Shahriyar and saving her own life as well as the lives of other women (Blythe, 2016).

Queen Alyssa, escaping from her city and her dangerous brother and founding the city-state of Carthage on the Tunisian shores (Britannica, 2023), is another example of female resistance in Ghalem's writing. Alyssa, the legendary Phoenician queen, a historical figure the narrator mentions in the memory of a visit she made to Tunis, is one of the powerful female figures the narrator talks about. The queen, also called Dido by the Romans, is known for the city-state of Carthage she founded on the Tunisian shores, where she landed after fleeing Tyre (in today's Lebanon) and her dangerous brother. In reference to Queen Alyssa, the narrator, in her account mixed with reality and dream, mentions a mythical character that she names [the Carthage lady] “la Carthaginoise,” haunting this democratic city later destroyed by Rome. This figure talks to the narrator in a style similar to that of people whose native language is Arabic and tells her to go to the city of Sousse, where a contemporary feminist play, *The Daughters of Tahar Haddad* (Accad, 1995), is being staged. Though the narrator later informs the reader that this memory takes place in a moment of daydreaming she calls the “Stendhal Syndrome,” the writer, through the symbol of this mythical female figure, wants to draw the reader’s attention to the feminist cause of the Tunisian women fighting for equality. Inspired by and naming themselves after Tahar Haddad, a Tunisian author, scholar, and reformer well-known for his book *Notre femme dans la charia et la société* (1930/2018) and his battle in defending women's rights, this feminist community in Tunis talks about the difficulty of living the everyday life as a woman, denounces oppression, and speaks about their combats and their hopes. Following the path of people defending fundamental human rights like Haddad, they all declare, “Nous sommes toutes les filles et les sœurs des hommes qui ont voulu notre liberté.” [We are all the daughters and sisters of men who wanted our freedom] (L’amour, p. 77).

It is again in the same context that the narrator mentions her friendship with Ilhem, the Tunisian colleague she comes across in Tunisia and decides to write an article together, and whom she continues to befriend in Québec, too. Ilhem, who in Tunisia expresses her affection towards Haddad as if he were her real father, shows timidity and fear when the narrator asks her to speak about Haddad later in Québec. The narrator questions the source of this fear, what happened to her friend before she came to Québec, and what pushed her to this self-censorship. Ghalem, through the example of Ilhem, through her transformation from a courageous intellectual and artist full of life to a person who surrenders to manipulations and intimidations, denounces systems of censorship in some countries and some people's assuming the right to control and organize other people's lives: "Ces pays aux cultures et aux civilisations millénaires se retrouvaient dramatiquement soumis à d'étranges systèmes de censure." [These countries with millennial cultures and civilizations found themselves dramatically subjected to strange systems of censorship] (*L'amour*, p. 78).

VII. Intersectional Perspective

a) *Class*

The intersectional analysis allows us to explore the ways race, gender, class, and similar systems of power depend on and mutually construct one another, and how these intersecting power relations ultimately create complex, interdependent social inequalities of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ability, and age (Collins, 2015, 2019). In my examination of the portrayals of the female characters in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) from an intersectional perspective, I focus on how a range of identity factors, such as gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality, interact to shape a character and their experiences. In terms of the

representation of the social class of the characters in the text, I take into account the criteria of income, education, and occupation (Barkan, 2011). The protagonist in this novel is a doctor traveling to several places in the world. Her mother is also an educated woman who speaks a second language, Spanish. Ghalem portrays the mother and daughter as self-dependent characters who can live life as they want, make their own choices, and exercise agency. The class marker, in their case, presents itself as one that provides women agency, freedom of mobility, and self-expression.

We see social the class marker as a debilitating factor, as represented in the example of Khadidja, whom the narrator mentions in her account of memories related to Algeria, her home country. This is a merchant woman who needs to support her children after her husband's death by going from house to house to sell or exchange jewelry. Khadidja's daughter is employed in a carpet factory in a basement, where she is bent all day long without seeing the sun. As for her son, Mohamed, after working long hours at a lemonade factory, catches tuberculosis and dies of it. Ghalem intends to draw attention to the importance of women's material conditions over the example of Khadidja. The narrator talks about how they were looking forward to the arrival of this merchant woman at their house. She was not only selling jewels, but she was also sharing facts about the lives and wisdom of the ancestors and confidentially giving news related to prisoners and resistance fighters. It is in this context that the narrator, as a child, observes her mother buying Khadidja's jewels out of savings. "Les bijoux des femmes ne sont pas toujours une fantaisie. Ils représentent leur sécurité financière, comme un compte en banque. En cas de besoin, elles peuvent les revendre." [Women's jewelry is not always fancy. They represent their financial security, like a bank account. If necessary, they can resell them] (L'amour, p. 36).

Khadidja, the merchant woman, is one of the characters Ghalem uses in her novel as a symbol of female strength and perseverance:

Il y a, en Algérie, des mères courage, des femmes qui s'entêtent à faire face au sort pour tenir maison, faire grandir leurs enfants et défendre leur dignité. Certaines, la plupart du temps veuves ou divorcées, étaient surnommées Dellala; elles étaient marchandes, courtières de bijoux.

[In Algeria, there are courageous mothers, women who stubbornly face fate in order to keep house, raise their children, and defend their dignity. Some, mostly widowed or divorced, were nicknamed Dellala; they were merchants, brokers of jewels] (L'amour, p. 36).

b) Ethnic Identity

The class marker does not always manifest itself as an empowering factor; having financial security of her own without depending on a man's support or a good education and occupation does not always provide freedom, as Ghalem represents in the case of Narrimen, who holds a medical degree and has no financial concerns. Gender and ethnicity create a unique oppression in the case of this Algerian woman. Being a woman in Algerian society is an obstacle to freedom. We see ethnic and cultural identity again as a marker that weighs on the female self as a heavy load to carry. Society, which is engrained with patriarchal codes of functioning based on controlling women's existence in the family and society, puts obstacles to a woman even if she has access to means of production. The system, in the case of Narrimen, uses the weapons of “family” and “honor” as means of subordination and subjugation. As long as she remains within

the borders of Algerian society, a woman is allowed to exist only in compliance with its rules: she has to get married, even if this is a fake marriage, and she has to be under the wing of a man.

Ghalem represents the pressure of ethnic identity on the female subject as portrayed in the early life of the protagonist in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010). The traditional discourse of female identity positions her in a relationship of hierarchy with respect to the male members of the family. Neither she nor the other female members of the family can make their own decisions and act accordingly; they have to obey the rules of men in the family and society. The narrator manages to escape to the city, study, and acquire a profession only as a result of female cooperation, as a result of a plan that had to be kept a secret from the men of the family, following the father's death. Though the reasons are not provided in detail, we understand that it is the same societal rules that do not allow women to travel or exist on their own without being under male "protection" and supervision.

Ghalem, in her text, paints her female characters as those who do not surrender to the impositions of their ethnic and cultural identity. The more society puts restrictions on female existence and marginalizes them, the more women build resilience and find alternative ways of breathing and resisting systems of domination. Though certain ways of female resistance are also found and created within the borders of society, migrating is represented by Ghalem as a solution, as a way of breaking free from societal and cultural oppression.

c) *Migrant Identity*

We see the protagonist as a woman who possesses hybrid qualities in her identity. The narrator's hometown, Oran in Algeria, which was under Spanish rule and inhabited by immigrants coming from Spain in some part of its history, is referred to by the narrator in many

places in the text. Through her references to the Hispanic heritage of Oran, the narrator wants to reveal the strong historical ties and the common past of the two countries and cultures located on the two shores of the Mediterranean. The narrator also mentions her native language, a dialect of Arabic that is a mixture of Berber, French, and Spanish, as a sign of this cultural dialogue between the two geographies and the hybridity of her identity.

In the novel, migration is represented in two forms: Firstly, in the form of the protagonist being far away from home, from Algeria, and being settled in Québec, Canada, a new country. Secondly, we see that the narrator's life consists of a continuous state of migration through her travels all over the world. The novel's settings oscillate between Algeria, Québec, and other lands. Though she misses the home country of her childhood, particularly the Mediterranean coast, she feels comfortable and at home in Montréal. Sage Goellner (2023) defines Ghalem as an individual “living and writing against the absoluteness of place” (p. 107). Concerning the writer’s use of different geographical spaces in several of her literary works, Goellner (2023) points out the writer’s superimposing these spaces over one another, just like in art, in a way that both images and spaces will be visible to the viewer, to the reader. The superimposition of places thus allows the writer to create new kinds of home, where the essence is the expression of a sense of belonging, that go against the idea of a single home, according to Goellner (2023). We can see this phenomenon in the representation of the protagonist as well as several other female characters in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010). Ghalem creates her settings and characters in such a way that the latter are not attached to a single home; they belong to many places, and they can make several places in the world their home. This representation of the writer challenges the established migration theory that considers migration as mainly a masculine experience (Averis, 2014; Averis & Hollis-Touré, 2016). Ghalem represents women as

migrating, traveling, and creating a sense of belonging for themselves anywhere on the earth. Women are depicted as being far from the image of the maker and guardian of the family and home; they, too, travel or migrate for several reasons.

The migrant identity of the narrator manifests itself by fulfilling three main functions in the text: It helps the protagonist recover from her traumas in adolescence; it enables her to complete her identity, and it brings freedom to her. We see an adolescence interrupted by the Algerian war in the background and the narrator's repetitive mention of the loss of Fodhil, a symbol of her traumas. Goellner (2022) notes that Ghalem bears witness to violence by means of repetition, which she considers a sign of the trauma of her uprooting. The repetition of the ghostly figure of Fodhil, who reappears several times, at the end of a street, a city, or a train station, or on the terrace of a café, represents, from a psychoanalytical perspective, an unassimilated trauma, according to Goellner (2022) and from this perspective, this repetition is, for the writer, a way of integrating her trauma while bearing witness to the history of her country of origin. We see the narrator remembering Fodhil and his departure with the repetition of the same phrases: *“Il a pris le train de cinq heures du matin. C'était la fin des vacances. C'était le début de la guerre.”* [He took the five o'clock train. It was the end of vacation. It was the beginning of the war] (L'amour, p. 133; italics in original). From a psychoanalytical perspective, the repetitive use of a scene allows the trauma to be accepted and finally integrated by the writer, according to Goellner (2022). We see that traveling is presented as a way of escaping the trauma for the narrator. The protagonist considers her many journeys as a way of coping with the loss of her homeland and the loss of her first love, Fodhil. Just like Fodhil, who was telling the stories he had heard from his ancestors, the protagonist, too, travels from place to place and tells the stories of the people she sees there; she is trying to remember, recreate, and relive those times

with Fodhil in a sense. Shuttling between her country of origin and many other locations in the world, in her physical journeys as well as in her traveling in memories, her displacements in time and space serve as a way of stitching the wounds for the narrator. The more she travels, the better she gets, and she recovers.

Traveling not only heals the narrator's wounds, but it also adds to her existence, makes her identity more complete, and becomes a means of [discovering oneself in new contexts] “de se découvrir dans de nouveaux contextes” in Ghalem’s own words (Rachédi, 2010, p. 44). The writer, in this novel based on the theme of traveling, explores relationships on a macro and micro scale, the relationship between different cultures as well as the individual's relationship with the other. This dialogue and encounter with the other, presented in the form of traveling and exploring the world, is also the narrator's exploration of herself, finding her identity in the mirror of different cultures and different people. Exploring Spain, walking in the streets of Madrid and Toledo, for instance, reminds her of the multiplicity of her identity and heritage, and allows her to find or rediscover some parts of her identity. Traveling allows the protagonist to find and bring together the missing pieces of her identity, just like in the mythical story of Isis and Osiris (Tyldesley, 2022). In the ancient Egyptian myth, we see Isis as one of the most important goddesses of ancient Egypt who travels all around the country to find her husband, Osiris, the Egyptian king killed by his jealous and ambitious younger brother Seth. Seth, after killing his brother, cuts him into pieces, which he scatters far and wide to prevent his reanimation. Transforming into a bird, Isis travels all over Egypt to discover and reunite the parts of her dead husband's body. Similarly, the narrator of *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) travels all over the world, gains several perspectives that add to her political consciousness, and completes herself.

The narrator also considers traveling as a way to freedom: “Partir, découvrir et revenir. Et repartir encore, pour ressentir le détachement, la liberté.” [Leave, discover, and come back. And leave again, to feel the detachment, the freedom] (L’amour, p. 24). The protagonist compares living a sedentary life to death, and she is afraid of living such a life. So, traveling becomes an activity that keeps her alive:

Encore un départ, une aventure, parce que la vie est tellement plus intense entre deux escales. On se sent mourir et revivre entre deux gares, deux aéroports. Ce qui importe, c’est le parcours, le processus qui fait oublier qu’on est finalement destiné à quitter ce monde. Le voyage comme une drogue douce.

[Another departure, an adventure, because life is so much more intense between two stopovers. You feel like you are dying and coming back to life between two stations, two airports. What matters is the journey, the process that makes you forget that you are ultimately destined to leave this world. Travel like a soft drug] (L’amour, p. 24).

Talahite-Moodley (2021) considers the narrator's journeys as the representation of a mental process of border-crossings and the places and memories juxtaposed in the text as the reflection of a thinking state in a continuous flow, “la pensée va et vient fascinée par l’idée du voyage” [the thought comes and goes fascinated by the idea of travel], as in the narrator's expression (L’amour, p. 24). Thus, “borders between countries lose their material tangible reality under the force of the poetic work, they become ‘deterritorialized’ mental spaces within which the narrator moves freely from one remembered journey to the next,” according to Talahite-Moodley (2021, p. 112). The text, which includes several references to plurilingualism, is also an example of linguistic border-crossing, according to Talahite-Moodley (2021); the mother's good command

of Spanish and the narrator's native tongue, a dialect of Arabic that is a mixture of Berber, French, and Spanish, as mentioned above, are aspects of the identity of the mother and daughter, allowing them to cross borders easily.

Ghalem's novel comes to an end with the story of her last female character, Julie. Julie is a physicist from Québec, and the protagonist meets her during a journey to northern Québec. Ghalem represents this character under ideal material conditions for a woman: She is educated and has a good occupation; she is doing research in northern Québec with her colleague and boyfriend, Diego, a geographer from Peru. This bicultural couple also represents the ideal relationship in the narrator's mind, an embodiment of her impossible love for Fodhil, whom she looks for throughout her life, and a multiplicity of identities and cultures manifesting itself in this couple's love. The novel, from the beginning to the end, is an effort to bridge people, cultures, languages, and histories to one another, a search for a common humanity for Ghalem. The writer wants to show that this diversity of geographical places, cultures, and peoples coexists in the imaginary as well as in real life. The writer successfully achieves her second goal, too: drawing attention to the multiplicity and diversity of the female condition through her characters from the past to our day and showing ways of resistance for women. Ghalem concludes her narrative with Julie, with a happy ending: She wants to give the message that no matter how bad the circumstances are, there is always hope. Women must continue fighting for their freedom, just like "Ftéma, the disarmed resistance fighter" (*L'amour*, p. 7). As the protagonist considers a sedentary life close to death and does not stay long in one place, the whole narrative creates the same vibe; the writer tells the stories of several characters one after the other, mentions them shortly, and then passes to another travel, to another story, and to another character. A modern-day traveler, Ghalem's protagonist introduces the reader to a plethora of places, cultures, and

people, each with a different story. Ghalem has so many messages to give to the world that she is impatient to share them with the readers, with us.

VIII. Partial Conclusion

In *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), Ghalem explores the themes of war, loss, exile, and the condition of women with a background of traveling to different parts of the world and under the shadow of the protagonist's unforgotten love of adolescence, Fodhil. The author provides a critique of war and injustices in the world, as well as the inequalities between women and men. Ghalem also highlights the multiplicity of peoples, places, and cultures and their relations to one another and points out commonalities between the Western and Arab-Muslim cultures. Thus, the text, from the beginning to the end, can be read as the author's endeavor to bridge peoples, cultures, languages, and histories to one another and her search for a common humanity.

A materialist feminist and intersectional focus on Ghalem's narrative shows that the author questions women's place in a patriarchal society and the traditional discourses of womanhood that relegate them to a subordinate position. The author gives powerful messages through several female characters and historical mythical figures in the past, such as Hypatia, Nefertiti, Scheherazade, and Queen Alyssa, known for their strength, achievements, and resistance to male power, and she juxtaposes them with modern-day women, family members, and others, struggling for equality and against oppression. In addition to the protagonist, a woman who is an example of success in a male-dominated environment, Ghalem presents the grandmother, the mother, as well as the other female ancestors of the narrator, including Léda, her two granddaughters, Aunt Faten, her adopted grandniece Narrimen, and Khadidja, the

merchant woman, as exemplary women who occupy a marginalized position in family and society but who refuse to surrender to their fate and take agency against oppression.

In this novel, the author portrays the mother as an autonomous, well-educated, and self-confident figure speaking Spanish in addition to her native tongue, as opposed to the mother figure represented as an uneducated woman who does not have a life of her own, who is overwhelmed by household and motherhood responsibilities, and who is subjected to violence by her husband in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981). While Ghalem depicts the mother in the first novel totally within the walls of her home, in the private space, she chooses the streets of Spain, a public space, for the context of the mother in this novel. Ghalem exemplifies the mother's high self-esteem in her navigating the Spanish streets successfully and establishing good contacts with local people totally by herself, without the help of anyone. In the first novel, the protagonist refuses to resemble her mother and disapproves and rejects almost every aspect of her as a woman and as a free individual, while in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), the protagonist admires her mother, whom she regards as a free and self-assertive person. In short, the mother in the first text is represented as an anti-role model, an embodiment of almost everything a woman should not be, whereas the mother in this narrative is portrayed as a role model, as someone to follow the steps of, for the protagonist.

Through the examples of this multitude of female characters deployed in her text, educated or uneducated but all of them possessing wisdom and intelligence, Ghalem, while describing the discriminatory and oppressive situations women are positioned in, also shows ways of struggle and resistance, thus presenting an optimistic stance in the feminist fight for justice. In addition, by means of the multiplicity of female characters used in the narrative, Ghalem gives women a voice and increases their visibility as marginalized individuals in society.

Also, the author highlights the power of female solidarity in her text as she weaves her story with several contexts where women are exposed to men's oppression and violence but find a way out and take control over their lives with the support of other women. Thus, Ghalem draws attention to the multiplicity and diversity of the female condition through her characters from the past to our day and shows women diverse ways of resistance.

Another aspect of Ghalem's text is that her female characters are not portrayed in a static position as the guardians of the family and home; on the contrary, they, too, travel or migrate for several reasons, and they do not display attachment to the city or country of origin. By representing women as active subjects migrating, traveling, and creating a sense of belonging for themselves wherever they go, Ghalem depicts women in a position not attached to a single home; her characters belong to many places, and they can make several places in the world their home. As opposed to an image of a woman inheriting unhappiness and misfortune from her female ancestors, as in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), the author in this text depicts women as inheriting a tradition of traveling, a tradition of crossing borders, from their mothers and grandmothers. Thus, Ghalem's narrative represents migration as a feminine experience and challenges the traditional migration discourse that considers migrating as mainly a masculine activity.

As for the representation of migration and exile as a feminine experience, we see that the act of traveling is shown to have three main functions in the text: Firstly, it helps the protagonist recover from her traumas in adolescence, the traumas stemming from the war and the departure of the man she loves, Fodhil. Secondly, traveling to different parts of the world allows the protagonist to see herself in the mirror of others, get to know herself better, and thus complete her identity. And lastly, traveling and migrating are represented as a way to freedom for women, in the case of the narrator as well as the other female characters. In the many examples of

pressure and oppression the female figures face in a male-dominated society, Ghalem illustrates migrating to another place as a solution to escape male domination, as a path to a free life.

Chapter 5 Abla Farhoud's *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015)

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on Abla Farhoud's *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015), an autofictional novel followed by *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* published in 2017, another autofictional text of the author, which, is the subject of analysis in my next chapter. In the frame of my research questions, I aim to explore Farhoud's novel to see how she engages with migration and exile from a female perspective. In this framework, the author's representations of the female characters' identities and their contexts will be the points to which I will pay attention. My purpose is to see how women's relationship to modes of production and patriarchal and gendered social structures inform their existence in family and society, as represented by Farhoud in her novel. I also aim to investigate how factors such as ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and sexuality are involved in the experiences of the female characters with a special focus on the influence of ethnic and cultural identity on women's subordination.

To start with, I will give an overview of *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) with information regarding the plot, the theme, the form, and the motifs, as well as the autobiographical elements in the text with reference to Farhoud's biography. Following a paragraph exploring the protagonist's passion for theatre, which constitutes the backbone of the story, I will address the topic of identity, which is another major theme of Farhoud's narrative. Using a materialist feminist perspective in the subsequent paragraphs, I will discuss the mother figure in comparison with other female figures such as family members, teachers, or other women, with a focus on the role they play in the protagonist's life. My analysis will continue by focusing on the author's portrayal of women's place in society as well as on sexuality in relation to the female condition. I will complete my analysis of this novel with an intersectional

perspective on the diverse identities of Farhoud's characters in order to examine how they shape their experiences of exposure to discrimination or oppression.

II. Overview of the Novel

Born in Lebanon in 1945, Abla Farhoud moved to Québec in 1951, at the age of six, together with her family. The family settled in Montréal where Farhoud started school and where her father started running a family store (Kačkutè, 2023). Later, Farhoud took drama courses and worked as an actress and speaker for Radio Québec. In 1965, Abla Farhoud returned to Lebanon with her family, which she experienced not “as a return home but as a form of exile” (Wimbush, 2021 p. 197). The author worked as an actress for Radio Lebanon and as a researcher until 1969, when she, at the age of twenty-four, left Lebanon for a second time and moved to Paris to study theatre. She met her husband, the Québécois musician Vincent Dionne, in Paris and returned to Montréal in 1973. Following her MA degree in theatre arts, ten years later, Farhoud started to write plays and novels. The author lived and worked in Montréal where she died in 2021 (Kačkutè, 2023).

Toutes celles que j'étais (2015) is the first text of Abla Farhoud's series of autofictional novels, followed by *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017). The first novel is closer to the real facts of Farhoud's life when compared to the following narrative, which is also inspired by the writer's biography and family but contains more fictional elements (Maalouf, 2017; Wimbush, 2021). Unlike the second novel, the writer gave the characters the real names of her family members in *Toutes celles*, with Aablè being the female protagonist, the fictional self of the writer, with a slight modification in her name, in the particular way the grandmother addresses her granddaughter in the text: “J’entends encore sa manière toute particulière de dire mon nom:

‘Aablè, Aablè, ... réveille-toi ma chérie, réveille-toi...’” [I still hear her very particular way of saying my name: ‘Aablè, Aablè, ... wake up my dear, wake up...’] (Toutes celles, p. 58). The novel is set in the years 1951–1965 and tells the life story of the protagonist, starting at the age of six in Aïn-Hirshy, her native village in Lebanon, and continuing in Montréal with the whole family's migration to Canada to unite with the father, who is already there to visit his sick sister and mother. There are six main chapters in the novel, with several subchapters under each, the first chapter starting with the protagonist's and her family's travel from the village in Lebanon to Québec, and the last chapter being about the family's approaching return to Lebanon, the home country after spending fourteen years in Canada, a story to be told in *Au grand soleil*.

Farhoud, in her autofictional narrative, draws attention to the different stages in a migrant woman's life and offers a rich perspective concerning how women at different ages experience exile and its consequences. Each section of the novel provides scenes from important points in Aablè's life, at different ages, with different aspects of her character. As the title suggests, the reader gains insight into the multiple selves of the protagonist, mostly narrated in the first-person narrator mode by Aablè, as a young child, in a chronological order, though it is at times the adult narrator reflecting on her past, breaking this chronological order, and changing the narrative time from the past to the present day. Unlike *Au grand soleil*, Farhoud's polyphonic text narrated by three siblings, Ikram (representing Farhoud in young adult age), Faïzah, Adib, and their father's cousin Youssef, this text has only one narrator, Aablè, at different ages. Farhoud, in the text inspired by her own life story, explores the themes of exile, challenges of adaptation, identity, culture, language, family, the meaning of being a woman in family and society, sexuality, and the sense of achievement and fulfillment as an individual. The writer

portrays exile through the eyes of women and focuses on the migratory experience as lived and expressed by women at different stages of their lives.

Farhoud's texts include both young and old protagonists, contrary to the tendency of postcolonial Francophone women writers who frequently portray the experiences of women in their childhood and early adulthood time (Averis, 2017; Wimbush, 2021)¹⁵. Antonia Wimbush (2021) emphasizes that Québec's migrant women's writing differs from that of the women writers in the rest of the Francophone postcolonial world in terms of its focus on old age in exile and names Abla Farhoud, Marie-Célie Agnant, and Monique Bosco as representatives of this literary trend in Québec. Farhoud's passion for theatre constitutes the backbone of the story in this novel, and the writer successfully conveys this love, the meaning of her life, to the readers throughout the lines from the beginning to the end, as expressed in her words, "Je me rends compte que, depuis la fois où je suis montée à l'arbre pour réciter mon poème d'adieu aux gens de mon village, c'est ma passion. Ma seule passion," [I realize that, since the time I climbed the tree to recite my farewell poem to the people of my village, this has been my passion. My only passion] (Toutes celles, p. 140).

While in Lebanon, Aablè has an elder brother and sister in addition to her two younger brothers, and her family with already five children gets larger with a sixth and seventh baby born in Canada. The father runs a 5-10-15¢ to 1 \$ store in Montréal and Aablè works there after school together with her elder sister and helps her father¹⁶ run the family shop. In Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, a district in north Montréal where Aablè and her family initially settle, the protagonist starts a Catholic school run by the sisters, learns French from scratch quickly, and becomes a

¹⁵ The reason for this particularity needs further investigation since I could not locate any relevant literature on that point.

¹⁶ Aablè's father studied French at school for a few years. He also speaks English, which shows that he had access to a certain level of education contrarily to the mother (Toutes celles, pp. 38–39).

very successful student. Despite her advantage of being at a young age in terms of adaptation and her dedicated nature, some challenges are waiting for Aablè and her family since the young girl is aware of their immigrant status and some negative attitudes towards them. Hearing insults such as “Maudite Syrienne, va-t’en donc chez vous!” [Damned Syrian, go home!] (Toutes celles, p. 72) at times does not deter Aablè; on the contrary, it motivates and makes her more ambitious in the adaptation process. Already a strong, independent, and carefree character in her village, Aablè develops resilience face-to-face with the challenges she and her family encounter, works hard, and succeeds.

Following the suggestion of Sister Marguerite at school and going on the stage for the school performance becomes a milestone in the young Aablè’s life. Acting thus becomes a passion for life for the protagonist. “Immigrer avec une famille est une expérience ‘extrême’, comme on le dit de certains sports,” [Immigrating with a family is an ‘extreme’ experience, as they say about certain sports] (Toutes celles, pp. 28–29), the young girl speaks about the difficulty of the process, and acting becomes the lifebuoy she sticks to in this challenge. Soon, the protagonist becomes an integral part, often the leading character, of the school performances happening a few times a year, attends the free acting courses offered by Marcienne Villeneuve-Groulx at le Studio des Colibris, and makes radio shows every Saturday with Madame Groulx and her students at the studio. However, what the protagonist builds in terms of adaptation and self-confidence since the age of six comes to a halt at the age of fourteen when she is no longer allowed to continue her studies and the family moves to another district, a farther location. The end of school also means the end of theatrical performances for Aablè, moving means that she can no longer attend the acting courses and the radio shows with Madame Groulx, and the days she must spend in the family shop working long hours seem like a torture to the young girl. From

that time on, Aablè starts to look for acting opportunities by her own means, takes professional acting courses, and gets a few roles in theatre and on television in addition to her ongoing helping role in the store. Yet, the protagonist is far from the happy and confident Aablè of her childhood.

Aablè's life gets even harder as her father decides to repatriate the family and get back to "his adored Lebanon" (*Toutes celles*, p. 80). Now that she has adapted to Canada, learns French to the point of forgetting Arabic, her native tongue, and makes a start for her professional career in acting, returning to Lebanon, which she almost forgot what was like, is frightening for the young girl. Indeed, it is hard to say this will be a return home for the young girl considering the fact that she spent more time in Québec than she did in rural Lebanon, and her identity is mostly constructed in this place, which she recently started to call her country. After a few years of his "pro-Lebanese propaganda" (*Toutes celles*, p. 164), the father sends his wife and his three children to the home country with the intention of following them after he sells the shops in Montréal and settles all accounts in the country. Face-to-face with the splitting of the family into two and the separation from her beloved mother and siblings, Aablè stays in Québec with the other half of the family, unwillingly counting the days for her prospective travel, with no intention of leaving everything she tried to build in the country if her mother was not in Lebanon to stay. Not being able to endure the absence of her mother, whom she misses a lot, and not feeling strong enough to stay in Canada all alone without her family, Aablè has no choice but to obey her father's decision and accompany her father and siblings to their home country. One night, the family shop gets burned in a fire even before the father sells it, and this closes the page in Québec for Aablè's and her family's life to open another one in Lebanon. Farhoud's novel *Toutes celles* which starts with the protagonist's departure from Lebanon, ends with her

departure from Québec, a departure that is a return at the same time. With some weak idea about what might be waiting for her in their home country as a young woman, Aablè is on the threshold of a new adventure, a second phase of her life, which the reader gains insight into in *Au grand soleil*, this time through the voice of “Ikram”¹⁷, inspired by the young adult self of Farhoud, as the female protagonist: “Je vais fermer mon cahier, et je l’ouvrirai là-bas, au pays de mon père, là où on cache les filles,” [I’m going to close my notebook, and I’ll open it there, in my father’s country, where they hide the girls] (*Toutes celles*, p. 203).

III. Passion for Theatre

The protagonists’ love and passion for theatre have a pivotal place in both autofictional texts written by Farhoud. In *Toutes celles*, the reader learns how Aablè, the writer’s fictional self, gets to know and falls in love with acting at the school performances through the encouragement of her teacher, Sœur Marguerite, the sister at the Catholic school she starts attending upon the family’s arrival in Québec. *Au grand soleil* tells the story of the challenges Ikram, the protagonist, faces due to her desire and determination to perform her acting profession in Lebanon. In *Toutes celles*, Aablè, a seven-year-old child, gets on stage for the first time at school, but the very roots of her passion date back to nearly one year ago. As the adult narrator looks back to her childhood forty-one years ago, she remembers how she climbed a tree to be able to see everybody in her village on the day of their departure for Canada and recites a poem she learned at school, her poem of farewell, loudly on that tree. That day marks the moment when the seed of love for acting is planted in Aablè’s child heart. The period when Aablè gets on stage for the first time in Québec is a period of linguistic and cultural exile in the little girl’s life.

¹⁷ Ikram is the female protagonist of *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017).

Having recently arrived from Lebanon, where her mother tongue is Arabic, Aablè is trying to exist in an unfamiliar linguistic and cultural environment. Already an intelligent and strong girl with a high level of self-awareness, she realizes that she can cope with this challenging transition process by being successful and proving herself at school. She quickly learns French, makes friends, and, despite the obstacles she encounters along the way, does not give up and successfully adapts to her new life in Québec.

Aablè's getting on the stage, acting in school performances a few times a year, and attending the free acting courses offered by Marcienne Villeneuve-Groulx, a teacher of diction and acting for young people in Montréal, play a significant role in her adaptation and integration into her new cultural and social milieu. The little girl's passion for theatre becomes a safe harbor where she takes refuge in the emotional storm in which she finds herself following their migration to Canada. Realizing the fact that, on the stage, she can be the Aablè she wants and chooses, without the obligation of being defined by her ethnic background, provides the protagonist with great relief and enables her to forget her immigrant identity, which she describes as "cette vilaine sensation d'être déplacée ou en déplacement," [this nasty feeling of having been displaced or being in displacement] (Toutes celles, p. 35). Already in a time of her life, which is a period of identity formation for everybody at her age, in addition to her exiled status, Aablè's love of acting opens her a path to constructing an identity, expressing and defining herself the way she wishes: "Je venais d'un autre pays, oui, mais quand j'étais sur scène, j'étais de tous les pays. Ou du pays que je choisissais," [I came from another country, yes, but when I was on stage, I was from all countries. Or the country I chose] (Toutes celles, p. 54). The meaning Aablè ascribes to her acting lessons and to theatre can be grasped better in her expression, "pour moi, c'était une affaire de vie ou de mort, ou pour le dire plus simplement, une

rampe de survie. Certaines venaient pour apprendre, d'autres pour s'amuser, moi j'étais là pour m'exprimer, pour exister," [for me, it was a matter of life and death, or to put it more simply, a survival ramp. Some of them came to learn, others to have fun; I was there to express myself, to exist] (Toutes celles, p. 52). Acting, thus, becomes a way of developing resilience and is synonymous with survival in exile for the young Aablè.

After assigning so much meaning and importance to acting, not being able to perform it almost paralyzes the protagonist. When Aablè is made to quit her studies unwillingly and can no longer attend school, she also has to say goodbye to her school performances on stage, which take place a few times a year. This time is also a period when the family moves to another district, which is too far from le Studio des Colibris, where she attends the free acting courses of Marcienne Villeneuve-Groulx. Theatre is what the young protagonist builds everything on and all that she needs and wants in life, so its absence feels like the end of the world to her: "La fin du théâtre et de l'école m'avait laissée avec un trou béant que je ne savais comment remplir," [The end of theatre and school had left me with a gaping hole that I didn't know how to fill] (Toutes celles, p. 119). The stage is the only place where the young Aablè feels strong and forgets her vulnerability, and as she loses this opportunity, she also loses her ability to cope with life: "être dans une autre peau, sortir de moi, de ma condition, plonger dans un ailleurs que je pouvais explorer à loisir, m'oublier enfin," [to be in another skin, to get out of myself, out of my condition, to dive into an elsewhere that I could explore at leisure, to finally forget myself] (Toutes celles, pp. 147–148). This poetic and theatrical universe is where she feels she belongs, and separating her from that universe is taking away her joy of life, the meaning of her life, her "reason to be here on this earth" (Toutes celles, p. 199).

IV. Identity

Farhoud, in *Toutes celles*, problematizes identity and belonging and invites the reader to reflect on the in-betweenness that the female migrant subject finds herself in childhood and adolescence periods. Aablè faces the truth of exile, her condition as a migrant on the very first days of school, following their migration to Québec. As her teacher at Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, Sœur Marguerite, asks her where she found the picture of the Virgin Mary that she holds in her hand, Aablè experiences an emotional shock when she does not understand anything from her teacher's words. Though the sister repeats the adverb "où" [where] several times with a warm smile on her face, it is the coldness of the linguistic barrier—the linguistic exile she finds herself in—that Aablè feels and she becomes cognizant of her difference for the first time. She feels so humiliated, helpless, and unhappy that she escapes from school despite her teacher's vain efforts to stop her. However, that day when she faces her immigrant reality becomes a milestone and motivates the protagonist to learn French and become successful at school.

Possessing a high level of self-awareness, the protagonist questions her identity from an early age. Already a time of self-discovery and identity formation, adolescence in a new country becomes a time of double challenge for Aablè's quest. Echoing Pierre Bourdieu (2004, as cited in Montandon, 2006, p. 86) stating that "the immigrant is atopos, has no place, and is displaced and unclassifiable...Neither citizen or foreigner, nor truly on the side of the Same nor really on the side of the Other," the protagonist asks: "MA place, est-ce que je vais finir par la trouver? Je la cherche depuis que je suis née et encore plus depuis que je suis au Québec," [MY place, will I ever find it? I have been looking for it since I was born and even more since I came to Québec] (*Toutes celles*, p. 193, capitals in original). The protagonist tries to find her place between her Lebanese roots she was born into and the Canadian linguistic and cultural context

she is introduced to at the age of six, and she is highly aware of the difficulty of this task: “Un enfant d’immigrants cultive une double personnalité. Sans passé, personne ne peut prétendre savoir qui il est, son identité est mutilée,” [A child of immigrants cultivates a double personality. Without a past, no one can claim to know who they are, their identity is mutilated] (Toutes celles, p. 97), she speaks. Though she is highly motivated to integrate and feels herself as already part of her new environment, she is at times made to remember her immigrant identity with insults such as “Maudite Syrienne, va-t’en donc chez vous!” [Damned Syrian, go home!] (Toutes celles, p. 72) that she hears despite all her efforts to forget it and make it irrelevant.

The protagonist is reminded of her difference not only by means of insults but also in the context of the praise she receives from her teachers as she joins a Québec-wide competition of catechism for seventh graders organized by the archbishop of Montréal to test and promote the students’ learning about the religion. The young girl, already a smart and hard-working student in her class and school, gets the highest score all over the province of Québec. The nun who announces Aablè’s achievement and praises her in front of all her schoolmates refers to the protagonist’s great success despite her not being Catholic. Aablè, an adherent of the Orthodox faith, does not like this emphasis on her non-Catholic identity and on her difference from other students, despite all her efforts to fit in: “Elles apprenaient ce qu’un enfant d’immigrants ne crie pas sur les toits ou cache, si possible: sa différence,” [They learned what an immigrant child does not shout from the rooftops or hides, if possible: her difference] (Toutes celles, p. 91). The protagonist is herself highly aware of her difference and her migrant identity. What she wants is to be noticed with her character, her personality, but particularly with her art and acting; just like the writer herself, who points out the reductive use of the adjective “immigrant” and expresses her wish to be defined with reference to the totality of her identity, especially to her writing:

“Immigrante, oui, mais immigrante n'est qu'une partie de moi” [Immigrant, yes, but immigrant is only a part of me] (Farhoud, 2000, p. 56).

The protagonist of *Toutes celles* is aware of the fluidity of her identity as well as the emotional uncertainties concerning her family’s changing circumstances: “Nous nous sentions en deuil sans savoir ni de qui ni de quoi. Nous étions redevenus des exilés, unijambistes par surcroît, un pied ici, un pied là-bas,” [We felt like we were grieving without knowing who or what. We had become exiles again, one-legged moreover, one foot here, one foot there] (*Toutes celles*, p. 174) she speaks. Though the process puts obstacles in Aablè’s way during the fourteen years they are in Québec, the young girl manages to get through them one by one, tries to construct an identity for herself, and finally starts to call Québec “[her] country.” What Aablè builds through art in all this time becomes her identity. Therefore, the father’s decision to return all the family to their home country is not received by Aablè with the same enthusiasm. On the contrary, she feels a rage towards her father that she cannot express openly and blames him for destroying everything she has built so far and for ruining their lives because of his “fantasme du retour” (*Toutes celles*, p. 200). Despite having spent most of her life in Canada, Aablè has some ideas regarding Lebanese culture and society, and she is worried about the possibility of not being able to perform her job, the acting profession that “quenches [her] thirst and alleviates [her] deep sorrow” (*Toutes celles*, p. 201), in her home country.

In Farhoud’s novels *Le bonheur a la queue glissante* (1998), *Le fou d'Omar* (2005), and *Splendide solitude* (2001), where the protagonists' quest for identity and their literary creation are inextricably linked, writing offers the characters an opportunity to overcome their alienation and loneliness (Maddox, 2010). On a similar note, the protagonist of *Toutes celles*, Farhoud’s fictional self, finds herself in an identity quest that plunges her into intense loneliness and

emptiness and resorts to theatre as a way to get out of this emptiness. Just like storytelling allows the protagonists of the above-mentioned novels to reach out to the other by sharing their writing in a fruitful relationship between narrator and narratee (Maddox, 2010), Aablè, too, finds the ability to connect to others on the stage and in acting. Gill Valentine's (2007) analysis regarding the significance of space in processes of identity formation sheds light on Aablè's situation where she develops a sense of self in the context of theatre and acting. The stage provides her with the context where she can choose who to be as well as determine how others see her. Therefore, the stage where her migrant and ethnic identity is overshadowed and her artistic identity is foregrounded becomes the specific space where the young girl experiences a process of identification, in accordance with Valentine's (2007) observation that "the ways that 'who we are' emerges in interactions within specific spatial contexts and specific biographical moments" (p. 18). As the passion for theatre and acting constitute the essential part of Aablè's identity and her only real link with others, a prospect of life without this part feels like losing herself: "Je crains, en partant d'ici, d'aller tout droit à ma perte" [I fear, by leaving here, that I will go straight to my doom] (Toutes celles, p. 199).

V. The Mother Figure, an Antimodel?

In this novel inspired by her life story, Farhoud tells about her mother, grandmother, and other female figures who have positively touched her life. Early in the book, the reader gets to know that the mother, a character left unnamed by Farhoud, has limited reading and writing skills. When the family, at that time in Lebanon, their home country, receives a letter from the father, who is in Canada to visit his sick sister, it is Aablè's elder brother who reads the letter aloud to the rest of the family. "C'est toujours mon frère qui lit les lettres parce que m'ma elle

aime pas lire beaucoup. Depuis que bayé est parti loin loin à Canada, il envoie des lettres à m'ma et c'est mon frère qui lit" [It's always my brother who reads the letters because my mother doesn't like to read much. Since Bayé left far away for Canada, he has been sending letters to my mother, and it is my brother who is reading] (Toutes celles, p. 6), the little girl comments on her mother's illiteracy. When the family moves to Québec, the mother is not as lucky as Aablè in terms of adaptation, naturally due to her age but also due to the traditional role of wife and mother, a mother of seven, that keeps her mostly indoors, busy with the domestic responsibilities. Because she cannot go out and take part in the public sphere as much as needed, she speaks only Arabic, her mother tongue, and very little French, which is not enough for her to take care of herself outside without the help of Aablè and her sister, who are the ones mostly contacting people for outside businesses.

While her daughter Aablè experiences the social and cultural constraints as obstacles to her self-fulfillment as a person in terms of her being prevented from studying and having to work in the family business, the mother experiences the same limitations in the form of her familial responsibilities as a mother and as a wife that prevent her self-actualization, a condition that gets worse following their migration to Canada. Her obligations to take care of the children and to do the household chores imprison her within the domestic sphere, take up all her time, and thus do not allow her to flourish as a human being nor to integrate into her new social and cultural environments, despite her will to do so. The mother's condition in the family can be considered in the frame of Paola Tabet's (2004) concept of "conjugal amalgam" which refers to all the services—with no measuring—that wives provide in a marriage relationship, the marriage institution, as a form of regulation of sexuality and reproduction, and which thus becomes a

means of men's appropriating women's services such as sexual access, childcare, domestic service, and emotional labour in exchange for material support.

The mother not only sacrifices her own fulfillment for the well-being of her family and fails to make progress, but also finds herself in a state worse than before since her lack of linguistic capacity in French makes her dependent on her daughters for the daily activities that need to be performed outside the home. In addition to her role of wife and mother that keeps her inside the house, the mother is also denied access to French at home because her husband imposes on her the role of guardian of the culture and language of their home country and the duty of speaking Arabic with the children for this aim. Having no means to learn and practice French, the language of life outside, the mother is thus deprived of the most important tool for her existence in the public sphere.

The mother's being denied access to learning and practicing French exemplifies Tabet's (1982) analysis of the historical distribution of tools and weapons to be used by men and women, which she shows to have preceded the division of labour, and her emphasis on "the constant underequipment of the female part of humankind, and on its significance in material appropriation and in the domination that men exercise over women" (p. 9). In this frame, while men can and are encouraged to make use of their potential to the fullest with a maximum number of tools and opportunities at their disposal, women are deprived of even the most basic and necessary means to give them independence and autonomy, socially and economically. On the same note, Aablè and her sister's deprivation of studying contrarily to their brothers' opportunity to attend school illustrates the will to deprive them of the tools and weapons they need to survive in a world of male hegemony as well as to transform them into instruments of social relations

and to relegate them to the secondary position that has been determined for them, with no ability to become subjects.

The mother is mostly represented as a passive character throughout the novel, and she displays agency only in one instance when she overhears the conversation of her daughters about the end-of-year report card ceremony at school, where parents are also invited to celebrate their children's successes. The mother says that she, too, wants to take part in the ceremony, much to the surprise of her daughters, who cannot imagine their mother in a place outside their home. Worried about the idea of their mother's attending this event, the two sisters try to dissuade her from this intention by presenting her with several excuses. Aablè and her elder sister do not want their mother to be there for fear that she could be culturally a misfit in her environment but also with the sincere intention of protecting her since they think she would not be able to take care of herself on her own outside the house. Even if the house often becomes a prison for the immigrant woman confined to the domestic space, it also acquires capital importance as a refuge for the foreigner conscious of her difference, as Amaryll Chanady (2010) notes about the plurivocality of this image of confinement to private space in the context of Dounia, the female protagonist of Farhoud's novel *Le bonheur a la queue glissante* (1998), a grandmother in exile. However, in the case of Aablè's mother, this is Aablè and her sister, who are conscious—at a high level of alertness—of their mother's difference with her status as an immigrant, monolingual, almost illiterate, and dependent housewife and consider home as the only place where she can be safe. This instance shows how the two sisters made a division of labour in their minds, assuming themselves the duty of undertaking the outside responsibilities and assigning their mother the duty of taking care of the domestic responsibilities.

The conversation about the year-end report card ceremony at school is also noteworthy, not only in terms of showing how the two sisters, two young women, are preoccupied with a sense of duty and responsibility towards their mother but also in terms of showing how they internalized this image of woman restricted to the domestic sphere imposed on their mother. They passively accept the reality that their mother's place is home; their mother is out of place whenever she is outside, and they regard their mother's integration into the host society as almost impossible. What should be noted here is that the writer portrays Aablè, the protagonist and narrator at different ages, and her experience in a new country from a feminist point of view and conveys her focus on female emancipation through the character's plight to find a selfhood, the borders of which are drawn by herself. However, Aablè and her sister are depicted as having a flawed or incomplete understanding of gender equality that can be explained by a lack of empathy or naivety due to their young age. These two characters, in their effort to help their mother by fulfilling all the outside tasks and keeping her at home, fail to see that they actually serve to undermine her self-confidence as a free individual and self-sufficiency as a woman.

As Michel Foucault (1980) notes, "As soon as there is a relationship of power, there is a possibility of resistance. We are never trapped by power: it is always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy," (p. 13). And Aablè's mother, despite all the efforts of her daughters to convince her to stay at home, does not yield and objects, in her own way, to them and to the relationships of power that destine her to a subordinate position in life: "C'est bien là l'excellente idée de votre père, que je reste ignorante, que je me sacrifie, eh bien qu'il se sacrifie, lui, moi j'en ai assez!" [This is indeed your father's excellent idea, that I remain ignorant, that I sacrifice myself; well, let him sacrifice himself, I've had enough!] (Toutes celles, pp. 64–65). On this occasion when the mother is in a position to

rebel against her condition as a woman, she expresses the reasons for her ignorance and blames her husband for his role in that. Remaining determined in her intention, the mother attends the ceremony at school to the surprise of her daughters who see her outside home for the first time in Canada, successfully realizes her first mission in her alien linguistic and cultural environment, and speaks proudly: “Vous voyez, le loup ne m’a pas mangée,” [You see, the wolf didn’t eat me] (*Toutes celles*, p. 66). This is the only instance in *Toutes celles* where Farhoud portrays the mother in an active role, taking a step for herself and challenging gendered norms. In the rest of the novel, the mother is depicted in a submissive role, where she accepts the borders determined for her by societal and cultural norms and shows no sign of resistance to them. Despite the deep attachment and love that Aablè feels towards her mother, it is not possible to say that she represents a role model as a woman for her daughter.

VI. Female Figures as Path Openers

Farhoud does not portray Aablè’s mother as a role model from a feminist perspective but includes other female figures who are either strong in character or facilitate Aablè’s plight as a female migrant subject. Aablè’s—and Farhoud’s—paternal grandmother Jana, whom she calls “sitté,” is one of these female characters that the writer deploys in her text. As the tradition of Aablè’s ancestors suggests, the members of the family, from generation to generation, migrate from Lebanon to Canada, always leaving a child behind in the village as the guarantor of their belonging to the home country. And Jana, the grandmother, is thus the child who remains behind following her parents’ migration to Québec. She gets married in the village and later migrates to Canada following the death of her husband. In accordance with the familial tradition, she is the one who leaves her son Chafic, Aablè’s—and Farhoud’s—father, behind this time. Unlike the

mother figure whom the writer depicts as a passive character, the grandmother is an active woman with exemplary intelligence and self-agency, despite her lack of formal education. Farhoud describes her as a courageous, meticulous, and hardworking person who learns to read and write on her own, which is rare for her time, especially for a girl. The reader can grasp through the lines the admiration the writer feels for her grandmother as she praises her determination, sense of independence, patience, and taste for beauty. Jana, who becomes a businessperson and opens several shops in Montréal, is an example of success for her granddaughter, who considers her a feminist well ahead of her time:

Bien avant le féminisme, elle savait que l'émancipation passait d'abord par le savoir et l'indépendance financière, que la liberté ne se donnait pas, mais se prenait. Les conventions et les coutumes souvent très étouffantes, très peu pour elle et, au risque de provoquer le scandale, Jana a toujours suivi ce que lui dictaient sa tête et son cœur.

[Long before feminism, she knew that emancipation first came through knowledge and financial independence, that freedom was not given but taken. Conventions and customs are often very stifling, very little for her, and, at the risk of causing scandal, Jana has always followed what her head and heart dictated to her] (Toutes celles, pp. 55–56).

As a reader, it is not hard to see that the protagonist is extremely proud of and follows in the footsteps of this free, strong, and determined role model in life:

Jana, celle qui m'a appris à ne faire *que* ce que me dictent ma tête et mon cœur... Jana, celle qui m'a appris à coudre, découdre et recoudre les cols, les mots, les manches, les paragraphes, les blouses, les nouvelles, les robes, les pièces de théâtre, les manteaux, les

romans, pour le plaisir et la beauté, juste pour le plaisir et la beauté, aller jusqu'au bout de soi-même, jusqu'au bout, juste pour le plaisir d'accomplir sa vie.

[Jana, the one who taught me to *only* do what my head and my heart dictate... Jana, the one who taught me to sew, unsew, and re-sew collars, words, sleeves, paragraphs, blouses, short stories, dresses, plays, coats, novels, for pleasure and beauty, just for pleasure and beauty, to go to the end of oneself, to the end, just to the pleasure of fulfilling one's life] (Toutes celles, pp. 58–59, emphasis in original).

Farhoud's choice of the word "dicter" [dictate] in both quotations above is noteworthy since the word, in its dictionary meaning (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), refers to "impose, pronounce, or specify authoritatively" and "to issue as an order," which in both cases requires the existence of a higher authority. Farhoud's use of this specific word points out her aversion to patriarchal powers that dominate women and her emphasis on the ideal type of woman, not yielding to any source of power and knowing no authority other than her head and heart.

In addition to Grandmother Jana, Farhoud mentions several other female figures the young Aablè meets in her growing-up process as well as on her way to adapting and integrating into her new life and into her new social and cultural context. These women, each, enlighten her way to adolescence at different stages and play a significant role in her life. One of these women is Sœur Marguerite, the sister at the Catholic school where Aablè starts studying when they first arrive in Québec. This woman, "the smiliest person" (Toutes celles, p. 25) Aablè sees in her life, is the teacher who trains the little girl and her classmates for the performance organized for a special occasion at the end of the school year. This performance is the first time Aablè gets on stage and tastes the joy of speaking aloud and singing with others in front of the audience.

Stunned when she sees Aablè's performing so confidently and successfully in French, Sister Marguerite praises the little girl caressing her hair: "Dire qu'il y a à peine neuf mois, tu ne savais pas dire trois mots en français, c'est incroyable," [To think that barely nine months ago, you didn't know how to say three words in French, it's incredible] and advises her to continue getting on stage (*Toutes celles*, p. 26). The joy she feels while performing and this feeling of success as a newcomer well-received by her teacher, whose smile the little girl has "always considered the first and finest welcome to this country," becomes a mile point in Aablè's life and constitutes the first step of a passion she will have for the rest of her life: "Comme elle me l'avait souhaité, j'ai continué à monter sur scène," [As she had wished, I continued to go on stage] (*Toutes celles*, p. 26) she speaks.

Madame Chaussé is another woman Aablè meets in the first years of her Québec life and becomes one of those female figures who facilitate her adaptation to her new environments but also contribute to the construction of a better self as an individual. This 59-year-old woman, hired by Aablè's father to work with him as a salesperson and also to help with the shop, especially on Mondays when he goes shopping for the store to Montréal, develops a close and warm relationship with the family members at this time when Aablè and her family live in a house behind their store. Even after they move out to another place, her close relationship with the family continues. Aablè comes to the store after school on Mondays, and Madame Chaussé edits her homework, makes her recite her lessons, and more importantly, helps her rehearse her acting roles at school. Madame Chaussé takes this rehearsal task so seriously that she trains the young girl for her performances in a perfect manner, offering support with the content and focusing on the new vocabulary for the poetry part in the form of games. Thus, she serves as a private tutor and a life coach, a concept that probably did not exist at that time, for the young

girl, and makes great contributions to her self-fulfillment. The adult narrator, reflecting on her exilic past, appreciates the way this woman touches their life, shaping her personality, and speaks as follows:

Sans Madame Chaussé qui nous a aidés et surtout aimés, serions-nous les mêmes aujourd'hui, serais-je la même personne, si elle n'avait pas été là? Pendant la grisaille des premières années d'une famille d'immigrants déboussolée, s'il n'y avait pas eu de la bonté quelque part sur notre passage, serions-nous encore vivants?

[Without Madame Chaussé who helped us and, above all, loved us, would we be the same today, would I be the same person, if she had not been there? During the early gray years of a disoriented immigrant family, if it hadn't been for kindness somewhere along the way, would we still be alive?] (Toutes celles, p. 41).

Another female figure who enlightens the young Aablè's path and makes a positive change in her personality is Marcienne Villeneuve-Groulx. Aablè, since her successful performance in her first year at school, continues to get on stage and becomes an indispensable part of the school performances. At the end of her fourth year, following another successful performance, she meets Marcienne Villeneuve-Groulx, a teacher of diction and acting for young people, who appreciates Aablè's great talent on the stage and congratulates her on her success, offering her one year of free acting courses at le Studio des Colibris, her drama school. This woman, who asks Aablè her name but not where she was born or how long she has been in the country like everyone else seeing her for the first time does, impresses the young girl: "Ce qui l'intéressait, c'était ce que j'étais et ce que je faisais quand je montais sur scène. Je l'ai aimée tout de suite"

[What interested her was who I was and what I was doing when I went on stage. I loved her right

away] (*Toutes celles*, p. 49), she says. Aablè appreciates this support extended to her and remembers this teacher who changed her life with gratitude. The free courses offered by Madame Groulx open her a new path and transform Aablè into the person she would later become: “Tout ce que j’ai fait par la suite, ce que je suis devenue, dépendait de ce moment où cette femme a vu en moi une petite flamme, et m’a aidée à la garder vivante” [Everything I did afterward, what I became, depended on that moment when this woman saw a little flame in me and helped me keep it alive] (*Toutes celles*, p. 50).

VII. Women’s Place in Family and Society

In Farhoud’s two novels within the scope of my research, *Toutes celles* and *Au grand soleil*, the author offers a gendered perspective and addresses the patriarchal gender norms at work in Lebanese culture and society. In *Toutes celles*, where the protagonist is in her childhood and adolescence, Farhoud makes a start in a sense in exploring the themes of sexuality and women’s oppression, which she will elaborate on and deal with more in depth in the second part of her autofiction series, *Au grand soleil*, where the female protagonists are in their young adult age. In *Toutes celles*, patriarchal control is central to the family’s structure; it is the father, as the head of the family, who gets to decide where they will move out to and live without asking the opinion of the family members. While the father is in Québec visiting his sick sister, who later dies, the rest of the family is in Lebanon, and they find out about the father’s decision about the family’s future in a letter they receive from him. Though migrating to Canada is a tradition in Aablè’s family for generations, Aablè says she will never know exactly why her father did not return to Lebanon after the death of his sister or why he brought the family to Québec, since the father is in a dominating position and does not give an account for his actions. The father wants

the rest of his family to join him in Canada, and the mother is totally erased in this instance; she is not given a voice nor is portrayed in any act of agency concerning this important decision that affects her life. Thus, the family, consisting of the mother and five children, obeys the father's decision to migrate to Canada without any questioning.

Farhoud offers a critique of the patriarchal norms of Lebanese society and culture and their impact on female subordination in her illustration of several instances in Aablè's life. One such instance of discrimination towards the female members of society takes place early in the text when the family starts preparing for their migration to Canada and the protagonist's maternal aunt, living in another village, comes to help them with the preparations for the journey. The six-year-old Aablè is extremely happy and excited with the idea of meeting her "bayé" [father] and on the day when a photograph needs to be taken for the family members' passports, she wears a dress her mother sews for this special photo occasion, an important event for the 1950s. The excitement and happiness of the little girl do not last long, as she gets disappointed upon facing the gender divisions and the discrimination within her very family. In addition to the photo taken for the passport, her brothers are allowed to take a picture together in memory of this special day for the family, whereas she and her sister are not allowed to be in this picture nor for a separate photo for the girls: "Moi et ma sœur, on se prépare pour la photo. Y a pas de photo avec les filles. Une photo pour les garçons et rien pour les filles," [Me and my sister are getting ready for the photo. There are no photos with the girls. A photo for boys and nothing for girls] (Toutes celles, p. 11).

As a matter of fact, this is not the first instance of discrimination Aablè encounters; as a girl as young as six years old, she is already subject to and aware of the sex segregation in Lebanese society when she, on her way back from school, overhears two women chatting,

comparing the experience of having a son and a daughter and expressing their preference for having a son to having a daughter as a child:

J'ai entendu de mes oreilles une femme a dit les garçons, c'est mille fois mieux que les filles, si je pouvais échanger mes trois filles contre trois garçons, je serais la plus heureuse. Et l'autre a répondu: ô ma pauvre, ô ma pauvre, je sais pas ce que je ferais.

[I heard with my own ears that a woman said boys are a thousand times better than girls; if I could exchange my three girls for three boys, I would be the happiest. And the other replied, oh my poor thing, oh my poor thing, I don't know what I would do] (Toutes celles, p. 11).

Farhoud draws attention to the way external oppression develops into internalized oppression and internalized misogyny and stresses how relations of power transform their victims into a tool to be used for their own aims, making women active agents in the devaluing of women. Though she is at a very young age, Aablè possesses a feminist awareness and displays resistance to the patriarchal codes of her society that sneaked in and captured the mentality of even women at this level. By commenting "Moi j'ai passé devant les deux sans donner le bonjour. Pas de salam aaleikom¹⁸. Tant pis pour elles," [I walked past the two without saying hello. No salam aaleikom. Too bad for them], Aablè does the best she can do and expresses her reaction to this backward mindset reminder of the Middle Ages (Toutes celles, p. 11).

In the context of Farhoud's early works, where the fate of daughters depends entirely on the father and patriarchal law, which holds male honor above all else, Lucie Lequin (2006) mentions that the humiliation of a daughter comes from birth and that the very birth of a girl is a

¹⁸ Arabic expression of greeting which means "Peace be upon you", used as "hello" or "goodbye".

source of affront and disdain. “So how could a little girl who, in a way, is just a manufacturing error, flourish?” Lequin (2006, par. 15) asks to point out the difficulty for a girl to find well-being, happiness, and satisfaction in life in a patriarchal culture. In *Toutes celles*, Farhoud mentions the issue of son preference and the undervaluing of daughters, an example of misogyny prevalent in Lebanese society, in another scene, a scene of conversation between Aablè and her mother where the latter expresses her personal opinion on the indispensability of a son. However, Farhoud does not portray Aablè’s parents—inspired by her own parents—in this category, in a position of misogyny, and gives a more optimistic voice to Aablè. Well aware of the impact of culture on individuals’ minds, the young girl prefers to blame society rather than her parents for the lack of value attributed to girls she inevitably observes and is subject to as a woman:

Dans ce temps-là, m’a dit un jour ma mère, les enfants arrivaient, on les acceptait et on les aimait. Elle a réfléchi quelques secondes, puis: C’est sûr que si je n’avais eu que des filles, il aurait fallu un fils, au moins un fils... Dès que je suis née, on m’a aimée. Si ceux qui m’avaient précédée et suivie n’avaient été que des filles, j’aurais eu la vie moins belle. Peut-être que ce que je dis est injuste: mon père et ma mère aimaient les filles. C’est leur société qui ne les aimait pas.

[At that time, my mother told me one day, the children arrived, we accepted them, and we loved them. She thought for a few seconds, then: It’s certain that if I had only had daughters, I would have needed a son, at least one son... As soon as I was born, I was loved. If those who had preceded and followed me had only been girls, my life would have been less beautiful. Maybe what I’m saying is unfair: My father and mother liked girls. It was their society that didn’t like them] (*Toutes celles*, p. 34).

Another example of the patriarchal ruling in the family, even when they are in Québec, is about the education of the children of the family. It is again the father who makes the important decision that Aablè and her sister will not continue their studies but work at the family shop, where the father needs someone when he goes out to make the necessary purchases and extends his business by opening additional stores. With a strong desire to learn, a characteristic peculiar to those who are taken out of school without their consent, Aablè, a 14-year-old young girl, is having a hard time understanding her father's decision as a person who is a lover of culture, knowledge, and poetry, who, himself, suffers from not being able to go to school for as long as he would have liked, and who she thinks attaches importance to education. As an intelligent girl, Aablè is aware of the fact that her father imposes this decision on them not by tyranny or harshness but by indoctrinating and enticing his daughters to obey his decision. The adult narrator, looking back to her 14-year-old self, reflects on how she accepted the situation when she was told that her support for the mother who had just given birth to her seventh baby was indispensable and questions herself for not having objected to this decision by saying that her brother, who is older than her, could very well fulfill this task instead of her. Aablè's deprivation of her schooling is not a matter of necessity; rather, it is a manifestation of the patriarchal rules at work within the family. What Aablè faces is an example of female oppression, discrimination based on sex, since the girls are treated differently than boys, and whereas the latter can go to school, the former are obliged to obey the father's rules by quitting school and starting to work in the family store for long hours.

In subsequent years, the family business expands into a couple of stores, bringing in more money, and the family is no longer in the same financially precarious state as they were in Lebanon or during the first years of their settlement in Québec. However, neither Aablè nor her

elder sister get paid for working full-time in the shop. Though they can get money from the cash whenever they need it, no specific payment is made in return for their labour. Working in the shop feels like torture to the young girl since the hours she spends there are far from the opportunities that would add to her self-fulfillment. When Aablè is deprived of her right to continue her studies, she is actually deprived of her coping mechanism with life because it is at school that she makes friends as well as finds opportunities for acting, her lifelong passion.

In addition to her removal from school, the family moves to a different district, which is far from le Studio des Colibris, the school where she attends free acting courses offered by Marcienne Villeneuve-Groulx, and from the district where she performs her radio shows on Saturdays, which means all means of socialization, the lifebuoys Aablè sticks to in order to survive, are taken from her during this period. She can no longer attend the lessons or the radio shows, and this is “the end of everything she loves” (*Toutes celles*, p. 109) for her. What she feels is similar to being uprooted for a second time in her life: “Étais-je en train de vivre le déracinement une deuxième fois? Plus d’école. Plus de cours de diction. Plus de théâtre. Plus d’émissions de radio du samedi. Plus d’amis. Plus rien,” [Was I being uprooted a second time? No more school. No more diction classes. No more theatre. No more Saturday radio shows. No more friends. No more nothing] (*Toutes celles*, p. 114).

Lequin (2006), in the context of Farhoud’s focus on place in her texts to emphasize its brutal weight, explores the way space affects the lives of the characters. Indeed, the female protagonist of *Toutes celles*, Aablè, stresses, in many instances, the suffocating atmosphere of the family store where she works against her will, a place in which she is made to spend more time after her ties with the school are cut. In contrast, the stage where Aablè can carry out her

acting role is the place where she finds her true self, where she feels freest and happiest, and where she feels that she belongs.

Actually, the family store functions as a “third space” (Delaisse et al., 2022), a “thirdspace of opportunity” (Veronis, 2007, p. 466), for Aablè until she is 13 years old in terms of playing the role of “in-between” Québec and Lebanon, the host community represented by Madame Chaussé and Aablè, the immigrant. The family store as a “third space”¹⁹ manifests itself as neither a space of the dominant groups nor that of the subaltern ones but rather “a hybrid ‘in-between’ that is neither one nor the other” (Delaisse et al., 2022, p. 5), thus creating a space of resistance and offering a possibility of vital transformation for the young girl. However, the store loses this function when Madame Chaussé stops working there and Aablè, dropping out of school, starts to work full-time in the shop, being deprived of self-growth opportunities. As Lequin (2006) shows, space in Farhoud’s texts is more a matter of patriarchal and family power than of geography since her female characters, women of different ages, have no power over their space; they are unable to leave it or reconstruct it as they wish. In *Toutes celles*, a later work of Farhoud, Aablè and her sister, two female characters with a restricted life in the family store and their mother confined within the borders of home, are no exceptions to Lequin’s observation, but Ikram, the female protagonist of *Au grand soleil* and the young adult self of Farhoud, at the end of the narrative, breaks this chain and leaves Lebanon, the home country, as an act of agency and resistance.

Farhoud, through her female characters in *Toutes celles*, draws attention to the economic exploitation women are subjected to within the family, a phenomenon that takes place in two different ways. A closer look at Aablè’s family’s economic functioning shows that the female

¹⁹ See the articles of Luisa Veronis (2007) and A-C. Delaisse et al. (2022) for a more detailed discussion of the concept of “third space”.

members provide labour with no salary in return. The mother is confined to a life within the domestic sphere, with no contact with the outside world except her family, and provides unpaid labour for domestic services such as housework, cooking, and childcare. The mother's unpaid labour thus counts in the general economy of the household, just like that of the two daughters of the family. Aablè and her elder sister's being made to drop out of school and to work long hours in the family store without being paid a wage, against their will, can be considered within the category of "family helper" and their exploitation within the family, as explained in Delphy's (1980) theory. Emphasizing the difference between two modes of production in society, the industrial mode and the family mode, Delphy points out the unpaid character of women's work that is taken for granted, thus resulting in patriarchal exploitation. Delphy defines the category of "family helper" as "the ratification of exploitation within the family, since it institutionalizes the fact that some producers are not paid, that is, that the profit from their production belongs to their relative, husband or father" (pp. 27–28). Aablè's father, as the head of the family, opts to make use of the labour power of the girls and his wife under his authority, whereas the boys are allowed to continue their studies and are not asked for their support in the family business, paid or unpaid.

Aablè of *Toutes celles* experiences the constraints on her female self in the form of economic exploitation and the lack of opportunities, for only being a girl, in terms of being denied the right to continue her studies, whereas in *Au grand soleil*, the protagonist faces the lack of opportunities in her professional life when she wants to pursue her acting career in Lebanon, too. In both novels, through her protagonists Aablè, Ikram, and Faïzah, Farhoud shows how women experience patriarchal oppression in different stages of their lives, and how society and family which acts as society's agent in implementing its rules and requirements, regulate

women's lives and personhood by keeping them within designated borders. In her analysis of Farhoud's two plays *Les filles du 5-10-15¢* (1993) and *Jeux de patience* (1997), Louise H. Forsyth (2005) addresses the writer's representation of exile from the perspective of girls and women and contrasts her representation of exile to Palestinian writer Edward Said's (1990) understanding of exile, which he regards as a "cut off from the 'nourishment' of 'tradition' and 'family'". Being confined to private spheres, being imposed the same domestic tasks and responsibilities as well as the same patriarchal restrictions on their lives as in the home country, girls and women in Farhoud's plays experience exile in a more accentuated form of their traditional role, as a continuation of their already disadvantaged position, with no chance to escape the patriarchal pressure of their family and traditions, neither at home nor in the host country, Forsyth (2005) notes. On the same page, in *Toutes celles*, Farhoud represents her female characters suffering from the same patriarchal norms of Lebanon that continue operating and regulating their lives in the host country as well and finding themselves further marginalized in their exilic condition.

Farhoud, all over her text, emphasizes the importance of a woman's independence and self-actualization, her ability to stand on her own two feet and exist in society as a free and self-reliant individual. The writer offers a feminist perspective throughout her text and focuses on the educational and professional opportunities that would enable women to realize these aims. In one of her memories, soon after they migrate to Québec, the young Aablè takes part with her friends in a festival organized at a park in Sainte-Rose, near her house. The election of a symbolic male and female mayor from among the children marks the end of the festivities, and Aablè, too, joins this election campaign upon the encouragement of an instructor and is elected by the voters as the symbolic female mayor of the city. This day is an important day for the protagonist since,

during her candidacy for the election, she does not hear any of the insults such as “Maudite Syrienne, va-t’en donc chez vous!” [Damned Syrian, go home!] she is used to hearing (Toutes celles, p. 72). In addition, the other children do not ask her where she came from or what she is doing there. Being there and being evaluated by others, not by her identity but by the quality of her speech, is valuable for Aablè. This instance in the protagonist’s life where she is voted for by the majority is also significant in terms of showing that Aablè possesses a feminist awareness not only beyond her age but also beyond her time and beyond people’s mentality at that time. When, at the end of the symbolic election, the real mayor of the city comes to congratulate the child male and female mayor for their success and hand over the keys of the city to them for one day, Aablè asks him who will really become the mayor since two of them are elected for this position. When the little girl also asks the mayor if Sainte-Rose has previously seen “une mairesse” [a female mayor], the latter answers positively: “Bien sûr, ma femme est mairesse!” [Of course, my wife is a female mayor] (Toutes celles, p. 72). However, this is not the reply that the young Aablè expects and insists: “Je précise: pas la femme du maire, que je veux dire, mais une vraie mairesse élue. Il me regarde comme si je disais une chose des plus étranges, mais ne répond pas.” [I specify: not the mayor's wife, I mean, but a real elected mayor. He looks at me as if I’m saying the strangest thing but doesn’t respond] (Toutes celles, pp. 72–73). Condemning the societal and cultural norms that control and limit women’s autonomy by focusing on Lebanon, her home country, Farhoud simultaneously offers an extensive critique of patriarchy by challenging the male hegemony in Canada, her adopted country, as well.

VIII. Sexuality

In addition to exploring the unequal treatment of boys and girls in family and society and the social pressure and obstacles put before women to hinder their self-development and prevent them from realizing their full potential as free individuals, Farhoud discusses sexuality as another area of gender disparity and an overarching system of regulation in women's lives. As Forsyth (2005) rightly observes, Farhoud is among the first Québec writers to give voice to migrant girls and women and a pioneer in terms of conveying their demand for bodily autonomy, a move that echoes in today's "My Body Belongs to Me" calls. The female protagonist of *Toutes celles* encounters the first intervention to her bodily freedom at the age of seven, when her father, one day, asks her what she wants to do when she grows up, and she answers that she wants to be a dancer or a nun without any hesitation. The father expresses his understanding of her daughter's intention to opt for being a nun in the future for the simple reason that she has been studying with the sisters in a Catholic school, as well as his understanding of her daughter's comparing praying to dancing as a reason for her wish to be a dancer. Nevertheless, he refers to Lebanese cultural and social norms that place limits on the self-expression of the female body and points out the regulations that deem it socially unacceptable for a woman to show her legs and thighs. While doing this, Aablè's father uses his usual method of indoctrinating rules by persuasion, without any apparent sign of forcing or imposing:

Wallah! prier c'est comme danser... Bon, mais pour danser, il faut montrer ses jambes et ses cuisses nues. Ça ne te dérange pas? Est-ce que tu n'auras pas honte que les gens te regardent et pensent que tu es une fille de rien, une mauvaise fille.

[Wallah! praying is like dancing... Well, but to dance, you have to show your bare legs and thighs. Doesn't it bother you? Won't you be ashamed that people look at you and think you're a worthless girl, a bad girl?] (Toutes celles, pp. 31–32).

Aablè, the adult narrator, looks back to her seven-year-old girl self, who possesses an awareness beyond her age, and immediately grasps what her father implies and reflects on the meaning of the words used by her father, such as “mauvaise fille” [bad girl] and “aayb”, “honte” [shame], [shameful]. Farhoud, through her focus on the word “honte” [shame] which is a particularly loaded word for girls and women in Lebanese culture and society, emphasizes the material dimensions of the oppression of women. Establishing the covering of the body as a standard of moral code, the patriarchal culture of the author's home country sets the norms differently for women and men, controls and regulates women's dress and appearance, and imposes the burden of the “aayb” on the shoulders of women:

La “honte”, mot pesant, chargé de mille sens, qu'on apprend presque à la naissance quand on est une fille, et beaucoup plus tard quand on est un garçon. Même bébé, on ne montre pas le sexe de la fille... Aayb. Bien avant de savoir parler, la petite fille sait tirer sur sa robe pour cacher ses fesses mais surtout son sexe, pendant que son frère se pavane tout nu sous l'œil attendri de ses parents, si fiers de leur progéniture.

[“Shame”, a heavy word, loaded with a thousand meanings, that we learn almost at birth when we are a girl, and much later when we are a boy. Even as a baby, we don't show the girl's sex... Aayb. Long before she can speak, the little girl knows how to pull on her dress to hide her buttocks, but above all, her sex, while her brother struts around naked under the tender gaze of her parents, so proud of their offspring] (Toutes celles, p. 31).

Farhoud heavily condemns this mentality where boys are taught to take pride in their body and sexuality whereas girls are taught, from the very day they are born, to hide theirs and criticizes the use of the social apparatus of “aayb” to regulate the female body and the borders of the women’s place in family and society. Again, in a rather optimistic tone, Aablè does not blame her father totally for being a man with a backward mentality since she is aware that he is more open and more permissive than many men of his generation and encourages his daughters to be strong and do what seems good to them. On the other hand, the protagonist criticizes her father for not fully integrating into Canadian society and for his failure to adopt Western values by sticking to the norms of his home country and expecting his daughters to do the same.

Farhoud’s representation of Aablè’s family and its internal dynamics points out the material, concrete, and physical reality of relations based on sex and can be read as a reflection of the rule of patriarchy, the male domination over women, and the appropriation of one “sex class” by the other, as theorized by Guillaumin (2003). The subordinate position of Aablè, her sister, and her mother, in which they are dominated by the father and have no say in their lives, is an outcome of the relations of exploitation and domination based on women’s being appropriated by men. These relations that Guillaumin (2003) terms “sexage” are configured in a way that the members of the dominated category, in this case, women, are the property of other individuals, the dominating class of men, with their bodies and souls. The fact that Aablè has to leave school and work in the family store for long hours with no salary against her will shows that her time, her body, and her soul are appropriated by the father, as this is he who gets to decide about the trajectory of Aablè’s life. The same is true for her sister, who, unlike the boys in the family, is made to stop studying and support the family business, which means providing unpaid labour as

well as being deprived of a decent future. Furthermore, the sisters cannot ask their mother to intercede with their father on behalf of them because she has no power either.

The mother, too, with her boundaries set within the private sphere and being imposed on with the duty of providing domestic services, must act according to the will of her husband and has no choice but to fully accept her situation, even in big decisions like migrating to another country. The women in the family are thus given the status of an object, concerning their being functional like instruments and used with no payment in return and with regard to their deprivation of subjectivity. On a similar note, Farhoud's exploration of the theme of female sexuality in the context of Aablè's conversation with her father about her prospective profession and the use of the control mechanism on female bodies by means of the concept of "aayb" [shame] reveals the dimensions of "sexage" at a societal level and shows how women are appropriated by men collectively in terms of general social relations, in addition to their exploitation within family relations.

In both novels, *Toutes celles* and *Au grand soleil*, Farhoud discusses sexuality and constraints on women's bodily autonomy, also in relation to the controversial topic of virginity, a taboo in conservative cultures and societies. In *Toutes celles*, through the character of Aablè, the adult narrator reflecting on the customs of Lebanon, her home country, Farhoud explores how the concepts of "female virginity" and "chastity" are constructed in a way to control women and how women are intimidated with the constructed idea of "honor" and "family honor," a psychological and material burden only women are made to carry:

La virginité par exemple, ou plutôt le danger de... et la catastrophe si... on venait à perdre ce joyau. Jamais dit tel quel, mais narré à demi-mot, depuis l'enfance. Dans les

histoires, on remplaçait ce qui se trouve entre les jambes de la fille par «honneur» et, plus effrayant encore, par “honneur de la famille”.

[Virginity for example, or rather the danger of... and the catastrophe if... we were to lose this jewel. Never said as it is, but narrated half-heartedly since childhood. In the stories, what is between the girl's legs was replaced by ‘honor’ and, even more frighteningly, by “family honor”] (*Toutes celles*, p. 115).

Farhoud also points out the expression or suppression of female sexuality, a topic she further elaborates on in *Au grand soleil*, in terms of the vocabulary used in language. The adult narrator Aablè tells how she thought, for a long time, that the word “vagina” does not exist in Arabic, her mother tongue, until years later, when she reads Arabic erotic tales translated into French, and then she sees that this word has “many and very pretty synonyms” (*Toutes celles*, p. 115).

The theme of sexuality is more extensively covered by Farhoud in her second autofictional novel, *Au grand soleil* which focuses on the story of the two sisters in their 20s following their return to Lebanon. Towards the end of *Toutes celles*, the father’s nostalgic will to repatriate his family to the home country hangs like the sword of Damocles over Aablè since the protagonist is partly aware of what is waiting for them, as women, in the home country. By considering the reflections and impacts of the Lebanese cultural norms on her father’s mentality and parenting style, a small sample of the culture in the home country, as well as by reading between the lines in her father’s expressions, Aablè can make some inferences about the nature of the society and culture back there and the possible implications of being exposed to it in terms of her sex and her lifelong passion and profession of acting:

Je sais que pour nous, les filles, le feu qui couvait ici va éclater au Liban et faire des flammèches et embraser nos vies, tout simplement parce que nous sommes des filles. Nous serons asphyxiées par les interdits liés à notre sexe, et sûrement à mon métier d'actrice, si j'arrive à avoir là-bas un semblant de métier. Actrice, aussi bien dire putain. Je pressens tout cela, je le devine entre les mots que mon père n'a pas voulu trop clarifier.

[I know that for us, girls, the fire that was smoldering here will erupt in Lebanon, and flare up, and set our lives ablaze, simply because we are girls. We will be asphyxiated by the prohibitions linked to our sex, and certainly to my job as an actress, if I manage to have any semblance of a job there. Actress might also mean whore. I can feel all this; I guess it between the words that my father did not want to clarify too much] (*Toutes celles*, p. 202).

The protagonist is also aware of the difference in character between herself and her sister, regarding their possible adaptation and integration to Lebanon, and gives her sister, who is on good terms with traditions under the appearance of a modern girl, a higher chance of surviving in their new cultural and social environments. Not giving any voice to this sister in the first text, Farhoud focuses largely on this sister named Faïzah in *Au grand soleil* and addresses the different types of challenges the two sisters face in their reverse exile to Lebanon as two young adult women.

IX. An Intersectional Analysis of the Female Experience in Exile

Looking into the ways the protagonist and the other female characters of *Toutes celles* go through the migration process requires a focus on various aspects of their identities and

intersections between various forms of oppression, resulting in unique experiences for each one of them. Aablè and her elder sister face sex discrimination in terms of the father's unequal treatment of boys and girls in the family, not allowing the latter to continue their studies and making them help run the family store. Though the impact of this oppressive act on the elder sister is not mentioned in the narrative, the paralyzing effect it has on Aablè is explored in detail throughout the novel. The fact that Aablè and her sister are made to work in the shop for long hours without any salary, as opposed to the brothers' privilege to continue studying with no responsibility to earn a living, displays the class and gender dimensions of the two girls' oppression. As a traditionalist, the father clearly intends his daughters to marry and become mothers with no chance of professional fulfillment. This may explain why he is so keen to return to Lebanon when the girls reach puberty.

Farhoud, throughout her text, offers various other instances in which the female protagonist encounters the restrictive and discriminative cultural codes of her Lebanese ethnicity, both in Lebanon and Canada. Thus, sex, class, and ethnic culture stand out as the main factors that create oppression for the protagonist and her sister, and the two girls experience exile under more difficult conditions than their brothers following their arrival in Québec. As a matter of fact, Farhoud in *Toutes celles* assigns no voice or action to Aablè's brothers; they are briefly mentioned in the context of their ability to attend school, as opposed to her narrative in *Au grand soleil*, where two brothers, particularly Adib, the elder brother, are part of the text with their own story and are addressed relatively more in depth. The narrative in *Toutes celles* mainly focuses on Aablè as a young girl determined to construct herself a free self-hood and individuality while at the same time struggling against the restrictions resulting from her class, ethnicity, and female identity in the context of her exilic condition.

Jules Falquet's (2014) analysis might shed light on Aablè's condition in terms of emphasizing that the idea that work would liberate women may not always be true and that the interlocking relations of sex, "race," and class must be taken into account for a complete understanding and transformation of the situation of each and every woman. Falquet's concept of "communicating vessels," a system of interconnected structural power relations based on sex, "race," and class, points out that any change in one of these areas would have effects on the others and illustrates that what looks like benefits for women in the context of neoliberal globalization—professional opportunities opening for them, for instance—may be to their disadvantage and result in the exploitation of working-class and racialized people, half of them being women (p. 238). Through this lens, Aablè and her sister's work in the family store appears to be positive in terms of challenging the traditional discourse that sets home as the default setting for women and in terms of women's employment. However, the two sisters' participation in economic life also results in their deprivation of the right to study and the opportunity to thrive, which shows that working out of the domestic sphere does not entail a liberation per se. Moreover, the fact that this situation takes place against Aablè's will is an intervention in the young girl's autonomy and selfhood, and the two girls, as "family helpers" (Delphy, 1980), receive no payment in return for their working unremittingly in the store, which is evidence of their appropriation and exploitation.

Addressing Farhoud's representation of exile in her two plays *Les filles du 5-10-15¢* (1993) and *Jeux de patience* (1997), Forsyth (2005) focuses on the different ways the writer's female characters refuse resignation and affirm resistance to their exilic condition. The protagonists in these two plays defy their exile and female condition in the form of active witnessing by speaking out their own truths, either by writing or recording their voices on a tape

recorder. The experiences of Kaokab and Amira in *Les filles du 5-10-15¢* are very similar to that of Aablè and her elder sister in that they, too, are two sisters who are made by their father to drop out of school in order to help run the family store and work there without a salary, in contrast to the brothers of similar age experiencing no such restrictions. Kaokab, the younger sister, displays an act of agency and resistance by recording the thoughts and questions she cannot openly express to her parents on an old tape recorder. As for Aablè's resistance to exile in *Toutes celles*, it manifests itself in the form of acting, another passion of Farhoud in addition to writing. Performing on stage becomes for the young girl a way of constructing an identity, claiming her voice, and affirming her agency in producing a future for herself.

The case of Aablè's mother is another example of how "oppressions work together in producing injustice," in Patricia Hill Collins' words (2000, p. 18), since she is portrayed in a uniquely marginalized position compared to her daughters. In a situation that can be explained by the traditional mother role in the patriarchal Lebanese family rather than a condition resulting from old age, she is confined to the home and detached from the social world, with the burden of the responsibility of taking care of the family and home on her shoulders. In addition, she is deprived of the opportunity to learn French, a vital survival tool in her new social and cultural environment, in contrast to her daughters and the other male members of the family who enjoy this privilege. Her husband's imposing the duty of preserving the mother tongue and keeping speaking Arabic with the children at all times on her puts the mother in a totally disadvantaged situation in terms of gaining the required linguistic skills. Consequently, transformed into a being that can breathe only at home and that is dependent on her husband and daughters for all outside tasks, the mother's experience of exile differs from that of the rest of her family, being the outcome of a unique experience of oppression stemming from her sex, ethnicity, and migrant

condition. Language becomes another source of subordination and subjugation, locating her at the periphery of society and the mother, in her forced isolation, experiences an exile within exile.

X. Partial Conclusion

In *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015), which tells the story of Aablè's migration to Québec and her childhood and adolescence years in a new land, Farhoud represents exile as one that presents several challenges for the female subject. The protagonist, thanks to her young age and dedicated nature, manages to overcome some of these challenges and navigates successfully in this unfamiliar linguistic and cultural environment. Farhoud presents the protagonist's passion for acting as a means of survival she sticks to during this transition period and as the major component that shapes her personality and identity in these years of character formation.

In this text inspired by her life story, Farhoud tells about her mother, grandmother, and other female figures who have positively touched her life. The paternal grandmother Jana, a strong and autonomous character who becomes a businessperson and opens several shops in Montréal, is an example of success and a role model for her granddaughter, who considers her a feminist well ahead of her time. Sister Marguerite, Aablè's teacher at the Catholic school when she first arrives in Québec, who encourages the protagonist to go on stage and act, is the person who gives the young girl the meaning of her life: acting. Marcienne Villeneuve-Groulx, a teacher of diction and acting for young people who appreciates Aablè's great talent on the stage and offers her free acting courses at her drama school, is the woman who contributes to the protagonist's entry into professional life. Madame Chaussé, a middle-aged woman hired by Aablè's father to work as a salesperson in the shop, is a character who supports the protagonist

academically as well as in rehearsing her acting roles at school. Farhoud presents all these women as influential female figures who changed the protagonist's life positively.

As for the mother, a figure that the protagonist loves very much and whose absence she cannot bear, is represented by Farhoud as a character to exemplify the negative condition of women in family and society. The mother is portrayed as a passive woman who is always within the domestic space, busy with household chores, and who depends on her two daughters and husband for the outside businesses. The mother's speaking only Arabic, her mother tongue, and her deprivation of linguistic skills in French and the means to acquire them are the factors that contribute to her marginalized position. Thus, exile for this particular character of mother becomes a more difficult context, with the patriarchal rules of her home country and culture continuing to create her oppression under worse conditions and paving the way for a further marginalized position in the exilic background.

Farhoud, in *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015), offers a critique of the patriarchal norms of Lebanese society and culture and their impact on female subordination in her illustration of several instances in Aablè's life, with significant references to the issue of son preference and the undervaluing of daughters, which deprives the protagonist and her sister of the right to education and career opportunities. Farhoud, through her female characters in the novel, also draws attention to the economic exploitation women are subject to within the family by highlighting the fact that the female members of the family provide labour with no salary in return. The author, throughout her text, emphasizes the importance of a woman's independence and self-actualization, her ability to stand on her feet and exist in society as a free and self-reliant individual. Farhoud thus offers a feminist perspective by highlighting the educational and professional opportunities that would enable women to realize these aims and the social pressure

and obstacles put before women to hinder their self-development and prevent them from realizing their full potential as a free individual.

Farhoud discusses sexuality as another area of gender disparity and an overarching system of regulation of women's bodies and lives. Focusing on the patriarchal culture of Lebanon, where boys are taught to take pride in their bodies and sexuality whereas girls are taught to be ashamed of theirs and hide it, the author criticizes the use of the social apparatus of "aayb" [shame] to control the female body and the borders of women's existence in family and society. Farhoud, in this frame, explores how the concepts of "female virginity" and "chastity" are created to keep women's bodies under surveillance and how women are intimidated by the constructed idea of "honor" and "family honor," a psychological and material burden only women are made to carry in Lebanese society.

Chapter 6 Abla Farhoud's *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017)

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on Abla Farhoud's *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), an autofictional text that can partly be considered the second part of the story the author tells in her 2015 novel *Toutes celles que j'étais*, which I analyzed in my previous chapter. I will start by providing general information about the novel, including the form, the plot, the themes, the main characters, and the stylistic devices used by the author with reference to autobiographical elements in the narrative.

In my analysis part, I will explore how Farhoud represents this story of "homecoming," a reverse exile, through the eyes of Ikram and Faïzah, two female characters in their early 20s. I will deal with the challenges and obstacles the women face and the struggles they find themselves in through their migration experience. Accordingly, I will pay attention to the contexts in which the author portrays these female characters. In this frame, in two subsequent sections, I will discuss Farhoud's depiction of the female condition in Lebanese society, the constraints on women's career choices, and the patriarchal control on women's bodies and sexuality, with a special focus on the author's discussion of female virginity and chastity used as a commodity. I will then deal with the sun metaphor and its significance for the narrative, followed by another section where I will analyze Farhoud's comparison of the Canadian and Lebanese cultures. My analysis of *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017) will come to an end with the section where I will provide an intersectional perspective on the representation of female oppression and discuss how gender and sexuality intersect with ethnic and cultural identity to inform the unique experiences of the female characters.

II. Overview of the Novel

Abla Farhoud's novel *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017) is set in Beirut, Lebanon, between 1965 and 1969 and tells the story of the Abdelnour family, who return to their native country, Lebanon, after spending fourteen years in Québec. This autofictional text can be considered the continuation of Farhoud's 2015 novel *Toutes celles que j'étais*, inspired by the early life of the author. In this first text, the author tells the story of Aablè, a young girl who migrates from Lebanon to Québec with her family. After spending fourteen years in Montréal, Aablè and her family travel back to their home country, and *Au grand soleil* continues this story with different characters under different names and with some changes in the plot. Abla Farhoud, in an interview on her novel *Au grand soleil*, expresses that she remains deeply marked by memories of those "extrêmement difficiles" [extremely difficult] Lebanese years, but that writing has enabled her to get rid of "une boule" [a lump] that had been suffocating her for over 40 years (Maalouf, 2017). In this novel of Farhoud, the decision of repatriation is taken by the father, and the family consisting of the mother and six children, Faïzah, Adib, Ikram, Daoud, Soraya, and Rozy comply with that decision and leave their comfortable lifestyle in Montréal behind them. The mother, the eldest daughter Faïzah, the younger son Daoud, and the younger daughters Soraya and Rosy are the first to go to Beirut. Two years later, Adib, the eldest son, and Ikram, the second daughter of the family, follow them. And finally, the father, Anouar Abdelnour, arrives in the home country.

Farhoud, in *Au grand soleil*, explores the themes of exile and identity with a particular focus on sexuality and the condition of women through her female protagonists in their early 20s. This autofictional text features many similarities with the author's lived experiences (Kačkutė, 2023). Farhoud, born in 1945 in Lebanon, moved to Canada with her family when she was a

child and returned to Lebanon at the age of twenty in 1965. However, in 1969, she went to France and then to Canada again, this time to settle in Montréal, Québec. In this novel, Ikram, a young woman with a passion for theatre, is one of the two heroines. Ikram can be seen as the author surrogate of Farhoud since the protagonist pursuing an acting career in Québec mirrors Farhoud herself, an actress, dramatist, and playwright in her early career. In this novel that tells the story of a backward journey, a reverse exile, or a “homecoming,” Farhoud explores the challenges the family, particularly the two young adult daughters of the family, experience in adapting to the traditional culture and values of Lebanon, the home country where they return after having been raised in Québec.

The novel consists of 34 chapters, with events unfolding in chronological order. There are four narrators in the novel: Youssef, the father’s cousin; Faïzah; Adib; and Ikram, three older children of the Abdelnour family. Each chapter is told by one of these characters, in first-person narrator mode, and offers alternating viewpoints on the experiences of the family following the repatriation. In three unconsecutive chapters, we read the interior monologue of Youssef, the cousin of the father of the family, who welcomes and takes care of the family in their new life in their home country. The remaining chapters are devoted to Faïzah, Adib, and Ikram, and thus, the reader gains insights into the events mainly through the lens of these three young adult members of the family. In addition to her novels, Abla Farhoud is known for her playwright, dramatist, and acting career, and her dramatist skills are mirrored in the formal organization of *Au grand soleil*. As Nancy M. Arenberg (2021) notes, the structure of the novel, where the story is narrated in a circular form of alternating monologues of the four characters, similar to a theatrical chorus, echoes Farhoud’s artistic style as a renowned dramatist. This stylistic choice of the author also allows her to point out a social change illustrated by these young voices: the

emergence of new ways of considering life and living it, less bound to the community, more focused on the person and their personal values, no longer wanting to sacrifice their singularity to preserve traditions that have lost their meanings.

The story mainly focuses on the experiences of the two daughters of the family, Faïzah and Ikram, 22 and 20 years old, respectively, and the challenges they encounter as two young women in adapting to the social and cultural norms of Lebanese society after growing up in a newly progressive Canadian environment. What should be noted here is that in *Au grand soleil*, in this second autofictional novel of Farhoud, the author describes the condition of the women of the Abdelnour family, of Ikram, Faïzah, and the mother (the protagonist's name is Aablè, and her sister and mother are anonymous in the first text) in Québec as more favorable than it is depicted in *Toutes celles*. The patriarchal cultural norms that weigh the female characters down in the first narrative are not mentioned in *Au grand soleil*, so the three women, particularly the two sisters, are portrayed in the context of a full contrast of the Canadian and Lebanese social and cultural environments. The narrative that starts with the father's wish to re-establish roots in the native country ends with the disillusionment of the family at the place they call "home." The frustration is particularly felt by the two sisters, who have to witness firsthand that Lebanon, their native country, is not a promising "home" for women. The focus on the experiences of Ikram and Faïzah and their resistance to patriarchal norms allows Farhoud to offer a sharp contrast between Québec and Lebanon from a feminist perspective. The two sisters are struggling hard to adapt to the restrictive customs of Lebanese society, and this becomes a story of resistance, especially for Ikram, who does not passively accept what is presented to her as cultural traditions and norms but instead resists and rebels against this patriarchal pressure imposed on women. At the end of the story, following the traumatic events that affect the family, Farhoud depicts Ikram as a

woman with no choice but to leave Lebanon and move to France. Faïzah, the older sister of the family, escapes to a monastery in the mountains to live with the nuns, in seclusion and far away from all the pressures of society.

III. Constraints on Women's Career Choices

Focusing on the experiences and disillusionment of the two sisters in this familial quest to discover roots, Farhoud provides a literary snapshot of Lebanese society in the 1960s that delineates the gender roles between men and women. The children of the Abdelnour family, raised in Québec, know their homeland only through the favorable and praising narratives of their father. Ikram and her brother Adib arrive in their home country two years later than their mother and their other siblings. Ikram welcomes homecoming with great enthusiasm, and the first few months pass in excitement and wonder, particularly face-to-face with the perpetual sun and the lively atmosphere of the country after a cold Canada. Indeed, as the title of the novel suggests, the country first strikes the protagonist with its “grand soleil.” The text includes several references to the sun of the country that initially conquers one's heart but then turns out to be something dazzling, something that prevents one from seeing the real nature of the people and phenomena in the country.

Ikram spends her first days in Beirut visiting popular spots of the city and spending time with her brother Daoud, an 18-year-old young man studying architecture. After a certain while, she decides to look for professional opportunities in the city. As she has a passion for theatre and was an actress back in Québec, she wants to pursue her career in Beirut, too. Following a few trials, she manages to find two acting roles, one in a theatre production and the other on television. However, when she informs her family about her decision, she faces the negative

reaction of her parents, particularly her father, who tells her that a young woman's acting would not be approved in Lebanon. "Tu sais, ma fille, nous sommes au Liban... Tu le sais, ma fille, au Liban... une fille de bonne famille ne joue pas au théâtre ni à la télévision," [You know, my daughter, we are in Lebanon... You know it, my daughter, in Lebanon... a girl from a good family does not act in the theatre or on television] the father speaks, echoing the social and cultural restrictions placed on women in society and emphasizing the cultural differences between Canada and their home country (Au grand soleil, p. 87). This is an unexpected reaction for Ikram since the same father who allows and even takes pride in her daughter's pursuing an acting profession and appearing on television while in Montréal now opposes her decision to do so in Beirut: "Je parle du Liban. Nous vivons au Liban, Ikram. Les règles ont changé," [I'm talking about Lebanon. We live in Lebanon, Ikram. The rules have changed] the father justifies his decision (Au grand soleil, p. 88). However, Ikram, angry and determined, does not take a step back face-to-face with this obstacle to her professional opportunities and threatens her father with leaving home: "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," [Tell me clearly: I don't want you in my house. I will go begging or fucking. But I will act in the theatre and on television] (Au grand soleil, p. 88). Declaring that she will perform her career at all costs, even at the cost of being a prostitute or begging in the streets, Ikram revolts against the cultural shackles the father, actually, the patriarchal society wants to put on her.

In accordance with her name, which means "honour" or "esteem" in Arabic, Ikram displays an act of dignity and self-esteem, takes a tough stance, and shows resistance to patriarchy by declaring her will to be the person she wants to be without any compromise on her freedom or her personality: "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," [I don't want to sell my soul. Doing what my father and his society want me to do, giving in, giving up what I love, becoming what I am not, would be selling my art and my soul] (*Au grand soleil*, p. 92). Ikram declares in this instance her objection and resistance to "sexage," to the appropriation of women by men, as expressed by Colette Guillaumin (2003). The protagonist struggles against the power relations, disguised as culture and tradition, that aim at appropriating her self-ownership and that deprive her of freedom to exercise agency and have control over her own body, over her own life. Farhoud, through the situation Ikram falls into, provides a sharp contrast between the two countries, Canada and Lebanon, and how these two cultures differ from each other in their perspective towards women's pursuing an acting career and the condition of women in society. The desire to pursue her passion for acting becomes the major struggle of the protagonist in this country, and the parents have no choice but to accept their daughter's decision, though reluctantly.

Though Farhoud makes her two female protagonists meet the same fate in terms of the deep disillusionment they find themselves in, she portrays the characters of the two sisters differently in terms of their personalities. She portrays Ikram as a candid, frank, honest, and idealistic person. The young girl is naïve in a way that she is not able to detect lies and believes in the goodness of others until proven otherwise. "Je n'arrive pas à déceler les intentions imbriquées dans les mensonges ni à percevoir la logique interne de cette société dans laquelle j'essaie de vivre," [I can't detect the intentions embedded in the lies or perceive the internal logic of this society in which I try to live], she says (*Au grand soleil*, p. 111). Farhoud also depicts Ikram as a powerful and brave character since she does not yield to the oppression that society wants to put on her and resists the patriarchal rules.

As for Faïzah's personality, based on Ikram's observations about her sister after she joins her in Lebanon, the reader finds out that Faïzah considerably changes in two years in the home country. Ikram is having difficulty recognizing her sister, who has almost become a stranger to her. Farhoud depicts Faïzah as a young woman who quickly adapts to the realities of Lebanon, subscribes to the gender roles and customs the culture imposes on women, and becomes a conformist. Having come to Lebanon two years earlier than the others, Faïzah already gets used to the traditions and requirements of the country, being hypocritical, committing what society regards as "fault" but in secrecy, and giving another appearance to the outside. She dreams of finding an appropriate husband, and therefore, she finds herself ready to make compromises on her personality and the independent lifestyle she got used to in Canada. Now that she sees the purity and honesty of her siblings, Ikram and Adib, who just arrived from Québec, Faïzah feels guilty of her corruptness; she feels ashamed of herself and of playing a dirty game in secrecy with men and with society.

IV. Control on Women's Bodies and Sexuality

Farhoud portrays Faïzah, the elder daughter of the Abdelnour family, who arrives in Lebanon two years earlier than Ikram and Adib, as a young woman who is well-adapted to her home country, speaks Arabic well, works as the manager of two shops in the centre of Beirut, and takes care of the family until the arrival of the father, Anouar Abdelnour. Though she works and is financially independent, what she wants is to make a good marriage and stop working. The eldest daughter taking care of the family, who has a responsible character and is happy with the happiness of her family, goes through a character change in Lebanon, under the "grand soleil." The angel of the family in Canada starts to think of her own pleasure and her own profit in

Lebanon. Faïzah is depicted as a self-sufficient girl in addition to being logical and pragmatic in that once she has gotten to know the Lebanese culture and society, she now acts accordingly by following the conventions and acting as society demands, even though this is not always what she approves or desires.

Except for a few characters who possess good personality traits, Farhoud, in her novel, represents Lebanese society of the 1960s as consisting of hypocritical people. Faïzah, having gained insight into the characteristics of the society that she lives in, adapts to it and acts accordingly; she, too, acts hypocritically, plays the game according to the rules, and gives the society what it wants. Faïzah has full confidence in her wit and is happy to have been able to decipher the codes of the society she lives in. After she arrives in Lebanon, it does not take long for her to become cognizant of the focus on male sexuality and patriarchal surveillance over the female body in the country. “Ce pays est un sexe ambulante. Le sexe est imprimé dans le regard des hommes,” [This country is a walking sex. Sex is imprinted in the eyes of men], she remarks (*Au grand soleil*, p. 17). Given the conservative structure of Lebanese society, Faïzah acknowledges that a young girl must keep her virginity until the day she gets married, and having understood that the road to a good marriage requires preserving it, she thinks it should be preserved at all costs, as a smart girl would do in that society.

Farhoud, through the voice of Faïzah, condemns the objectification and commodification of women's bodies in the patriarchal culture of Lebanon. The author represents female virginity as a commodity, a product that can be bought or sold in this culture, and the importance attached to female chastity shows itself as one of the ways of the policing of society on women's bodies. Faïzah, in her interior monologue, tells how virginity is used as a standard that sets the value of a young woman, and for this reason, girls from rich families go to Europe

and go through surgical operations to have their hymen restored. Actually, Faïzah disapproves of this cultural and social system that forces women to be deceitful about their virginity. She nevertheless complies with it and is ready to do what it requires: “On ne naît pas hypocrite, on le devient,” [We are not born a hypocrite, we become one] (Au grand soleil, p. 17) Faïzah declares, as Farhoud’s wink to Simone de Beauvoir’s (1949/1990) famous saying, “On ne naît pas femme: on le devient” [One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman] (p. 6) and to feminism.

Paola Tabet (2012) uses the concept of “sexual-economic exchange” to point out the economic aspect of the sexual relationship between men and women. The Italian anthropologist deploys this concept to refer to the relations between men and women that involve some kind of payment by the man in exchange for the sexual services offered by a woman. She regards these relations of exchange of sexuality between men and women as a continuum, with marriage on one end and prostitution on the other, and argues that this compensation can be in the form of money and other material benefits such as food, housing, and clothes, as well as access to jobs and resources. Tabet also notes that this sexual-economic exchange is “the *general* pattern of men's and women's relations” in society, and women's sexuality is constructed in a way to condition girls and women culturally to submit to male desire and domination, starting from childhood (2012, para. 19, emphasis in original). In a society where female sexuality is treated as merchandise, virginity is configured as an inseparable component of personal and family honor to enable its deployment as a way to monitor female sexuality. Society regulates women’s sexuality in such a way that girls and women, unlike men, cannot enjoy sexual freedom without suffering negative social consequences. Women who do not comply with the restrictive norms on sexuality and seek sexual pleasure outside of marriage are marginalized and stigmatized.

Farhoud criticizes this patriarchal policing and control over women's bodies, this surveillance system that classifies women's bodies as acceptable or unacceptable according to their status of virginity, and equates a woman's worth to her virginity through the voice of Ikram, who exclaims her rage and revolt against this oppression:

Je suis écœurée. 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. Je n'en peux plus de ces yeux possessifs et malsains, j'en ai assez de ces regards qui se vautrent sur mon corps. Je n'en veux plus de ces yeux qui glissent sur moi et qui ont juste envie de me déflorer.

[I'm disgusted. I'm tired of this mentality, this rude joke that is played on our bodies. I've had enough. I don't want to be a virgin anymore. If only to thumb my nose at this masquerade. I can't take these possessive and sick eyes anymore, I'm tired of these stares sprawling on my body. I don't want those eyes that slide over me and just want to deflower me] (Au grand soleil, pp. 121–122).

By declaring so, Ikram states her determination to maintain control of her body and push back all the hands that could try to touch her bodily autonomy. As she sees virginity—the purity myth—as a means of oppression and violence against women, Ikram decides to free herself from the control of patriarchal jurisdiction by getting rid of her virginity: “J’en ai ras le bol du secret, de ce voile de pureté moyenâgeux, de cette société féodale aux mœurs arriérées,” [I’m fed up with secrecy, with this medieval veil of purity, with this feudal society with backward customs] (Au grand soleil, p. 122). With her reference to the Middle Ages, Ikram refutes the “backwardness”

of society's mindset, the strict division of the sexes in Lebanon that places women in a subordinated and oppressed position.

Through her protagonist, Farhoud presents a materialist feminist critique of Lebanese society in particular and the patriarchy as a power structure in general. In Ikram's words, "Je vais me débarrasser de ce morceau de chair, de cet encombrement que la société a inventé pour nous brimer," [I'm going to get rid of this piece of flesh, this obstruction that society has invented to bully us] Farhoud questions the creation of the myth of female virginity around a "piece of flesh" (Au grand soleil, p. 123). The author's perspective enables a closer look at the socially constructed categories of "woman" and "man" and the natural grouping of human beings as "women" and "men" and offers an example of how this creation of the idea of women as a natural group is used to oppress and exploit women, as expressed by Monique Wittig: "[W]hat we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an "imaginary formation," which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked by the social system) through the network of relationships in which they are perceived" (Wittig, 1992, pp. 11–12). This framework reveals the set of power relations in a patriarchal structure where a "piece of flesh," which is a physical feature as neutral as many others, turns out to be marked by an "ideology of sexual difference" (Wittig, 1992, p. 2) and is given additional imaginary meanings. Indeed, Farhoud, in some sense, makes an allusion and sends her regards to French materialist feminists, Monique Wittig in particular, who was actively involved in the events surrounding the revolt of students in May of 1968, with the following words of Ikram: "Ce sera mon mai 68 à moi! Ah que j'aimerais être à Paris avec les étudiants," [This will be my May 68 to me! Oh how I would like to be in Paris with the students] (Au grand soleil, p. 123).

Farhoud offers another critique of the patriarchal structure of Lebanese society by echoing the materialist feminist view that regards men and women as two classes and points out a struggle between the two (Delphy, 1984; Wittig, 1992). Christine Delphy (1984) treats women's oppression from the point of view of the class relationship between men and women and considers men's, as a class, exploiting women's labour as the cause of women's subjugation, thus highlighting the economic base of female subordination. Deploring the oppressive atmosphere and the unequal gender relations in the country, Farhoud condemns the patriarchy as a set of power relations and regards the relationship between men and women as a battle: "Je n'en peux plus de baisser les yeux. Je suis tannée de cette guerre des sexes, qui a toujours le même gagnant," [I can't take my eyes off anymore. I'm tired of this war of the sexes, which always has the same winner], Ikram speaks (*Au grand soleil*, p. 122). The protagonist, thus, becomes Farhoud's voice criticizing this phallocratic system that regulates even women's gazes, where women must lower their eyes as a sign of their obedience and submission. This hierarchical relationship between men and women in Lebanese society alludes to bell hooks' (1992) analysis exploring the political aspect of the "gaze" during the slavery time. Hooks states that the politics of slavery and the racialized power relations were configured in a way to deny the right to gaze to the slaves and that the slave owners used to punish enslaved black people for looking at them. If "there is power in looking," as hooks (1992) notes (p. 115), then women are denied this right and are positioned in a status similar to that of slaves in Lebanese society.

Actually, Ikram was previously warned against the class of men [that always have something in mind] "ont toujours quelque chose derrière la tête" in Lebanon during the first days of her arrival to the country as she was exploring the city (*Au grand soleil*, p. 31). A female

shopkeeper, who notices that her Arabic is weak and speaks to her in French, understands that she is new in the country and wants to give her some advice:

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.

[The smile is an invitation. I say that for your benefit, you don't know the country yet, men, you know, when they see a young girl [...] If she smiles at them for a second, it's a second too long, they think straight away that she's an easy girl,]

the woman speaks with good intentions (Au grand soleil, p. 31). On these first days when Ikram is still under the influence of the charming sun and landscape of the country, the young girl gets some idea about what might be lying beneath this ambiance, but it is through her sister's calamity hitting her face as a bitter truth that she gains insight into the nature of gender relations and the place of women in the homeland.

Following this encounter with the female merchant, Ikram learns a second lesson about the cultural norms of the homeland that affect women's condition and impose restrictions on the female body during a conversation with her mother, again during her first months in Lebanon. On the days when the family is temporarily living in a summer house by the sea, Ikram frequently goes swimming with her siblings. As she sees that her mother, unlike her father, never accompanies them in swimming, an activity she liked doing while in Montréal, she asks her for the reason. The mother answers that her age is not appropriate to go swimming here, in the homeland, since that would require her to uncover her body. Raised in Québec and accustomed to an independent lifestyle, Ikram gets angry face-to-face with the home country's culture

limiting women's activities and questions the existence of any such written rules that forbid older women from swimming: "Mais où sont-elles écrites, ces règles?" [But where are they written, these rules?] (Au grand soleil, p. 65). In response, the mother states that society would tolerate Ikram and her siblings' going swimming because they are newcomers and they are considered Americans, strangers. However, herself, born and raised in this country, she states she is obliged to abide by society's norms:

Nulle part. Mais moi, je ne peux pas faire semblant que je ne les connais pas et que je ne suis pas d'ici. 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.

[Nowhere. But I can't pretend that I don't know them and that I'm not from here. I was raised here. When I lived in Canada, I was doing like the people there; now I'm here, I do like the people here] (Au grand soleil, p. 65).

The mother, raised in the Lebanese culture, does not question nor resist this traditional system that restricts her freedom and puts her in an unequal status with men, even though she previously enjoyed freedom as a woman while in Montréal. Farhoud portrays the father and the mother as individuals conforming to the cultural norms of the country where they live. While in Québec, they approve and are even proud of Ikram's professional acting career but oppose it now that they are in Lebanon. By the same token, the mother, who enjoys corporeal freedom while in Montréal and goes swimming without any concern about unveiling her body, willingly obeys the rules that forbid older women's swimming in Lebanon. Beyond adopting a lifestyle based on beliefs, values, and principles or beyond having a conservative or progressive worldview of their

own, the parents just conform to the established customs of the country where they live without questioning them.

Farhoud depicts the mother character as a woman in her forties who is not given too much voice in the narrative. The reader does not know her name, but more importantly, her voice is rarely heard, and very few hints are given about her personality. Because the novel is presented from the different perspectives of the four characters, Adib, Faïzah, Ikram, and their cousin Youssef, these characters mention the mother in only a few places. Ikram's questioning of her mother's refusal to go swimming in the sea with the family members is one of these rare instances where the reader gains insight into her personality and worldview. The mother, a housewife who did not receive any formal education, is a woman who adheres to the traditions and customs of Lebanon, the country where she was born and raised. She does not question the designated gender norms and expectations that regulate and control women's bodies, and she compromises on freedom. However, the same woman willingly follows the cultural norms in Québec and tries to behave as people do there.

The mother is represented in the same traditional role during the family's discussion about Ikram's professional future in Lebanon. When the father declares his opinion that their home country is not appropriate for a young woman to pursue an acting career and opposes her daughter's free will, the mother does not make any comment, approving tacitly her husband's views, thus accepting the homeland's patriarchal culture marginalizing women and internalizing its true face behind the shining sun. Unlike the mother character, who is represented as having a weak personality in terms of displaying a feminist stance toward her own position as well as that of her daughter Ikram in Lebanese society, Farhoud represents the character of Faridé, the aunt of Anouar Abdelnour, the father, as a strong and independent woman living in the same

Lebanese city as them. This woman, regarded as a source of wisdom by the whole family, is the person to whom Ikram resorts for her advice at a stage of her life when she can no longer tolerate living in the oppressive atmosphere of Lebanon. The aunt she calls “Amté” advises her to act the way she wants and to go wherever she would be happy.

V. The Sun Metaphor

Farhoud resorts to the powerful metaphor of “sun” in her narrative and makes several references to Lebanon’s sunny and lively landscape. After arriving from Canada to Lebanon, the home country initially draws Ikram’s attention with the hectic atmosphere of Beirut and its perpetual sun that dazzles the eyes, warms her to her very cells, raises her spirits, and gives her the joy of living: “Ici, tout est excitant, tout est différent, tout est charmant, tout est ensoleillé, on ne s’ennuie jamais, même pas une minute de calme ou d’ennui,” [Here, everything is exciting, everything is different, everything is charming, everything is sunny, you never get bored, not even one minute of calmness or boredom] she exclaims and concludes, “Papa a raison: le Liban, c’est le plus beau pays du monde,” [Dad is right: Lebanon is the most beautiful country in the world] (Au grand soleil, p. 30). However, with the events unfolding in the following chapters, Farhoud shows that the country has another face hiding behind this luminous charm that conquers one’s heart as a first impression. The sun, which normally symbolizes life, energy, and positivity, represents a catastrophe for the Abdelnour family but particularly for Ikram and Faïzah as two women. The country associated with the sun weighs down the two sisters, sucks all their life energy, and eventually suffocates them:

Une épée pend à deux pouces de mon cœur, mais je ne sais pas pourquoi elle se trouve là
ni comment la repousser. D’où vient cette angoisse soudaine? Quand je suis arrivée, 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.

[A sword hangs at two inches from my heart, but I don't know why it's there or how to repel it. Where does this sudden anxiety come from? When I arrived, I said to myself that in Lebanon there is too much sun, impossible to be depressed or anxious. Exactly, the sun is starting to weigh on me, I can't stand it anymore, I'm running away from it] (*Au grand soleil*, p. 101).

Nancy M. Arenberg (2021) compares Farhoud’s representation of the homeland in *Au grand soleil* to “a mirage, a deceptive façade on the horizon” and the author’s technique to *trompe-l’oeil*, an artistic device used in architecture, cinema, and theatre to create an optical illusion and present an image in a deceptive way to the gaze of the spectator (2021, p. 339). Farhoud, also a dramatist, successfully deploys this *trompe-l’oeil* mechanism and adapts it to her literary narrative. The image of the country of origin, Lebanon, as a warm and radiant landscape, one that welcomes home and embraces Ikram as a first impression, later turns out to be nothing but a disappointment and becomes a distant mirage on the horizon for her and her sister Faïzah. Thus, Farhoud creates a contrast between illusions and reality using this dominant metaphor of the sun and, through the voice of 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,” according to Arenberg (2021, p. 340).

A closer look at the image of “the sun” in terms of Western mythology shows that the “sun” is regarded as “male” in contrast to the “moon,” which is considered to be “female.” The moon is thought of as female mainly because of its passivity in terms of receiving the sun’s light

as well as due to the resemblance between the lunar month and the menstrual cycle. In patriarchal societies, the sun is usually regarded as masculine, and traditionally, “the sun is associated symbolically with KINGS, paternal authority, worldly status, fame, victory, life force, and force of will” (Biedermann, 1994, p. 330, capitals in original). The author’s choice of “Anouar” for the father’s name in *Au grand soleil* might also be connected to the symbolic meaning of the “sun,” since “Anouar” (with Anwar, the English transliteration), a first name commonly used in the Arab world by both Christian and Muslim Arabs, means “luminous” in Arabic. Accordingly, it can be argued that Farhoud’s metaphor of “Le grand soleil” refers to the chain of meaning “Man/The Father/God/Patriarchy” and the pervasive male power in Lebanese society where “they hide the girls” (*Toutes celles*, p. 203) to make them invisible. In another perspective, Farhoud’s title “Au grand soleil cachez vos filles” [Hide your daughters under the bright sun] can also be read as a warning against the insidious social control strategies from which girls need to be hidden and protected.

VI. Female Sexuality and Desire

Farhoud, in her narrative, presents the matter of female virginity in relation to desire, too. Her protagonist Faïzah, who arrives two years earlier than her sister and now has a grasp of reality concerning the facts and conditions in Lebanon, possesses a more realistic perspective towards the country’s dazzling sun: “Le grand soleil est là pour nous rendre folles,” [The big sun is here to drive us crazy], she says (*Au grand soleil*, p. 18). She speaks about this dizzying aspect of the sun in the context of sexual relationships between men and women and about the role the sun plays in making it hard for a person to take control of their sexual desire and not yield to it. Farhoud here represents the sun and the warm atmosphere it emanates as a seductive fact, an

element that fuels and makes it hard to harness the sexual energy: “La sueur gluante de notre entrejambe dégouline sur nos cuisses endolories à force de les serrer l’une sur l’autre. On n’en peut plus. On cède. C’est ainsi qu’on perd la bataille,” [The sticky sweat from our crotch drips down our sore thighs from squeezing them together. We can't take it anymore. We give in. This is how we lose the battle] (Au grand soleil, p. 18). Because Faïzah sees sexuality as a battlefield, a ground where the two classes confront each other and, as a result, hold or lose power, she regards women’s sexuality as a means of power and as a weapon that can be used against men, given Lebanese men’s obsession with sexuality, as represented by Farhoud.

Farhoud represents her female character as a woman who tries to take agency, create a space of resistance, and find ways of deriving power in this “battlefield” where it is traditionally men who exploit and dominate women. In her attempt to reverse this hierarchical relation of power between men and women, the protagonist considers female virginity as a treasury that must be preserved until the right moment, until a young girl finds an appropriate prospective husband for herself, since she is well aware of the fact that when women lose their value attached to virginity, they consequently lose their power over men: “Une fois qu’il est abîmé, le voile de pureté, comme certains appellent la virginité, ne vaut plus rien. Et nous non plus. Nous perdons alors tout notre pouvoir,” [Once it is damaged, the veil of purity, as some call virginity, is worthless. And neither are we. Then we lose all our power] Faïzah speaks (Au grand soleil, p. 18). Faïzah thinks that men are weak because they desire women and women hold the power as long as they are aware of this male soft spot and can manipulate them as they like:

Faire marcher au doigt et à l’œil les hommes qui nous désirent, c’est un pouvoir effrayant, quand on y goûte une fois, on ne peut plus s’en passer. Parce qu’on sait très bien qu’une fois qu’on est mariée notre pouvoir féminin en prend un sacré coup.

[Making the men who desire us toe the line is a frightening power; when you taste it once, you can't do without it. Because we know very well that once we are married, our feminine power takes a big hit] (*Au grand soleil*, p. 17).

Beyond pointing out sexuality as a power relationship between women and men, using the sun metaphor in this sense allows the author to stress that men are not the only ones who feel sexual desire and have a soft spot for that. With Faïzah speaking about the strength of her desire and the difficulty of not yielding to it, Farhoud gives voice to female desire and sexuality that are suppressed and silenced in the patriarchal order and gives agency to women in this realm where men are traditionally considered to be the ruler.

Faïzah, as a young woman, has strong sexual desires but thinks that virginity should be carefully preserved no matter how strong the sexual urge is. She thinks that a young woman should not be overwhelmed by her desire; she should be strong enough to struggle against it and should not let sensual pleasures get the better of her. She acknowledges that this is the rule of living in this patriarchal society: If a young woman is overcome by her desire, then she loses her chance to get married unless her family is rich enough to take care of this situation. However, despite all her confidence in her wit and self-control, Faïzah cannot avoid experiencing the calamity of her life; she gets hurt over the issue that matters most to her, in which she has the highest self-confidence in terms of having control. The reader is not provided with details concerning how and when this sexual intercourse takes place, except for the fact that Faïzah goes through this experience with a man she loves. However, this experience of Faïzah turns into a scandalous event when she, later, decides to marry Azziz, a lawyer from a rich and reputable family in the city, a husband profile for whom the protagonist has been waiting for a long time.

Though the father does not approve of his daughter marrying Azziz due to the latter's negative personality traits, Faïzah is determined and eager to make this marriage. As, on the eve of the wedding, Faïzah confesses to her fiancé that she lost her virginity, this latter, together with his father, rushes into the house of the Abdelnour family to declare the ending of the engagement and asks them to return the jewelry and gifts they previously presented to Faïzah with the intention of marriage. This declaration comes with degrading words towards the young woman, revealing a private detail of her sexual life to the rest of the family members: “C’est votre fille qui est dégoûtante! Elle est impure. Impure!” [It's your daughter who is disgusting! She is impure. Impure!] utters the fiancé’s father (Au grand soleil, p. 120). Farhoud narrates this scandalous event that makes Faïzah want to commit suicide by throwing herself out of the balcony, through the eyes of Ikram, who, with the rest of the family, watches in horror: “‘Impure’, ça veut dire souillée, dévirginisée, tout le monde sait ça. Ma sœur n’est plus vierge, et c’est la cause de la rupture des fiançailles,” [Impure” means defiled, devirginized, everyone knows that. My sister is no longer a virgin, and this is the cause of the broken engagement,] she says to herself (Au grand soleil, p. 121).

VII. Comparison of the Canadian and Lebanese Cultures

Throughout the narrative, Farhoud portrays Ikram as a representation of Canadian culture and Faïzah as a representation of Lebanon and its values in the 1960s. In the novel, the Canadian society symbolizes integrity as opposed to the Lebanese society, which is represented as corrupted. As the story unfolds, when life slaps Faïzah on the face and she encounters the true face of society with a catastrophic experience, the young woman eventually experiences an awakening and turns her back to this hypocritical society she was previously trying to conform

to. Through the comparison of these two protagonists, Farhoud offers a critique of hypocrisy and wants to draw attention to the stereotypes in conservative societies regarding artists and the common people who make up the rest of society. Refuting the tendency in conservative societies to regard artists as people who have an irresponsible lifestyle, who do not possess or care about ethical values, and to sometimes consider them immoral people, Farhoud, through the character of Ikram, portrays the image of artist as one who does not lie and deceive other people, who is honest, and who has ethical values. In contrast, Faïzah and the members of the Lebanese society, except for a few characters with unspoiled goodness and purity, are depicted in the novel as hypocritical, lying, and deceiving people. Farhoud criticizes this corruption of society in the following words of Ikram: “Les gens sont des menteurs. Ils mentent comme ils respirent, si bien qu’on les croit. On se laisse berner, on se fait avoir à tout coup,” [People are liars. They lie as they breathe; they do this so well that we believe them. We let ourselves be fooled; we get fooled every time] (*Au grand soleil*, p. 107). Farhoud points out here that even though the actors perform, often give life to fictional characters, and pretend to be leading fake lives on stage, they lead a genuine and artless life in reality, they behave as they are without deceiving others. As for common people in society, particularly in conservative societies where there are strict rules regulating behaviors, individuals learn and, in a sense, are forced to act hypocritically, deceive others, and act as someone who they are not in essence. In fact, it is these common people who live a fake life without maybe noticing that they are part of a continuous life-long performance, as represented by Farhoud in *Au grand soleil*.

Farhoud offers a comparison of Canada and Lebanon in terms of their cultural and social structure and strongly criticizes the latter’s cultural and social fabric. While making this, she refers to the religious character of society with no direct focus on any specific religion or

sect. The author does not provide any direct reference to the Abdelnour family's religious adherence, though some practices of the female protagonists have elements of Christianity, such as Ikram's praying to the Virgin Mary or Faïzah's making the sign of the cross when she is praying, which imply that they are Christian. The fact that Faïzah, at the end of the story, takes a radical decision and goes to the monastery up in the mountains to live with the nuns and lead a secluded life also alludes to the Christian identity of the family. However, the first names and surname the author chose for her protagonists are of Arabic origin, and these are names that can be preferred by both Muslim and Christian people. Also, the characters' use of the Arabic word "Allah," which refers to God in Islam, in their daily lives, highlights the interwoven character of culture and religions in the country. As a matter of fact, in the opening chapter of the novel, the author provides several details regarding the cosmopolitan structure of Lebanese society, particularly that of Beirut, the capital city in the 1960s. The reader finds out that this is a city where people from all religions and all sects live side by side, where people wear short skirts along with Islamic headscarves and the djellaba²⁰, and where the Arabic, French, and Armenian languages are spoken. Farhoud emphasizes the elements of harmony and co-existence of cultures, languages, peoples, and religions that make up the Lebanese society and criticizes the society's character as a whole.

Antonia Wimbush (2021), in her book chapter where she offers a comparative analysis of Farhoud's two autofictional novels *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) and *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), explores the literary representations of how women experience migration at different ages and different stages of their lives. Wimbush argues that Farhoud, through her protagonist Ikram in the second novel, presents a perspective towards Lebanon, reminiscent of

²⁰ A long, loose-fitting unisex outer robe or dress with full sleeves mostly worn in the Maghreb region of North Africa.

the orientalist views criticized by Edward Said. Indeed, the author represents the Canadian and Lebanese cultures in sharp contrast, with Lebanon portrayed as a country consisting of people who constantly lie, deceive others, follow no rules, and make promises they never keep:

À travers ce chahut, cette cohue, ce chaos, que l'on appelle ici fawda, énonçant le caractère fondamental de notre pays en général et de Sin el Fil en particulier, les gens rigolent, se querellent, s'amuse, crient, vendent, achètent, se font des courbettes, des crocs-en-jambe, s'injurient, rient, s'encensent, se mentent, et implorent Dieu.

[Through this bedlam, this crush, this chaos, which is called here fawda, stating the fundamental character of our country in general and of Sin el Fil in particular, people make jokes, quarrel, have fun, shout, sell, buy, bow to each other, trip each other up, insult each other, laugh, praise each other to the skies, lie to each other, and implore God] (Au grand soleil, p. 9).

Farhoud provides the representation of Lebanese society with a generalized perspective, except for a few characters who are not hypocritical and corrupt like the grand majority of the people. Ikram regards Lebanon as the source of all the tragedies that hit her and her family and rejects the Lebanese cultural identity, which she finds completely opposite to her values and worldview. That is the reason why she feels relaxed and takes a deep breath after leaving the "Orient" behind her on her journey back from the "home country" in the final scene of the novel. On the same page, Farhoud, through the voice of Faïzah as well, represents a binary opposition between the East and West in the context of their approach to women and female virginity:

C'est là, exactement là qu'elle est, mon erreur: j'ai fait confiance en oubliant que, 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.

[That is, exactly where it is, my mistake: I trusted while forgetting that, for the Oriental, the will to possess a virgin, and even several, is part of his culture, of his dreams, of his deepest desires, whether he is a Muslim or a Christian does not change anything] (*Au grand soleil*, p. 126),

Faïzah speaks and adds, "l'homme oriental, quel qu'il soit, amoureux ou non, veut être le premier. Le premier en tout" [the oriental man, whoever he is, in love or not, wants to be the first. The first in everything] (*Au grand soleil*, pp. 126–127).

Farhoud offers a comparison of the Canadian and Lebanese societies, not only through the female protagonists Ikram and Faïzah but also through Adib and Daoud, the young adult male children of the Abdelnour family. Adib, the eldest son, is the last child of the family to arrive from Canada to Lebanon together with Ikram. A young man deeply attached to his mother, Adib prefers staying at home and chatting with her about philosophy to other worldly pleasures of his age outside the home. With a clever mind and sensitivity, he is depicted as a person who should have been an artist, a poet, or a writer, according to the other family members. Through the character of Adib, Farhoud seems to challenge the traditional view of masculinity and present a new model of man: one who is sensitive, caring for women, siding with them, and liking the interior of the home, all of which are traits normally associated with women. Adib, like her sister Ikram, possesses positive qualities of integrity, honesty, and morality, representing Canada on artistic terms. The reader finds out that this young man returned to Lebanon a few years ago, in the first year of his university education, but could not stay in the country because of an

unfortunate event. The author does not provide the details of this event but gives the information that it is as serious as to cause a psychiatric disorder for the young man, who, following this incident, gets back to Canada immediately. Farhoud portrays Adib as a man who does not possess the personality traits traditionally associated with masculinity, especially in a patriarchal society, and who, himself, is cognizant of this nature of his: “Je joue malgré moi le rôle du premier fils, du plus vieux, qui fait office de gardien de la tradition” [I play despite myself the role of the first son, the eldest, who acts as guardian of the tradition] he speaks (Au grand soleil, p. 27).

Daoud, the younger son of the family studying architecture, is a man who cannot adapt to the cultural atmosphere of Lebanon and eventually decides to try his chances in other countries. Farhoud, through the voice of Daoud, too, makes a critique of the lack of esteem for art in Lebanon. “Les arts plastiques, le théâtre, la littérature font des martyrs dans les petits pays” [The plastic arts, the theatre, the literature are made a martyr in the small countries] Daoud speaks, offering a comparison of the Canadian and Lebanese perspectives towards art (Au grand soleil, pp. 150–151). During the familial tension over Ikram’s desire to pursue an acting career in Beirut, it is only these two brothers who react to their father’s objection to the young woman’s acting on the grounds that the country’s cultural values would not allow such an act. Unlike their mother and their sister Faïzah who keep quiet and give tacit consent to the father’s refusal to accept Ikram’s free will, Daoud criticizes the “backwardness” of this mentality of the Lebanese society by saying “les gens sont arriérés ou quoi!” [people are backward or what!] and emphasizing that there is at least a difference of two centuries between the two cultures (Au grand soleil, p. 90).

The mother does not revolt because of her upbringing and her traditional role of adhering to the cultural norms of her country. As for Faïzah, though she is cognizant of the patriarchal social fabric of Lebanon, she accepts it as it is, does not question nor rebel against it, and wants to play the game according to the rule if that is the rule. Let alone giving support to Ikram face-to-face with this controversial subject where a woman's life choices are at stake, Faïzah, with her conformist and pragmatist perspective, gets angry at her sister since her pursuing an acting profession might trigger the reaction of her prospective in-laws, on the brink of marriage with the rich lawyer. She blames her father for not being firm enough towards Ikram and even goes as far as thinking that he should lock her up.

After the scandalous breakup with Azziz, the ex-fiancé, Faïzah gets a better grasp of the Lebanese society's true nature, engrained with patriarchal ideology, and realizes her place in society as a woman:

Moi, Faïzah Abdelnour, qui me croyais une fille moderne et intelligente, avec jupe courte et travail à l'extérieur, je suis identique aux femmes qui m'ont précédée, même pire. On atteindra bientôt les années 1970 et le sexe féminin est encore une monnaie d'échange, une tare, une malediction.

[I, Faïzah Abdelnour, who thought I was a modern and intelligent girl, with a short skirt and work outside, I am identical to the women who preceded me, even worse. We will soon reach the 1970s, and the female sex is still a bargaining chip, a defect, a curse] she says (Au grand soleil, p. 146).

On the other hand, in a paradoxical way that can be explained by the effect of the trauma she is subjected to, Faïzah still regrets the fact that she lost her control, opened her legs to the man she

loves at a moment of passion, and lost her virginity, for which she thinks she will pay the price forever. She also regrets having confessed to her fiancé that she is no longer a virgin, which is the reason for the broken engagement. Towards the end of the narrative, Nabil, the owner of the boutiques where Faïzah works as a manager, wants to marry her. However, this latter does not want to marry a man she does not love despite engaging in sexual relationship with him for a while: “Maintenant, chaque fois que j’ouvre les jambes à Nabil, cet homme qui m’aime et que je n’aime pas, je sais profondément ce qu’est une prostituée,” [Now, every time I open my legs to Nabil, this man who loves me and whom I don’t love, I know deeply what a prostitute is] (Au grand soleil, p. 146). The bodily pleasure she gets from her first sexual experience becomes a source of deep culpability for her. However, at the same time, she wants to maintain her bodily autonomy and displays resistance to her sexuality’s being used by men as a trade product: “Mon corps appartient à Dieu et à lui seul,” [My body belongs to God and to him alone], she says (Au grand soleil, p. 185). To get away from this guilt but also as a way of resisting patriarchal oppression, she decides to go and live with the nuns in the monastery: “Chez les sœurs, je pourrai enterrer tout ça. La culpabilité et les frémissements de plaisir,” [At the nuns, I could bury all that. The guilt and thrills of pleasure] (Au grand soleil, p. 146).

Farhoud, through the voice of Faïzah, shows how female sexuality is used as merchandise, how it is policed, and how female desire, in contrast with male desire that is elevated, fuelled, and encouraged, is repressed and confined within certain limits in phallographic societies. The protagonist’s realistic remark concerning the country’s sun and luminous landscape, “Le grand soleil est là pour nous rendre folles,” [The big sun is here to drive us crazy] becomes an example of self-fulfilling prophecy and places her in the middle of a psychological trauma that brings about a lifelong regret and a perpetual emotional dilemma between desire and

social constraints, but at the same time an awakening about her status in society as a woman (Au grand soleil, p. 18).

As for Ikram, it takes four years for her to decide what she is going to do with the rest of her life. After comprehending the true character of Lebanese society and after trying her best to adapt to it, she becomes aware that she does not belong there and that she will not be able to continue her life in this country that is suffocating her. The obstacles she faces in her attempts to find an acting job, the social conditions in which women are treated, and lastly, witnessing her sister Faïzah experiencing the trauma of her life, Ikram eventually understands she cannot cope with this country symbolized by a “grand sun”: “Qu’est-ce que le Grand Soleil a fait de nous?!” [What has the Great Sun made of us?!] (Au grand soleil, p. 185). The novel ends with another similarity between the author’s life and that of her protagonist: Ikram's departure from her home country, alluding to Farhoud’s own journey from Lebanon to Paris as a young woman (Maalouf, 2017; Wimbush, 2021).

In the final scene, we see Ikram on an airplane to Paris, experiencing a mental and emotional crisis. Though the flight attendant thinks this state originates from the anxiety of leaving and tries to calm her down, the complete opposite is true for the young woman: “Non non non, ce n’est pas l’angoisse du départ, non, je DOIS partir, je VEUX partir...,” [“No no no, it's not the anxiety of leaving, no, I MUST leave, I WANT to leave...,”] she screams in delirium (Au grand soleil, p. 187). On her journey to her independence, the protagonist’s last words are intended to be a summary of Farhoud’s message in a sense: “Je ne me cacherai plus et personne ne me dira cache-toi... Tout est clair dans ma tête, je sais que l’Orient est derrière moi. Je me sens reposée,” [I won't hide anymore, and no one will tell me to hide... Everything is clear in my head, I know that the Orient is behind me. I feel rested] (Au grand soleil, p. 188).

VIII. An Intersectional Perspective on the Representation of Female Oppression

As an intersectional analysis allows us to see the pluri-dimensional aspect and complexity of the social reality embedded with relationships of domination based on gender, sex, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity, we can examine Farhoud's *Au grand soleil* with a focus on the intersection of patriarchy and ethnicity that subjects women to oppression and violence. In this literary portrayal of the migration experience of the Abdelnour family, the author represents the interaction of sex and gender with ethnic culture, operating as power structures and shaping the material conditions of the subordination of the two young adult protagonists, Ikram and Faïzah. The female characters' lived experiences are shaped by sex, gender, and ethnicity, which operate as "interlocking, mutually constructing or intersecting systems of power," as expressed by Collins and Bilge (2016, p. 28), which consequently enables the surveillance of the female bodies and the "appropriation" (Guillaumin, 2003) of the class of women by men. Rather than seeing power systems as a "static entity," they can be better conceptualized and understood as a relationship, as power relations (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 28), and a closer look at the oppression of the two female protagonists allows us to see the relationality (Collins & Bilge, 2016) at play. The Lebanese culture manifests itself as a source of oppression only towards women; men derive power and privilege from this culture intersecting with patriarchal ideology in visible and invisible ways. It is their intersecting identity of being a woman on the one hand and their Lebanese origin on the other hand that creates the marginalized position for women in Farhoud's narrative.

However, the social context, one of the core ideas of intersectionality, needs to be taken into consideration in this analysis (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The oppression of the female

protagonists arises from the intersecting systems of power of sex, gender, and ethnicity only in the context of their presence in Lebanon, in the social, cultural, and political context of their home country. Neither being a woman nor having a Lebanese origin puts Ikram and Faïzah in a lower hierarchical position than men nor limits their opportunities in any area in the Canadian context, which is offered by Farhoud as an element of comparison. As a matter of fact, the author presents the Western and Eastern contexts in binary opposition, the former being a space where women can be free individuals in an equal relationship with men, whereas the latter is portrayed as a space that imposes the domination of women by men. The experience of migration from a home country to a host country, which is generally explored as an ultimately liberating experience for women in the literary narratives of migrant women writers, manifests itself as a completely opposite experience in the context of this representation of a return from exile. In several texts, the migrating process is portrayed as one that provides women with wings to freedom, notwithstanding some challenges that accompany it, but the migration experience becomes one that chops off their wings and takes away their freedom in this narrative. The two female protagonists do not possess the migrant identity since they supposedly arrive in their “home country,” but the experience of “homecoming” and finding their roots eventually turns into a nightmare for the two young women.

As several intersecting factors contribute to the subordination and oppression of Farhoud’s two characters that cannot be analyzed with a gender-only frame, deploying an intersectional analysis provides insight into how interlocking oppressions operate in Lebanese society as represented by the author. The examination of the representations of the female characters' oppression reveals that theirs is a multifaceted phenomenon, and the marginalization they face is the outcome of the multiple intersecting power structures at play: sex, gender,

patriarchy, and cultural ethnicity. In her gendered perspective of migration, Farhoud's literary representation of migrant women is that of exposure to oppression and subordination, but at the same time, it is that of agency and resistance. Farhoud's text can be examined with a focus on the different forms of agency exercised by Ikram and Faïzah in the face of intersecting oppressions. In the case of Ikram, it might be important to emphasize that the young woman is still close to adolescence and thus in a moment of her life when she no longer wants to bow to her parents and social values. It is also important to highlight that in the 1960s, Québec was going through a "Quiet revolution" during which Francophone women gained more and more autonomy after having none for a very long time (Lavallée, 2018). Francophone women in Québec could not vote until 1940; freedom came progressively in the sixties, and they cherished it. Farhoud's portrayal of the character of Ikram might be read as carrying some of these women's determination to keep that hard-won independence. It should be noted that, contrary to her mother at her age, the author witnessed women fighting for their freedom in Québec, and she had models as well as access to an alternative discourse.

The two female protagonists of *Au grand soleil* recognize that things can be different and that they do not have to yield to the conditions imposed on them. These two oppressed women do take an active role in their own way by fleeing society and its repressive gender norms. Faïzah creates a space for resistance at a monastery up in the mountains, as she regards a secluded life far from all men as the only way to preserve her bodily autonomy and escape exploitation. As for Ikram, her space of resistance is the West, particularly France, known as the country of human rights; she leaves Lebanon and the "backward" mentality of the East behind her, as she considers this to be the only way to preserve her sense of self, her personhood, and her independence.

IX. Partial Conclusion

In *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), Farhoud explores the themes of exile, identity, the condition of women, and sexuality from a female perspective. As opposed to *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) which depicts the migration of a six-year-old girl, Aablè, Farhoud's fictional self, from Lebanon to Québec and her growing up in a new linguistic, cultural, and social environment, this text tells the story of a return from Québec to Lebanon, of Ikram this time, again serving as the author's surrogate. While telling the young protagonist's, who is in her early 20s, adaptation process to her new home country, the author provides a sharp contrast of the Canadian and Lebanese social and cultural environments. Farhoud depicts Lebanon of the 1960s as a country consisting of corrupted people who constantly lie, deceive others, follow no rules, and make promises they never keep, as opposed to the Canadian society represented as symbolizing integrity. The contrast of the two contexts is embodied in the two female characters of the story, too. Faïzah, the elder sister, who migrates to the home country two years earlier than her younger sister Ikram, goes through a character transformation in this period, losing her positive attributes while acquiring some negative personality traits under the influence of the Lebanese social and cultural environment. On the other hand, Farhoud represents Ikram as the symbol of the positive moral and ethical characteristics of Canada, with her honesty and trustworthiness.

The motif of "grand soleil," an outstanding aspect of Lebanon in the eyes of the protagonists, occupies an important role in Farhoud's description of her home country. Lebanon's sunny and lively landscape, which attracts the protagonists after a cold Canada, symbolizes the other face of the country showing itself after a certain while. The perpetual sun

that dazzles the eyes hides the reality that Lebanon is not a favorable place for girls and women. The Lebanese social and cultural fabric of the 1960s is portrayed by Farhoud as an oppressive environment that prevents women from flourishing to their full potential and eventually suffocates them. As the title of the novel *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* [*Hide your daughters under the bright sun*] suggests, Lebanon manifests itself as a place where they hide the girls to make them invisible and inactive. Alternatively, Farhoud's title can be interpreted as a warning against the insidious social and cultural control strategies from which girls need to be hidden and protected.

Farhoud, in her text, provides a critique of the patriarchal cultural norms and their effects on women in Lebanese society, as exemplified in the challenges the two sisters face in their new life in Beirut. The societal limitations on women's career choices are deplored through the example of Ikram, who wants to continue her acting profession and faces her father's objection since acting in theatre or on television is not considered a suitable profession for a girl from a good family in the Lebanese context. The author also questions women's place in society and condemns some cultural practices that put limits on women's autonomy and visibility, as in the example of the character of mother.

What Farhoud focuses on most in terms of illustrating the “backward” (Au grand soleil, p. 90) mentality and customs of the country is what the character of Faïzah experiences and the way Ikram deplores the repressive practices she witnesses in the case of her sister. The author discusses the issue of female sexuality and condemns the use of female virginity and chastity as merchandise as well as a way of controlling women's bodies and a means of “appropriation” (Guillaumin, 2003) of women by men. In addition, the author depicts sexuality as a battlefield, a ground where the class of men confronts the class of women and, as a result, either side holds or

loses power. Farhoud, in her narrative, also presents the matter of female virginity in relation to desire, in an effort to illustrate how female desire, in contrast with male desire that is elevated, fuelled, and encouraged, is repressed and confined within certain limits in phallocratic societies. Through her protagonist Faïzah speaking about the strength of her sexual desire and the difficulty of not yielding to it, Farhoud gives voice to female desire and sexuality that is suppressed and silenced in the traditionalist discourse and gives agency to women in this realm where men are commonly considered to have an active role and have a say.

Lastly, Farhoud does not leave her two female protagonists in victim mode; she shows ways of resistance for women through Ikram and Faïzah, who rebel in their own way. Experiencing the patriarchal oppression of her society on her body and soul, Faïzah stands up against men's use of her sexuality as a trade product and against her exploitation. The solution she finds is to go and live with the sisters in a monastery up in the mountains, the only place she thinks she can protect herself from male domination. As for Ikram, face-to-face with the social regulation of women's conduct by means of female virginity, she decides to get rid of her virginity and put an end to this control over her body. Through the voice of Ikram, Farhoud points to the insignificance of "this piece of flesh" in essence and emphasizes how the constructed idea of female chastity and virginity is used as a means of oppression and violence against women (Au grand soleil, p. 123. Refusing to obey the patriarchal impositions of her home country, Farhoud's protagonist chooses exile for a second time at the end of the narrative; she leaves Lebanon and migrates to France.

Chapter 7 Nadine Ltaif's Poetry

“Nulle part est mon origine / je l’ai cherchée dans les mythes.”

[Nowhere is my origin / I searched for it in the myths.] Nadine Ltaif²¹

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the poetry part of my analysis corpus and examine Nadine Ltaif's poetry collections *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987), *Entre les fleuves* (1991), and *Élégies du Levant* (1995),²² with a larger focus on the first two since they deal more closely with the question of exile and the condition of women. For the quotations from *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987) and *Entre les fleuves* (1991), I will use their published translations: *The Metamorphoses of Ishtar* (2011), a translation by John Mikhail Asfour, and *Changing Shores* (2008) by Christine Tipper, respectively. For the references to Ltaif's other collections for which there are no published translations, I will use my own. Differently from my previous chapters, where I focus on one work in one chapter, I will treat the three selected collections of Nadine Ltaif in this chapter due to the more condensed form of the poem compared to that of the novel and explore the similarities and differences in terms of themes, motifs, metaphors, and stylistic devices used by the artist. How does Ltaif perceive and represent exile from a female perspective, how does the act of crossing borders, languages, and cultures mirror in her works, and what role does writing have in this process, these are the questions I will probe into in this chapter through a close reading of her poems, written both in verse and prose.

²¹ (EL, p. 9)

²² For my in-text citations of Ltaif's works, I will use the initial letters of the collections in parentheses, MI for *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987), EF for *Entre les fleuves* (1991), EL for *Élégies du Levant* (1995), LD for *Le livre des dunes* (1999), and RE for *Rien de mon errance* (2019a).

I will first give an overview of Ltaif's biography and poetry, her sources of inspiration, and her themes. Then, I will focus on the main traits of *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987) and *Entre les fleuves* (1991), which constitute the great majority of my analysis framework, as well as on *The Thousand and One Nights* (Britannica, 2023), the renowned Eastern folk tales on which Ltaif largely draws in her first collection. Following these work-specific subchapters, I will continue with the common themes and motifs in Ltaif's works, which I find relevant in terms of my materialist feminist and intersectional lens. What I will look into is how Ltaif depicts exile from a female perspective, the living conditions of women, her narrator and others, as well as the different components of the women's identities that create their unique conditions through their intersection.

II. Overview of Ltaif's Poetry

Information on Ltaif's biography is scarce. On the back cover of her books, one discovers that although she was born in Egypt, her origin is Lebanese. Born in 1961 in Egypt, Ltaif moved to Lebanon, where she spent her early school years. Later, in 1980, she settled in Montréal, where she received her undergraduate and graduate degrees in literature and cinema. Ltaif writes in French, with some of her books translated into English, and collaborates in the production of independent films with the company Nadja Productions. The poet is the co-founder and co-editor of the digital magazine *Mitra* (L'île, 2023).

The poetry collections of Ltaif contain some autobiographical elements, mainly related to the poet's exile (Ltaif, 1993, 2005). Located between the geography of the Middle East and that of Québec, her poems are highly informed of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultures in terms of symbols, myths, and vocabulary. The setting switches from Montréal to Lebanon or

Egypt, and the period alternates between past and present. The poet's inspiration is the rhythm coming from her origins, from the Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Mesopotamian geography; it is a wind blowing from the desert, the flowing of a river, the sound of a Nay²³ or the singing of a bird through which the narrator can embrace her mother and the true essence of her origins (MI, p. 64). Hers is an inspiration coming from Sidon²⁴, from her Phoenician roots. And most importantly, it is her thirst for freedom that makes Ltaif speak: "Aujourd'hui, c'est l'élan libérateur qui me fait écrire. C'est la liberté qui m'inspire" [Today, it is the liberating impulse that makes me write. It's freedom that inspires me] (Ltaif, 2005, p. 70).

The death and the devastating effects and the unspeakable traumas of war, of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990) occupy a significant portion of her poems: "Car la guerre empêche la vie de naître / empêche les fleurs de mûrir / empêche le soleil / et rompt le rythme des choses" [The war obstructs life at birth, / arrests the budding of flowers, / averts the sun and breaks all rhythms], Ltaif writes (MI, p. 10). Accordingly, the vices of mankind, among which wars take up a large part, and the misfortunes "the sons of Adam" cause are condemned throughout the collection (MI, p. 33). In this frame, Ltaif's language is an expression of lamentation; she explores the misery she sees around her, the destruction caused by wars, the ruins caused by bombs, and the hunger of the multitudes of people. In addition, the poet's writing draws the picture of a woman retrieving her voice and finding her real self, all along with the many stages and instants that accompany this process. Accordingly, Ltaif's poems also offer an open critique of women's condition in the Middle Eastern geography ruled by patriarchal

²³ The Nay is an oblique rim end-blown reed flute that is open at both ends and has six finger holes along the front and one thumbhole on the underside (Middle Eastern Music and Dance, 2023).

²⁴ Sidon is an ancient city on the Mediterranean coast of Lebanon. Along with the city of Tyre, it was the most powerful city-state of Ancient Phoenicia (Mark, 2009).

norms. In her poetry collection *Élégies du Levant* (1995),²⁵ too, Ltaif explores the recurrent themes of war, death, exile, and rebirth and expresses her protest against the oppressive cultural rules of Arab society.

III. *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987)

Ltaif, in this collection written in the form of a fable, explores the Lebanese war and the experience of exile as seen from a female perspective. In this semi-autobiographical work, Ltaif does not only undertake an immigrant questioning but also a feminist critique of a cross-cultural experience (Verduyn, 1992a). The exile, for the narrator, does not only mean a separation from the home country but also a separation from the mother and mother tongue. In this collection, the narrator follows in the footsteps of Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. Just as Ishtar hunts her prey and chases the tiger, the poet herself, searches for her words and chooses them meticulously (MI, p. 45). The linguistic exile Ltaif finds herself in requires her to be careful and alert, like the goddess watching for her prey since she is no longer in the familiar context of her mother tongue, she is in a new territory, the territory of French, where she needs to work on words carefully.

The collection addresses the narrator's process of adapting to a new environment, to a new culture, and of rediscovering herself in the mirror of the other. The narrator finds herself torn between the home country and the adopted country, neither here nor there. "Je vois double: L'Est et l'Ouest" [I see double: East and West], she speaks (MI, p. 48/p. 38) and points to [a war between [her] two hearts], "une guerre entre [ses] deux coeurs" (MI, p. 48/p. 38). The narrator, with no belonging to the home or host country, identifies herself with Sidon, with a sense of self

²⁵ Levant is a word derived from the French *lever*, "to rise," as in sunrise, meaning the east. Historically, the word refers to the region along the eastern Mediterranean shores, an area roughly corresponding to modern-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and certain adjacent regions (Britannica, 2023).

that has traits from both cultures, and says “car je suis Sidon / Sidon a Montréal” [because I am Sidon / Sidon in Montreal] (MI, p. 10/p. 9). Tracing her origins to Sidon and self-identifying with that ancient city, Ltaif emphasizes that she starts from scratch, from her roots, from this land that possesses the power she needs to rebuild herself.

IV. *Entre les fleuves* (1991)

Entre les fleuves (1991) tells the story of breaking from Lebanon and rebirth in Montréal: The narrator explores the in-betweenness she feels in geographical and existential terms and what exile means to her in more depth. As the title of the collection suggests, the narrator inhabits Montréal, the city, which is an island located between two rivers, the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers, as well as a place of close contact between French and English, in addition to many other languages of its inhabitants. The city is “l’île du Naufragé” [Castaway Island] for the narrator (EF, p. 8/p. 5), and its cosmopolitan character welcomes the plurality of the narrator’s, migrant subject’s, identity. Montréal is represented by Ltaif as “human” (EF, p. 26/p. 19), an environment where one can live and flourish under favorable conditions in addition to being a place of freedom where one can recreate herself. Therefore, Montréal is a place of transformation and *Entre les fleuves* (1991) is the story of a rebirth for the narrator: “Soudain me voila de renaître à nouveau entre ses doigts” [Suddenly, I am being born again in her arms] (EF, p. 7/p. 5). In Montréal, “entre les fleuves,” the “I” is born again. This time she is born from no one, a sign of being an individual with no reference to anyone, any past, any origin, only herself, with all she does by herself, with all she builds for herself. The metaphor of in-between is omnipresent in Ltaif’s collection: between two rivers, cultures, countries, languages, and temporalities. This physical and symbolic gap presents itself as a way out of patriarchal

confinement for the narrator. And the adopted land is represented by the poet as a place that helps her recover from her wounds: “C'est une colline magique comme un baume sur mes blessures” [It's a magic mound like an ointment for my wounds] (EF, p. 25/p. 19).

V. *The Thousand and One Nights*

Ltaif's poetry is adorned with mythological and legendary figures, symbols, and themes from ancient Greece as well as from Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultures. *The Thousand and One Nights* (Britannica, 2023), the renowned collection of largely Middle Eastern and Indian tales of uncertain date and authorship, is one of these sources of inspiration for Ltaif in *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987): “Le vent a soufflé les contes, a traversé les déserts, le vent a apporté à mon corps le feu nécessaire à ma passion de raconter” [The wind blows the tales across the desert and brings to my body the fire my passion needs to narrate] (p. 34/p. 30). “The Tale of the Goose, the Peacock, and the Peahen” from this collection of folk tales is largely explored in Ltaif's poems, where the narrator self-identifies with and adopts the voice of “l'Oie” [the Goose], a character in the tale: “Je suis l'Oie, l'Oie des Mille et Une Nuits” [I am the Goose of the Thousand and One Nights] (MI, p. 34/p. 30).

The collection *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987) is a criticism of slavery, religious wars, and intolerance, written in the form of a fable where Man was the great tyrant from whom the poor Goose had to flee since he could no longer stand his reign (Ltaif, 2005). The tale is about the Goose's encounter with the lion, the king of beasts, and a series of other animals from different families, including a camel and a donkey, who all tell the lion about their sufferings from “the Sons of Adam” and request its help (Mardrus & Mathers, 2004). Adopting the voice of the Goose, the narrator speaks, “Mon coeur palpite à l'approche du lion, du lion du désert, que

j'implore, et que je vais rencontrer pour vous libérer du fils d'Adam; le Rusé, le Perfide" [My heart palpates as the lion approaches, the desert lion that I implore and will meet to liberate us from the deceitful and devious son of Adam] (MI, p. 34/p. 30). Ltaif's poetry particularly focuses on the perspective of the camel that complains about the vices of mankind and all his cruelties on earth by comparing the story of the camel to that of Egypt and its complaints to Egypt's laments on its pain of hunger.

VI. Plurality of Identities

In *Entre les fleuves* (1991), exile, for the narrator, is a separation from "mère" [mother], her biological mother. This reference to "mother," for which the poet uses the subject pronoun "Elle" [She], with a capital "E," throughout the entire collection, does not only refer to the biological mother but also to her "native land" and "mother tongue," which shaped the narrator as much as the former did. This pronoun "Elle" also stands for the other symbolic mothers, such as the goddesses and historical and mythological female figures that make up the collective memory of the poet's cultural background, nourish her identity, and occupy a significant place in her poetry. The narrator's exile is at the same time a separation from the self and, therefore, the beginning of a new stage, a quest for a new self. This is a symbolic exile the narrator experiences as a woman: "Voici mon exil celui qui ne fuit pas seulement la guerre" [Here is my exile. / That which flees not only the war] (EF, p. 28/p. 21). What the narrator flees is not only the war and its atrocities but also the patriarchal law that makes no place in the world her home. Ltaif voices this feeling of estrangement a woman feels—a woman's having no sense of belonging to a world dominated by men—in her lines, "Étrangère tu resteras / fidèle à ton mystère" [Stranger you will remain / faithful to your mystery] (EL, p. 10).

Accordingly, the narrator refers to the plurality, to the fragmented nature of her identity, to the multiplicity of the languages and cultures that make up her identity: “Je ne sais plus ma langue natale” [I no longer know my mother tongue], she writes (EF, p. 36/p. 26). “Je suis habitée par plusieurs voix” [I am inhabited by several voices] Ltaif states and adds that she tries to express the multiplicity of her identities by giving voice to multiple figures in her poems: “L’orientale, l’occidentale, l’arabe, la québécoise que je suis devenue, l’égyptienne et la libanaise que je n’ai jamais cessé d’être” [The Eastern, the Western, the Arab, the Québécois that I became, the Egyptian, and the Lebanese that I have never stopped being] (Ltaif, 1993, p. 65). Nevertheless, the poet also mentions in her collection *Le livre des dunes* (1999) the difficulty of possessing an Arab identity, mainly due to the loaded image Arabness refers to: “Il m’est difficile d’être arabe / ou de porter une image en mon nom,” [It is difficult for me to be Arab /or to carry an image in my name] and expresses her ambivalent feelings towards her ethnic identity, which she finds difficult to be proud of but which she cannot stop loving either, with her lines “Il m’est difficile d’être fière / ou d’aimer / ou de cesser d’aimer” [It’s difficult for me to be proud / or to love / or to stop loving] (LD, p. 57).

Ltaif’s depiction of the exilic experience of her narrator can be explored through an intersectional perspective on gender, ethnicity, religion, and language, too. A closer look at the context before the exile shows the condition of the narrator and the women in her native land as one of oppression stemming from the religious, cultural, and patriarchal norms at work, which is one of the reasons for the narrator’s migration to Montréal. If “the experience of race alters the meaning of gender,” as Gill Valentine (2007, p. 13) notes, what it means to be a woman has its unique meaning and dynamics in Middle Eastern geography. Accordingly, being a woman in an Arab country under the significant influence of religion and patriarchal culture is represented by

the poet as a marginalized and subordinate position in the hierarchy of roles created by the systems at work. Doreen Massey (1994) points out the role played by social relations based on gender, ethnicity, and class in shaping the way individuals inhabit and experience space and place and emphasizes that it is this particular set of social relations that interact at a particular location that form the identity of a “place.” Drawing on Massey’s perspective on the gendered character of space and place, it is possible to argue that Ltaif depicts Lebanon and other Arab countries as highly gendered places that put men in a privileged position and impose severe restrictions on women.

Lefebvre’s (1991, as cited in Delaisse, et al., 2021) theory of the production of space, which considers it a relational and dynamic process, is also useful in reading Ltaif’s representation of her native land as a geography of oppression for women. Lefebvre’s definition of space, “the spatial triad,” has three components, and the first one refers to “conceived space,” which highlights the conception and design of space by “those in power, dominant forces, and social elites,” (p. 554). The second component, “perceived space”, refers to how people perceive space, and the last one, “lived space,” corresponds to how people act in this space based on their perception. These three aspects of space are interrelated, and the “lived space” where human interactions take place can be a site where the conceived and perceived space, therefore the hegemonic ideologies, are challenged (Lefebvre, 1991, as cited in Delaisse, et al., 2021). In Ltaif’s depiction of homeland, which refers to “perceived space,” the Arab countries are represented as a space conceived by the intersecting systems of power in a way to regulate women’s lives, to dominate and “appropriate” them (Guillaumin, 2003). Through her emotional and intellectual excavation within the depths of her cultural roots, Ltaif brings to light female figures such as the Goose, Sheherazade, and Cassandra who refuse to remain passive and refuse

to act according to their perception of space but instead try to change it by resisting power. As for the poet's portrayal of her narrator, she is described as a woman who does not bow to pressure but instead decides to "deny the heritage of her father" and abandon her country and her mother tongue, which can be read as a way of challenging the conceived space and the hegemonic forces at work (EF, p. 45). Ltaif depicts her narrator in a position of rebellion against structures of power as well as in a critique of those who passively obey the rules: "Me sentant exclue. Ne parlant pas la langue du pouvoir. Ni celle des soumis," [I feel excluded. Not speaking the language of power. Nor that of the suppressed] (EF, p. 45/p. 35).

As for the multiplicity of the narrator's cultural identities, it manifests itself as an advantage through her exilic experience, which she calls "l'odyssée du Phénix" [the Odyssey of the Phoenix] (MI, p. 9/p. 7). This allows the narrator, during her metamorphoses, to derive strength from the many cultures that form her background and helps her to be born again the way Phoenix does. Phoenix, the fabulous bird in ancient Egypt and classical antiquity, which is said to have been reborn from its ashes, symbolizes immortality and resurrection, life after death (Britannica, 2023). Simurgh, equated with the Phoenix in some sources (Britannica, 2023), is another legendary bird associated with rebirth after death (Mark, 2019). "Simurgh," literally meaning "thirty birds in Persian, with "si" corresponding to "thirty" and "murgh" to "bird" (Encyclopedia, 2023) also refers to the plural identities of the narrator, represented by Ltaif as a source of strength in the exilic process: "Dans ce lieu choisi pour renaître de personne. / Que de moi comme le Simûrgh de mon pays natal. / De mes pays natals. J'ai compris que je n'étais / pas faite d'une seule civilisation," [In this place chosen for rebirth from no one. / Only from myself like the Simurgh of my homeland. / Of my homelands. I've understood that I was / not formed from a single civilisation] (EF, p. 35/p. 26).

An examination of the exilic condition of the narrator in Montréal shows that her experience is shaped by the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and language, too. Ltaif represents “language” as an area of challenge since this is at the same time a linguistic exile that she experiences, a symbolic and geographical rupture with Lebanon as well as with Arabic. With Arabic being her mother tongue, Ltaif explores the difficulty of switching to French as a primary means of communication in her adopted country, though it is the second language of her homeland, a former French colony (Tonus, 2021). The change of language in expressing herself—the transition from Arabic to French in this case—is a big stage in an individual’s perception and expression of self, an act with physiological and existentialist dimensions. If “Changer de langue, c’est aussi changer de peau” [Changing your language also means changing your skin], as Simon Harel (2005, p. 56) notes, then it is not hard to assess the difficulty of switching from the mother tongue to another language. Accordingly, Ltaif explores language as a significant factor that shapes the exilic process and is primarily concerned with the absence of words and the difficulty this poses for her as a poet. The narrator, trying to express her ambivalent feelings towards Montréal and her exilic experience, emphasizes the insufficiency of the language in describing what she exactly experiences or her own inadequacy in using the language: “Ce que je vous raconte à présent / c’est pire, pire que le pire,” [What I retell you now is disastrous] (MI, p. 49/p. 39).

Separated from the “mother” figure, a symbol and source of life, what the narrator initially experiences is a symbolic death. In Montréal, she is reborn and discovers her true self as a result of her connecting with the numerous female figures, all symbols of power, from the myths and tales of the past. Though she does not feel any belonging to any geographical place or any specific culture, one aspect of her identity she is sure of is her being a woman, where she

feels comfortable is her female identity, which is one of the reasons why she migrates to Montréal. In several places, Ltaif's narrator affirms her female identity and her sense of belonging to the class of women and draws attention to the sufferings and misfortunes of women caused by men: "Dans le coeur de chaque homme / une femme pleure. / Moi, Dieu m'a créée femme / et je ne me rappelle plus combien / j'ai ruisselé d'hommes dans mon coeur." [In the heart of every man / a woman cries. / As for me, God created me a woman / and I no longer remember how many / men I have flowed into my heart] (EL, p. 42) The motif of "water," another source of life, prevails throughout the collection *Entre les fleuves* (1991), through the images of "river," "sea," and "mother's womb." Montréal, the city between the rivers joining the sea, allows the narrator to return to her essence, like a return to the womb of her mother. This metaphor of water can be seen in the above-quoted lines of *Élégies du Levant* (1995), too. The act of crying associated with women as a sign of their sorrows and the narrator's flowing men down into her heart can be read as her nonchalance towards them, to their ephemerality in the narrator's world, their coming and going like flowing water without having a permanent place in her heart.

What describes Ltaif is rather her creative force, her art, in which she feels totally free: "Je me suis forgé une langue. Une identité littéraire. Et de livre de mots à livre de poèmes. Tantôt en prose tantôt en vers mais toujours libres" [I forged a language for myself. A literary identity. And from book of words to book of poems. Sometimes in prose, sometimes in verse, but always free] (Ltaif, 2005, p. 68). The multiplicity of her cultural background manifests itself as an element that contributes to the narrator's creativity as she is nourished by both cultural textures, that of her Arab and Mediterranean roots, and the linguistic and cultural atmosphere offered by Montréal, her adopted land. Having these many aspects of her identity, the narrator does not have

a sense of belonging to a single origin; she is in search of her true essence in the mythical sources and legends, where she hopes to find the female figures to lead her, to guide her as well as to give her the power she needs.

VII. Female Figures as a Muse

Ltaif's poetry tells the story of suffering from separation from the mother, and her text illustrates that the mother has more than one face and there is more than one mother: "C'est à Elle que j'ai voulu offrir ma première lettre. Elle, sous toutes Ses formes, Ses âges" [I wanted to offer her my first letter. To her, in all her forms, her ages] (EF, p. 8/p. 5). In *Entre les fleuves* (1991), the poet refers to several images, motifs, and figures with the initial letter of "M," a series of names alliteratively referring to the symbol of "mother": Melaina Kole, meaning melancholy, the name of the narrator's hidden double character, the mythical figures of Myrrha, Medusa, and Morgana, the metaphors of "mère" [mother] and "mer" [sea], as well as "L'île de Montréal" [The island of Montréal], which reminds the poet of a middle-aged woman, "une femme d'un âge mûr" [a middle-aged woman] (Ltaif, 1993, p. 65). Interestingly, the poet's cultural roots, her sources of inspiration, also have the initial letter "M": Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Mesopotamian.

The poet's cultural background is nourished by a large number of female mythological and historical figures who are represented as her mothers. Ltaif borrows from mythological themes and refers to the female characters of ancient myths as a way of communicating with them. The poet excavates down to these myths to reach out to these legendary women to find her true essence, and their realm is already familiar terrain for her: "Remonter l'antiquité, comme on remonte une enfance, un lieu où, il me semble avoir déjà vécu" [Going back to antiquity, as we

go back to a childhood, a place where, it seems to me, I have already lived] (Ltaif, 1993, p. 64).

She adopts their voice not only to recreate herself but also to position herself in an act of solidarity with the class of women she is a member of. Ltaif gives her sisters a voice through her poems as an act of protest against the condition of women from the past to modern times and as a resistance against the imposed silence that women have been subjected to throughout history.

Ltaif's narrator is nourished and takes her inspiration not only from the diversity of her cultural backgrounds but also from the numerous female figures and mythical deities she identifies with: "Et j'ai eu des nourrices, non pas une ou deux, mais trois et quatre et cinq, qui ont cultivé mes désirs comme mes mémoires, et arrosé mes nuits qui foisonnent aujourd'hui sous vos yeux, de rêves et d'histoires vécues," [I had many mothers—not only one or two, but three, four and five. They cultivated my desires and memories and irrigated my nights, the nights that deepened under your eyes in dreams and true stories] (MI, p. 34/p. 30). Her imaginary world is loaded with femininity, with women, the image of "mother," "wet nurse," and goddesses. These are the voices of mothers from whom she is born—symbolically—and which inhabit her unconscious. The poet's adopting the voices of these female figures and her reference to a multitude of mythical and historical themes manifest themselves as elements that enrich her expression. Christl Verduyn (1992b) contrasts this plurality of women in Ltaif's texts with the unicity of men, as the narrator refers to the father as "Unique" (EF, p. 45) whereas the mother is double, multiple, and plural, in the form of historical, mythological, and biblical mothers. Verduyn (1992a) also notes that in Ltaif's writing, the woman/mother is privileged, and what comes from the man/father (biological or symbolic) is rejected. Indeed, in Ltaif's writing, the female identity is privileged since the narrator expresses in several places her gratitude for being

a woman: “Mille fois merci je suis née femme,” [A thousand thanks, I was born a woman] (EL, p. 42).

VIII. Ishtar

The mythical deity Ishtar, manifesting herself as the narrator’s muse, has a significant role in Ltaif’s poetry collection *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987). Ishtar, the goddess of love with a considerable impact on the images of many later goddesses, including Aphrodite, is the first known deity of the ancient world (Pryke, 2017). In addition to being a goddess of love, Ishtar is also known as a war deity, with a powerful voice used to sing songs of joy as well as for performing lamentations and giving war cries on the battlefield. Ishtar also symbolizes the death and life cycle, as told in the myth about this goddess of fertility and life, who one day decides to go down to hell to kill death but fails in her mission (Sassin, 2006). To be able to go up to the world of the living again, she needs to find someone to replace her in hell, and that would be her husband, Tammouz. Upon the lamentations of the latter, the sovereign of the Death decides that each of the two will spend six months underground, which refers to the obligation of human beings to accept the life and death cycle. This myth also conveys the message that hell is never final and death is always followed by resurrection (Sassin, 2006).

A closer look at the complexity of Ishtar’s character in terms of inhabiting the extreme aspects of life such as celebrations and mourning, laughing and crying, love and war, as well as life and death, can give us an idea about the reason why the poet chose her as a guide for her narrator through her metamorphoses, her changes from one state to another in her experience of exile in various forms, and her lamenting her lost country. Ishtar's descent into hell corresponds to the exile of Ltaif; the poet embodies Ishtar’s myth by comparing the pangs of exile to a

descent into the hell, and just like the goddess, she, too, is forced to leave her country of origin, to be uprooted. And eventually, the poet, like her muse, comes back to life and is reborn after her symbolic death—her exile.

Another significant aspect of Ltaif's reference to Ishtar is the geographical location associated with this mythical figure: Mesopotamia, an area in the Ancient Near East generally considered to be located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Pryke, 2019). This region, roughly corresponding to modern-day Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, was home to the world's earliest civilization along with many of the world's first great empires, including the Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian Empires (Von Soden et al., 2023). The region's name means "between rivers" in Greek, referring to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Von Soden et al., 2023), and the poet refers to this region as "Deux mers entourant le berceau initial. Le Tigre. L'Euphrate," [Two seas encircling the initial cradle. The Tigris. The Euphrates] (EF, p. 35/p. 26). With regard to her choosing Ishtar as a muse, Ltaif speaks as follows:

Moi j'ai voulu trouver une figure qui représente l'origine de ma culture Assyro-babylonienne alors j'ai choisi Ishtar. La déesse de l'amour et de la guerre. Je pouvais avec cette incarnation écrire mon récit épique de la guerre du Liban et l'odyssée de mon exil d'abord au Caire puis à Montréal. Cela a donné Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar.

[I wanted to find a figure that represents the origin of my Assyro-Babylonian culture so, I chose Ishtar. The goddess of love and war. With this incarnation, I could write my epic story of the Lebanese War and the odyssey of my exile, first in Cairo then in Montréal. This gave rise to The Metamorphoses of Ishtar] (Tonus, 2021).

Ltaif's use of a mythical figure as a symbol of her roots and a source of inspiration, from an area "between rivers," corresponds to her journey, in both symbolic and geographic meanings; one that begins "between rivers" and ends in Montréal, again a city "between rivers." In this way, the poet also makes a connection between her two poetry collections, *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987) and *Entre les fleuves* (1991). Accordingly, through her journey, Ltaif's narrator follows in the footsteps of her muse, Ishtar, the source that nourishes her, and for whom she has a deep passion:

Vous étiez Ishtar. Celle qui ressemble au feu. Vous étiez et vous êtes encore mon buisson ardent et je vous desire. Comme le Phénix qui desire le feu, encore et à nouveau. Plus personne pour retenir ma main et mon coeur en vous pour vous servir.

[You were Ishtar, she who resembled the fire. You were and still are my ardent bush, let me desire you. As a Phoenix that desires the fire, more and more. No one can keep me from serving you with my heart] (MI, p. 69/p. 59).

IX. Hecate

In *Entre les fleuves* (1991), Ishtar transforms into Hecate, the goddess of crossroads, a figure who is installed within the depths of the narrator's self. Hecate is the goddess of magic and witchcraft, often depicted with three heads and holding two torches or a key (Quarrie, 2019). She is also referred to as the goddess of the Three Ways, bridging Earth, Sea, and Sky with her torches that help light the way and her key for opening doors on the journey. This deity, regarded as the goddess of liminal time and space, deeply associated with boundaries and crossroads, is significant in terms of its symbolism about the multitude of thresholds, places, and moments of

entering or beginning that everyone experiences throughout their lives (Quarrie, 2019). Hecate, the mythical goddess of crossroads and choice who shows the narrator her way and guides her, is an important metaphor in this collection. The deity's having three heads, so three faces, refers to the above-mentioned multiplicity of the "mother" figure as a nourishing source in Ltaif's writing. The fact that "Hecate a le visage changeant de celle qui aime" [Hecate's changeable face is that of one who loves] (EF, p. 7/p. 5) symbolizes the ability to transform, which explains that the goddess is a model for the narrator in this sense, too.

X. Sheherazade

Sheherazade, the heroine of the famous story collection *The Thousand and One Nights* (Britannica, 2023), known for telling one story each night to avoid death at the hands of King Shahryar, is another source of inspiration for Ltaif. The king, upon discovering his wife's unfaithful behavior during his absences, kills her, and as a result of his loathing all womankind, he marries and kills a new wife each day until no more candidates can be found (Britannica, 2023). Scheherazade, the elder daughter of the king's vizier/minister devises a scheme to save herself and other girls and insists that her father give her in marriage to the king. In accordance with her plan, she tells a story to the king each night, without finishing it, and promises to complete it the following night. The stories Scheherazade tells each night turn out to be so entertaining, and the king ends up becoming so engaged that he puts off the girl's execution day after day and finally abandons his cruel intention. According to the version translated and published between 1704 and 1717 by Antoine Galland, the first European translator of the tales, the grace of the king comes from Scheherazade's talent as a storyteller and not from children

born from the union of the spouses, as is the case in Egyptian manuscripts, Arabic editions, and their translations (Kremer, 2019).

The figure of Sheherazade, “the masterful narrator,” is an important trope employed by Arab women writers in the diaspora to tell their stories in order to defy oblivion and symbolic death, Hanadi Al-Samman notes (2015, p. 3). On a similar note, Ltaif adopts Sheherazade’s voice as a rhetorical device that connects her to cultural roots in the excavation of her true essence—to see and create herself from scratch in the mirror of this female ancestor, who, despite being a fictive character, expresses the potential of female power. Following in the footsteps of Sheherazade allows the poet to connect to her true self and find a way to express herself the way this fictive ancestor does, which paves the way for her resurrection. Ltaif resorts to Sheherazade's voice and her stories of *the Thousand and One Nights* to highlight the vices of mankind, including the horrors of war, as well as to emphasize the importance of “telling” as a way of coping with exile in its geographical and symbolic meaning. Similar to Sheherazade's telling stories, which can be read as a way of resistance and an act of female agency face-to-face with the dominant power, Ltaif’s creative force, her writing and telling her story and stories of other women, manifests itself as an act of agency, a resistance to symbolic death, a challenge to patriarchal law.

Like Sheherazade's encounter with the king, Ltaif’s narrator adopts the voice of the queen of night and morning and comes face-to-face with King Solomon (MI, p. 35). This queen, the legendary Queen of Saba²⁶, is known for her visit to King Solomon to test his wisdom, an encounter with various versions narrated in Biblical and Quranic scriptures as well as in other mythical sources (Mainguy, 2013). The queen, depicted not only as a determined, beautiful, wise,

²⁶ Ancient kingdom in southwestern Arabia in the region of modern Yemen known for its extensive trade, especially in spices and gems. (Collins, n.d.)

and intelligent woman but also as an independent one, exercises political power as a sovereign and deals as an equal with the king reputed to be the wisest (Mainguy, 2013). In comparison with Solomon's wisdom that enables him to understand the language of the trees, animals, and birds (Mainguy, 2013), Ltaif's queen speaks with a multitude of voices of the "sirens," with whom she speaks the same language, the language of women, from which the narrator derives her power to acquire her freedom:

Mille et une langues ont parlé ma langue, mille et une voix me lèvent et me portent vers vous. Une bouche aujourd'hui se libère, car elle n'a peur de rien ni de mourir. Elle n'a rien à perdre. Une voix seule me reste pour lutter et survivre.

[A thousand and one tongues speak my tongue, one thousand and one voices rise and transport me to you. One mouth, today, liberates, afraid of nothing, not even death. It has nothing to lose. Only one voice is left for me to struggle, to survive] (MI, p. 34/p. 30).

Ltaif's images of Sheherazade and Queen Saba, in reference to their being listened to and heard by the male power in the position of authority, symbolize the visibility of women as well as the recognition of female voice and power.

XI. The Sirens

Ltaif both speaks through the voices of and addresses women who once were her mother, her nourishing source, and who accompany her through her metamorphoses and contribute to her transformations. The poet, in both of her collections *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987) and *Entre les fleuves* (1991), refers to the language of the sirens, mythological creatures imagined as half-human, half-fish female figures, known for their enchanting voices

inviting men to their deaths (Triaridou, 2022). This trait of the sirens has a deeply gendered dimension since their having a voice presents a danger for patriarchal gender conventions, and the association of the sirens' voice with the act of killing men symbolizes the destructive potential of women's voice in a patriarchal context (Triaridou, 2022). With her metaphor of "sirens," Ltaif alludes to the efforts of silencing women throughout history and takes her stance by [fighting, militating, against ideological slumber] "luttant, militant, contre l'assoupissement idéologique" (Ltaif, 1993, p. 62), which refers to a feminist undertaking focusing on the roots and bases of women's oppression, a long way to walk: "Il m'était impossible de rire. D'exister. Oh oui je viens de loin. La marche fut longue," [I found it impossible to laugh. To exist. Oh, I have come a long way. The walk was long] (EF, p. 45/p. 33).

The chapter titled "Le langage des sirènes" [The language of Sirens] in *Entre les fleuves* (1991) is the part where the narrator affirms her female identity, one she feels at the very depths of her essence as well as the reason for her leaving Lebanon, a place where she does not feel that she has a decent place as a woman, like all the other women in her country (EF, p. 44/p. 33). Voicing her place within the class of women, the narrator expresses solidarity with women, her sisters, stating her determination to fight for them so that they can acquire the value and recognition they deserve: "J'ai des langues en réserve. Je peux les brandir au besoin. Autour de ma tête je les répands hideusement pour éloigner les curieux, les méprisants. Ceux qui ne savent pas aimer mes soeurs. Je suis Méduse quand je veux," [I have tongues in reserve. I can brandish them at will. I wind them around my head in a hideous fashion to scare off the curious, the scornful. Those who do not know how to love my sisters. I am Medusa when I want to be] (EF, p. 46/p. 35).

The poet's use of the "Medusa" metaphor, a symbol of female power back in Ancient Greece, is noteworthy in this context. Medusa, known for her hair in the form of hissing snakes and her ability to turn anyone she looks at to stone—literally to petrify—symbolizes feminist power against patriarchal forces and the ultimate defense against the male gaze. (Tan, 2021). The male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), symbolizing the patriarchal order where men are configured as "active" and the owner of the gaze and women as "passive" and the ones to be looked at, represents a power imbalance between the two sexes where women are made to support and feed the heterosexual male perspective and narrative. In this framework, by deploying the "Medusa" metaphor, Ltaif assigns women an active role, the power of holding and exercising the gaze, an act that subverts traditional gender norms.

XII. Women and a Feminist Critique

Ltaif's poems offer a feminine and feminist perspective on migration and exile and explore the condition of women in Arab and Middle Eastern geography. The poet fully assumes her femininity and affirms her belonging to the class of women: "Du fond de mon être et dans tout ce que je fais, jusque dans la plus fine ramification de mon être, je serai et resterai une femme" [From the depth of my being and in all that I do, to the most delicate ramification of my being, I am and will remain a woman] (EF, p. 44/p. 33). She inscribes herself in "the history of women across the world," a history that is her own story, "[son] histoire à [elle]" (EF, p. 48/p. 36). The poet offers an open critique of the male hegemonic systems of power at work in Arab countries, including Lebanon, and expresses her aversion to patriarchal sources of oppression that dominate and subordinate women:

Il y aura toujours autour de moi des regards mâles exorbités de voir tant de féminité s'exprimer sans la moindre gêne. C'est pour fuir la haine de ces regards que j'ai quitté mon pays. Ne plus jamais devoir défier le mépris dans leurs yeux, car il faut avoir senti l'humiliation. Savoir que nous représentions la menace d'une souillure. Qui saurait cacher son étonnement si un regard d'homme arabe venait se poser sur moi, étendue à moitié nue sous le soleil?

[There will always be males around me looking with bulging eyes to see so much femininity expressed without the slightest shame. I fled my country to escape the hatred of those looks. To never have to defy the contempt in their eyes again, for one has to have experienced the humiliation. Knowing that we represented the threat of a stain. Who'd be able to hide their amazement if the gaze of an Arab man came to rest on me, lying half-naked under the sun?] (EF, p. 44/p. 33).

The power of looking, as explored above and as referred to in the images related to “regards” [looks] and “yeux” [eyes], has a significant place in the poet’s refusal to be in a patriarchal structure that aims to suffocate her and other women, and Ltaif expresses her determination to subvert this “determining male gaze” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 62) that objectifies the female body.

Dealing with the low status of women and the subordinate position they are subject to in Arab countries, Ltaif explores marriage and addresses how home, which should normally be a safe harbor for everyone, becomes a space that symbolically kills women. As Simone de Beauvoir (2011) notes, “the destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage... Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution” (p. 502). Beauvoir (2011) also stresses that

the traditional society in which marriage is imposed on the young girl, more imperiously than on the young man, offers no other perspective to the former. Ltaif, in her poems, condemns this patriarchal functioning that forces women into marriage and imprisons them within the borders of the domestic space, which not only prevents them from becoming their true selves and thriving but also exposes them to violence and exploitation:

Je veux vous parler de l'ensablement des femmes au Caire. Comment on les enterre et on les marie dans des maisons qui ressemblent à des ruines, où elles nettoient ces maisons couvertes de poussière. Il n'y a pas d'excuses pour nos yeux poussiéreux qui ne voient pas.

[Let me talk to you about the burial grounds of the women of Cairo. How they bury them and they marry them in houses that look like ruins, when they scrub and clean these houses covered by dust. There are no excuses for our eyes that do not see] (MI, p. 25/p. 23).

In referring to the practice of marriage as a way of controlling women, the poet's image of "ensablement des femmes" [the burial grounds of the women] alludes to the burial of newborn girls alive, a practice of female infanticide followed by pre-Islamic Arab societies as well as by the Greeks and the Romans (Ahmed, 2021). This female infanticide, known as "the act of Wa'd," manifests itself as a deep transgenerational trauma that resides in the Arab female psyche until the present day (AlAmmar, 2020, para. 2; Al-Samman, 2015). Ltaif compares this age-old practice of misogyny to today's oppression of women based on unequal power relations between the two sexes in an attempt to evoke and raise awareness about women's condition in the Arab world, which she represents as one of restriction and imprisonment at home.

In the context of “home,” Ltaif uses the word “Harem,” a word derived from the Arabic “harim,” referring to a place that is off limits, sacred, and/or taboo (Encyclopedia, 2023): “Aujourd’hui elles n’ont qu’un Harem / comme une prison dorée / où elles chantent leurs consolations. Les femmes ont joué les unes pour les autres / le rôle de celles qui consolent. / Le rôle de mères. / L’éternelle quête de sein où se loger,” [Today they only have a Harem / like a golden prison / where they sing their consolations. Women played for each other / the role of those who console. / The role of mothers. / The eternal quest for a breast to shelter in] (EL, pp. 21–22). Usually associated in Western thought with Muslim practices, “harems,” the part of a house set apart for the women of the family, are known to have existed in the pre-Islamic civilizations of the Middle East (Britannica, 2023). The poet’s preference to capitalize the first letter of the word “Harem” might be read as her wish to refer to another related meaning of the word, which is a part of the royal courts consisting of the ruler’s wives and concubines, their female attendants, and eunuchs (Britannica, 2023). A typical example of gendered space, “Harem,” in this sense, too, corresponds to Ltaif’s condemning perspective of “home” in Middle Eastern geography as a place where women are trapped. In both senses, “Harem” highly relates to “home” as represented by Ltaif and as a place that is both a “woman’s grave and a man’s paradise” as expressed by Saudi women during the campaign they launched for their rights in 2022 (Mounir, 2022).

The native land represented by the image of “mother” in Ltaif’s writing is one that “devours” (EF, p. 10), a land of wars that consumes human lives but at the same time a land that inflicts violence onto the female subject, one that “appropriates” her (Guillaumin, 2003) and leaves her no autonomy, no right to exist as herself: “Elle me portait dans Son corps, tellement Elle avait une maîtrise absolue de moi. Moi, je n’existais pas. Elle me mangeait,” [She carried

me in her body, such was her absolute control over me. I did not exist. She ate me] (EF, p. 41/p. 31). The narrator experiences alienation and escapes from this insatiable source of power, the patriarchal system that permeates all over her homeland and that swallows the female bodies. What she leaves behind and rejects is not only the homeland but also her mother tongue, the communication means associated with the violence she witnessed until that time, and a domain where she feels estranged and already in exile; hers is a linguistic, geographical, and symbolic departure at the same time. In the exilic land, in geographical terms, the narrator's language is French, a language that allows her to make a fresh start, create a new self despite all the awkwardness she has at the beginning, and paves the way for freedom. Thus, exile, which means a symbolic death for the narrator, is also the opening door to her own reality, to her rebirth.

In her *Élégies du Levant* (1995), through her lines “Notre langage ne fut / jamais respecté. / Notre langue barrée / comme nos visages barricadés. / Faisant croire à notre salut. / Dans le code écrit. / Qu’il est écrit. / Qu’il est écrit. / Qu’il est écrit” [Our language was / never respected. / Our barred tongue / like our faces barricaded. / Making us believe in our salvation. / In the written code. / That it is written. / That it is written. / That it is written] (p. 37), Ltaif points to the invisibility women are forced into in terms of the male control and domination of their bodies, such as the covering of their faces, their deprivation of the right to talk and to have a say about their lives, and the undervaluing of their words even if they speak. Considering the “code” as the patriarchal code and the scriptures as the source of the patriarchal law and, correspondingly, of the oppression and subordination of women, Ltaif condemns the religious discourse that persuades women to find peace and salvation in faith instead of claiming their freedom and rights. In addition, the poet's recurrent use of vocabulary with religious

background, including “fils d’Adam” [sons of Adam], which refers to divine creation and is cited in Biblical and Quranic sources, and “Allah” [God] also highlights the poet’s critique of the acts of violence and crime committed for religious purposes (MI, pp. 11, 33).

The lines, “Je suis un hors-la-loi / En restant voyou / je gagne mon salut / Ne me parlez pas / de demeure / Homeless je reste / dans l’extrême liberté” [I am an outlaw / By remaining a thug / I earn my salvation / Don’t talk to me / about home / Homeless I remain / in extreme freedom] (RE, p. 48) correspond to the narrator’s thirst for anarchy in the sense that she does not take into account any authority or other systems controlling women’s lives, including religion, too. Ltaif’s use of the words “hors-la-loi” [outlaw] and “voyou” [thug] alludes to Monique Wittig’s (1992) discussion of lesbianism as a way of escaping oppression, which she considers the result of the heterosexual system. By stating that “*outlaw* and *mad* are the names for those who refuse to go by the rules and conventions, as well as for those who refuse to or cannot speak the common language” (Wittig, 1992, p. 40, emphasis in original), Wittig points out the “escapee” position of lesbians (p. 20). With her radical claim that “lesbians are not women,” Wittig emphasizes that lesbians are the outlaws of the heterosexual system and illustrates that with their refusal of the role of “woman,” lesbians also refuse the economic, ideological, and political power of men (p. 32).

On a related note, Ltaif states that what enables her to remain herself without any outside impositions, what gives her a domain of her own, is writing: “Puisqu’écrire m’aide à rester hors système. C’est le prix à payer pour rester libre” [Since writing helps me stay out of the system. This is the price to pay to stay free] (Ltaif, 1993, p. 61). In relation to the act of crossing all physical borders of “homeland,” Ltaif’s narrator echoes Virginia Woolf who said, “In fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country

is the whole world” (1938, p. 166)²⁷ and expresses this state of not belonging anywhere, her symbolic exile, her having no home and no country other than the world she creates for herself, a land where she is born for a second time, which is her writing, and which emerges in the wintry atmosphere of Montréal: “Ta renaissance est hivernale / et pourtant tu n’es d’aucune patrie / sauf des lettres” [Your rebirth is wintry / yet you have no homeland / except for letters] (EL, p. 10).

Focusing on the marginalized and exilic position women are destined to hold since antiquity until today, the poet adopts a bleak and pessimistic tone regarding the condition of women and presents a negative perspective with regard to the future of female empowerment:

Nous ne retournerons plus
sur nos rivages.

Nous, les femmes déportées
razzia²⁸ des temps modernes.

Au monde des hommes
nous serons voilées.

Depuis les antiques guerres
ont fait de nous des esclaves.

Des Cassandres hallucinées.

Nous ne serons pas écoutées.

Et pour sépultures
nous n’aurons que les eaux.

[We'll never return

²⁷ This topos is a recurrent element of my corpus, which I discussed it in my previous chapters.

²⁸ A raid for plunder or slaves, especially one carried out by Moors in North Africa (Collins, n.d.).

to our shores.

We, the deported women

modern-day razzia.

In the world of men

we will be veiled.

Since the ancient wars

they have made us slaves.

Hallucinated Cassandras.

We will not be listened to.

And for graves

We will only have the waters] (EL, p. 36).

The “Cassandra” metaphor Ltaif uses as a rhetorical device is noteworthy in its relation to women’s demand to have a say, to be heard, and to be respected. Cassandra was a Trojan princess in Greek mythology who had many suitors, including Zeus and Apollo, who, in order to court the princess, gave her the gift of seeing the future (Lesser, 2020). When Apollo tried to seduce Cassandra, she refused his sexual advances, as a result of which, Apollo did not take his gift away but instead put a curse on her by spitting into her mouth. Cassandra’s curse was that she would remain clairvoyant, but nobody would ever believe her prophecies. Elizabeth Lesser (2020), in her book on Cassandra and other guiding myths, notes how the stories and tales that constitute a culture shape power relations and highlights the importance of women being the storytellers and the protagonists of the tales, quoting a professor as a source of inspiration for her work:

Listen here, young lady. Women have been ignored, ridiculed, punished, even killed for their opinions forever. But without the balancing power of her voice—the female voice—things in this world end in disaster. Cassandra’s tale is your tale. It is all of our tales. We must speak, and we must be taken seriously. We must change the way the story ends. (Lesser, 2020, p. 9).

Hence, it is this deep hunger for a place where she, as a woman, will be recognized and listened to that makes Ltaif leave her country of origin: “Se libérer de traditions. Ouvrir un champ nouveau... En quête de liberté, d'espace, de dignité, de lieu d'écoute.” [Free myself from traditions. Open a new field... In search of freedom, space, dignity, a place to be listened to] (Ltaif, 2005, pp. 65–66). “The language of the sirens,” a metaphor Ltaif uses in her writing, also epitomizes this desire to speak and be heard. In her reference to the powerful Queen of Saba, who speaks with a multitude of voices of the “sirens,” namely, who speaks the language of women, the poet emphasizes the importance of women’s having a say as a sign of power. In addition, Ltaif deploys this metaphor to highlight the vices and crimes of mankind, a topic she explores throughout her texts, and the role women would play in an alternative world order where they have power. The sirens and Queen Saba symbolize this female power and illustrate that women in power would create a different history, indicating that their language is the language the world needs to speak for it to be a better place.

Ltaif, through her lines, “Au monde des hommes / nous serons voilées. / Depuis les antiques guerres / ont fait de nous des esclaves” [In the world of men / we will be veiled. / Since the ancient wars / they have made us slaves] (EL, p. 36), offers a critique of the mandatory practice of veiling imposed on women and associates veiling with enslavement. The word “voilées” [veiled] the poet uses can also be read as a metaphor representing the symbolic

nonexistence, the symbolic and physical invisibility women are destined to in a world designed by and for men and ruled by the patriarchal system, a position that marginalizes and alienates women even if they are in their so-called “homeland.” The poet’s reference to women’s being made into slaves since the ancient wars points to the distribution of power, one of the inequalities between women and men, one that is based on the “appropriation” of women by men (Guillaumin, 2003).

Colette Guillaumin’s (2003) analysis of women’s appropriation illustrates the way relations between the sexes are similar to relations between the races and how some of the physiological differences between individuals are specifically chosen and attributed with meanings to be used in the creation of relationships of domination. Guillaumin’s concept of “sexage” helps to understand how this constructed ideology has come to naturalize the appropriation of women and their being used as slaves (2003). Accordingly, this system is configured in a way where those in the dominating class, men, own the bodies and souls of the dominated ones, of women who are their possessions, and who are forced to act according to the will of their owners in everything they do. This revolt against women’s enslavement and against their invisibility is what motivates Ltaif to write:

C’est l’histoire de l’asservissement des femmes et de leur disparition de la scene publique. Tout cela me fait écrire et continue de nourrir ma révolte. Car je ne peux pas oublier qu’écrire pour moi a débuté par une première révolte. Celle de la guerre, elle se poursuit dans une lutte contre la condition des femmes, et surtout des femmes dans le monde arabe.

[It is the story of the enslavement of women and their disappearance from the public scene. All this makes me write and continues to fuel my revolt. Because I cannot forget that writing for me began with a first revolt. That of the war, it continues in a fight against the condition of women, and especially women in the Arab world] (Ltaif, 1993, pp. 65–66).

XIII. Telling and Writing as Resistance

“Je parle et je raconte, comme une femme arabe à une autre femme arabe, comme une oie à une paonne hospitalière raconte et raconte,”

[I talk and retell, as an Arab woman would to another, as a goose to a generous peacock, I tell and retell] (MI, p. 33/p. 29).

Ltaif’s texts express the utmost importance of the act of writing for her. For the poet, writing means a rebirth in new textual bodies, a constant act of forging new identities (Ltaif, 2005). This perspective counters the identity women are locked in; this is a way for women to become unseizable. Throughout her poetry, the creative force manifests itself as a means of survival, a resistance against the crushing weight of migration, uprooting, and exile, as well as a response to violence, a reaction against male domination, a road to self-emancipation, and autonomy as a woman. Ltaif’s poems depict an ambivalent attitude towards the country of origin—one that she chooses to abandon and that pushes her to exile. On the other hand, the poet has a strong desire to rediscover herself in her roots, her essence, which she believes to lie within the cultural depths of the geography extending from the Middle East to Ancient Greece and

Rome. Hers is a relationship of love and hate, which can be read as a desire to see her beloved one, her motherland, in another form, in another taste. Writing gives the poet a way to exist, in all senses: “Être née pour la liberté. C'est nous, ces femmes arabes qui écrivons, réalisons des films, peignons. Malgré et contre tout, et tous ceux qui veulent nous réduire au silence. Nous avons voulu faire quelque chose de notre vie,” [Born for freedom. It's us, these Arab women, who write, make films, paint. Despite and against everything, and all those who want to silence us. We wanted to do something with our lives], Ltaif explains to point out how art means freedom for her and other Arab women (Ltaif, 2005, p. 68).

Fleeing an agonizing land, not to be consumed, is the reason why the narrator chooses exile, to deny the heritage of her father, which is nothing but the patriarchal rule that takes away women's rights: “Aucune femme n'a la place qu'elle mérite dans les pays arabes d'où je viens. D'où je descends,” [No woman has the place she deserves in the Arab countries where I come from. Where I descend from] (EF, p. 45). She leaves as a form of resistance, as a sign of her not yielding to this male-written code: “Aujourd'hui je choisis de tout abandonner, jusqu'à l'héritage de mon père Unique. À la tête d'une horde de soumis. Sous un tel joug je n'ai pas plié” [Today, I choose to abandon everything, even the heritage of my unique father. At the head of a submissive horde. Under such a yoke I did not bend] (EF, p. 45/p. 33). The narrator's aim is to free herself from the passive and subordinate position ascribed to her, a position she was supposed to occupy in case she chose to stay in her native land.

Thus, Ltaif depicts exile as the road to emancipation and empowerment for a woman: “La vie prend un nouveau tournant. Ne repart plus sur les bases anciennes. Plus aucune dépendance. Plus rien ne compte à présent, que ce que je ferai de ma vie,” [Life takes a new turning. No longer using ancient rules. No more dependency. Nothing matters anymore, what I'll

do with my life] (EF, p. 39/p. 29). It is the courage to leave everything behind that allows her to reacquire her right to be the only one to decide about the course of her life, totally free and self-autonomous. “On ne saura pas me dicter une conduite. / Je suis libre et rebelle. Je ne saurai être Sage. / Dans ce lieu choisi pour renaître de personne. / Que de moi comme le Simûrgh de mon pays natal.” [I cannot be told how to behave. / I am free and rebellious. / I wouldn’t know how to be sage. / In this place chosen for rebirth from no one. / Only from myself like the Simurgh of my homeland] (EF, p. 35/p. 26). With the capitalized first letter of the word “Sage,” the narrator highlights that she does not feel the obligation to follow any religious or social code, any law that dictates her a marginalized position, and that she has no authority to listen to, whether it be the father and mother from whom she was born. If being born from a certain origin puts a burden on her shoulders, then the narrator cuts all her ties from what subjugates her. And once the narrator eventually finds her true self and is reborn, she expresses her desire to live free until the end of her life and die “loin de [sa] famille, de [ses] amies, / de [son] ancienne vie. / Ne réclamant plus d’aucune tribu. / Mourir libre et déracinée” [far from [her] family, from [her] friends, / from [her] old life. / No longer belonging to any tribe. / Dying free and rootless] (EF, p. 32/p. 24).

XIV. Partial Conclusion

Nadine Ltaif represents exile as a very difficult path full of challenges. It is a death, in symbolic terms, since she leaves her mother, motherland, and mother tongue behind. What she leaves behind is also the patriarchal dynamics of her homeland, a system she suffered from and criticizes harshly. The exilic experience in a new land, language, and culture is the soil where the narrator experiences her metamorphoses, various stages of her cutting the ties with her native country. What she finds at the end of her exilic journey, both in geographical and symbolic

terms, is a rebirth, a new self, a free and autonomous individual who follows her path. In short, Ltaif represents exile as a road to finding her true self and a path to freedom for a woman who wants to break free from the religious, cultural, and social impositions of her native land.

In her representation of exile and women's condition in family and society, Ltaif borrows from several female mythological and historical figures of her Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and Mesopotamian roots. These are either the goddesses, historical figures, or fictitious characters from the folk tales, but most importantly, they are all independent, powerful, and influential women. Ltaif, affirming her place in the class of women, draws on and follows the footsteps of these female characters, who are part of the collective memory of her origins. The poet's history is the same as the history of these women; they are her ancestors, who symbolize the female power and influence. These ancestors are the proof that women once had agency; it is the relations of power that have caused women's subordinate position in the past and today, and women can and must retrieve their voice, soul, and freedom. Therefore, Ltaif, in her poetry, addresses these myths and figures as her unique way of communicating and reaching out to her origins, which hold the codes of her true essence.

Another path that takes the narrator to rebirth and freedom is staying "hors-la-loi" [outlaw], refusing to follow the rules or impositions from any religious, cultural, or social authorities. Ltaif represents this lawlessness as the sine qua non of female freedom, as the price to be paid to take back the reins of her life and of herself. And lastly, writing and telling, two acts of expression, are represented by the poet as being of vital importance since they are the evidence of an individual's having a say, a power to exercise, proof of one's being active and in the position of doer. It is these acts of writing and telling that give women a voice, a way of being heard, and a way of being recognized.

As a result, Ltaif's art is not situated in a position of victimhood through a mourning and lamenting tone only, despite presenting a pessimistic attitude in some parts of her poetry. She does not place herself in a submissive role face-to-face with the systems that oppress women. On the contrary, the poet chooses to perform an act of agency, an expression of rebellion and resistance against male dominance. Ltaif's texts, despite drawing a negative picture in terms of the vices and crimes of mankind as well as in terms of women's condition in Middle Eastern geography, have an inspiring tone, too. In her texts, the Goose flees, and the daughter of the Vizier, Scheherazade, tells stories to stop the massacre of women. Ltaif is picking tales that propose options to counter unacceptable violence. Women's voice, as exemplified through the many female figures Ltaif addresses, is represented as a power to change the course of history; the poet's texts can thus be read as the message that the world would be a better place if women were in the ruling and leading positions.

Chapter 8 Discussion of the Findings in the Analyses

In the frame of my research, I analyzed the selected literary works of three Canadian women writers of Arab origins who represent migration and migrant women in their texts. I examined Lebanese Canadian author Abla Farhoud's two autofictional novels, *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) and *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), Algerian Canadian writer Nadia Ghalem's two novels *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) and *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), and Lebanese Canadian poet Nadine Ltaif's poetry collections *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987), *Entre les fleuves* (1991), and *Élégies du Levant* (1995). My general objective was to identify the protagonists of these works and their experiences in order to compare them and see if these authors share similar concerns. To conduct this analysis of texts written in French in a North American minority context, I combined two distinct feminist approaches: that of French materialists and that of American intersectionality. I used a materialist feminist approach and an intersectional feminist lens to answer my research questions. In this discussion chapter, I will address my three research questions by comparing the collected information.

First Research Question

In the frame of my first research question, I focused on the living conditions of the female characters depicted in my corpus. I analyzed how women's relationship to modes of production, the social classes they belong to, and the patriarchal and gendered social structures, practices, and relations they are subject to inform their marginality and the different positionalities they occupy in the family, society, and state. The contexts in which those women are depicted by the artists were my point of focus in this research question.

First of all, I will start by noting that I did not find any representation of the female characters in a state context²⁹; all my findings in the texts are related to women's place in family and society. All the protagonists across my corpus of analysis are female, either a child or women of young and middle age spanning the 6–40 age range, and none of them is married or a mother. The female characters are described in a variety of contexts, in private spaces as well as outside. Unlike the mother figures described in a passive and subordinate position in family and society, the daughters, the protagonists in this case, are represented as active women, either studying or working, but never limited to the private space of the home. Ghalem's protagonist, Chafia is depicted in the setting of a psychiatric hospital, a closed space, due to her mental condition, but still, she is not described as a homemaker; she is represented as a movie editor. Ltaif's narrator and Ghalem's nameless protagonist and secondary female characters in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) are represented as women with hybrid qualities in their identity, in terms of their cultural background; these women do not belong to one place or home; they easily cross borders and make several places their home. Farhoud's protagonists, too, are not attached to one single place; they migrate and change contexts out of their free will or as a familial requirement.

Autobiographical elements are recognizable throughout the corpus I analyzed, with abounding references to Lebanon, Egypt, and Algeria, the authors' homeland or country of birth. (Born in Egypt, Ltaif grew up in Lebanon.) The Algerian War (1954–1962), the war for independence from France, and the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and the effects of these two wars on the protagonists, are significant motifs in Ghalem's and Ltaif's texts. Their characters

²⁹ The question is addressed in Nadine Ltaif's poem *Venise en Québec* (2019b), an extract of which also appears in Hejer Charf's short film *Les réfugiées du Chemin Roxam* (2019).

and narrator, being women who witnessed war in their home country like the authors themselves, suffer from war-related traumas and heavily condemn the horrors of war. Though Farhoud did not personally experience war, she, too, is affected by the war that tore apart her native country and denounces war through the voice of her male protagonist, Adib in *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017) (Wimbush, 2021).

All of the texts I studied include a mother character and references to the protagonists' relationship with their mother. The mother figures in Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) and Farhoud's both novels have a life restricted within the four walls of the home. Thus, they are represented in accordance with the traditional discourse that sets women as the guardians of home and family. As a matter of fact, these characters are portrayed as women with limited or no formal education who are in a position to obey the patriarchal rules of their native culture and find themselves in a subordinate and dominated position in the hierarchical power relations between men and women. The only exception in my corpus is the mother figure in Ghalem's *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), who is portrayed as an educated, autonomous, and self-confident woman whom the author describes as a self-reliant character navigating successfully in different countries between different languages and cultures, a figure who is not represented within the traditional motherhood role. However, a short reference in the novel to this mother figure's past shows that this woman, too, was subjected to the oppressive rules of her home country but now enjoys a liberated life in Madrid.

The exposure of women, protagonists, or secondary characters, to the patriarchal cultural norms of their native country is a common thread in these three authors' works in my corpus of analysis. All the female protagonists and narrator are represented as girls and women who suffer from gendered social structures, practices, and relations and occupy a marginalized position in

family and society. The social and cultural pressure on women manifests itself in the form of deprivation of the right to study, restrictions in terms of personal growth or career choices, metaphorical imprisonment within the private sphere, imposition of household and familial responsibilities, forced marriage, exposure to male exploitation and abuse, and domestic violence. All the authors in my corpus emphasize the difficulty of existing as a woman in their home country and point out the importance of a woman's independence and self-actualization, her ability to stand on her own two feet and exist in society as a free and self-reliant individual. The writers thus provide a feminist perspective by highlighting the educational and professional opportunities that would enable women to realize these aims and the social pressure and obstacles put in front of women to hinder their self-development and prevent them from realizing their full potential as free individuals.

Sexuality as an area of violence against women is covered in all the texts I focused on. Ghalem addresses the issue in the frame of men's exploiting women sexually, rape, and refusal to take responsibility for the consequences of their sexual activity, such as in cases of pregnancy, childbirth, and abortion, with a particular focus on imposed motherhood, with its mental, emotional, and bodily dimensions. As for Farhoud, she condemns male exploitation of women by providing a critique of the use of female sexuality as a trade product and a way of regulating and appropriating their bodies and souls, with a focus on the constructed myth of female virginity and chastity. As an additional perspective, Farhoud addresses the issue in the frame of female desire and sexual freedom in her *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), where she also refers to the French cultural, social, and sexual revolution of May 1968 (The Independent, 2008), through her character Ikram expressing her wish to be in Paris together with the students involved in the protests. In this frame, the author portrays her female characters, Ikram and

Faïzah, two young women in their early 20s, as women who engage in sexual activity, premarital sex, which was considered a moral issue and taboo in Lebanese society in the 1960s. By emphasizing the strength of female sexual desire and the difficulty of not yielding to it as a woman, Farhoud, in her text, adds visibility to female desire and sexuality that is suppressed and silenced in the patriarchal order.

Both Ghalem and Farhoud discuss the societal and cultural control mechanisms regulating female bodies constructed around the concepts of “honor” and “aayb” [shame], which are put as a burden on the shoulders of women. Ltaif, too, in her poems, deplores the patriarchal control of women's bodies in Arab countries with a particular focus on the male gaze, which she represents as being full of hatred and contempt, as the reason for her narrator's leaving her native country. Farhoud, through the voice of her protagonist Ikram, criticizes the same toxic male gaze in her native country, Lebanon, as expressed in her words, “I can't take these possessive and sick eyes anymore, I'm tired of these stares sprawling on my body,” (Farhoud, 2017, p. 122). The texts of Ltaif, Farhoud, and Ghalem can thus be read as a call to women in general and Lebanese and Algerian women in particular to exercise bodily autonomy and take control of their lives.

In the frame of my perspective focusing on the authors' representations of contexts, another common thread running through my study is the multiplicity of the female characters deployed by Ltaif, Ghalem, and Farhoud in their texts. These women are elder family members such as Grandmother Jana, Aunt Faridé in Farhoud's texts, the protagonist's nameless grandmother, her Amti [aunt], and Léda, a female ancestor in Ghalem's texts, as well as other women the protagonists meet over the course of the story, including Sister Marguerite, Madame Chaussé, Marcienne Villeneuve-Groulx, Hayat, and Latifa. These are the characters who

contribute to the protagonists' construction of a better self as an individual, positively touch their lives, and enlighten their way.

As opposed to Farhoud's texts with realist characteristics, Ltaif's poems and Ghalem's novels share the commonality of including references to numerous mythical and historical female figures such as Hypatia, Nefertiti, Scheherazade—the fictitious character of *The Thousand and One Nights* (Britannica, 2023)—and Queen Alyssa in Ghalem's texts and female goddesses Ishtar and Hecate, mythological figures including the Sirens, Medusa, and Cassandra, the historical figure of Queen Saba, and again Scheherazade in Ltaif's poems. Both authors use these historical, mythological, and legendary figures from the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions that make up their cultural background as a way for their protagonists and narrator to reach out to their roots, connect with their female ancestors, and see themselves in the mirror of these powerful and influential women. By addressing these female ancestors, some of whom are marginalized and oppressed subjects, Ltaif and Ghalem also give voice to women, each having a story, a vision, and a message to share with the world and add to their visibility. Lastly, the authors, with their many references to these female figures, create historical continuity between the women of the past and today and foreground these strong and exemplary women as muses and role models for women of the present time. By illustrating that women share a common history and by highlighting these ancestors who symbolize female power and influence, the texts of Ltaif and Ghalem can be read as a message that these female ancestors are proof that women are strong and bold in essence and are not “naturally” weak, as some say. In reality, it is power relations that have caused women's subordinate position in the past and today, and women can and must retrieve their voice, soul, and freedom.

Second Research Question

In the frame of my second research question, I analyzed the literary works in my corpus with a focus on how factors including race, gender, class, religion, and sexuality are involved in the experiences of the female characters and how they shape their experiences of exposure to discrimination or oppression. In the context of my second research question, I also probed into the artists' representation of the influence of ethnic and cultural identity on women's subordination.

To start with, in the analysis of my corpus, I did not see any discussion of race in its general sense; it was rather the ethnic and cultural identity of the characters that was a salient point of reference in all the works I studied. The Lebanese and Algerian identities of the characters in the novels and poems are largely covered as a strong marker that places women in a marginalized position in family and society. The intersection of gender and ethnic and cultural identity—in other words, being a woman in Algerian and Lebanese societies—is represented by the three authors as an obstacle to freedom, a femininity in the victim mode, and a heavy load to carry. All the texts portray the Algerian and Lebanese ethnic and cultural backgrounds as ones that support and maintain a patriarchal societal order and limit women's existence as free individuals. It is the rules and traditions of their native country that cause the female characters' exposure to psychological and physical violence through the use of the weapons of "family," "shame," and "honor" to regulate women's conduct, as represented by Farhoud, Ghalem, and Ltaif.

Religion, which can be taken into consideration as part of the ethnic and cultural identity of the female characters in the works that I examined, is referred to by the authors as a social category that informs women's experience of subordination and subjugation. Both of Ghalem's

novels include short references to the Islamic veil. In *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), it is Hayat, the protagonist's Algerian female friend, who is represented as a symbol of success since she manages to overcome her timidity and fears as well as stops wearing a headscarf, both of which are portrayed as obstacles to women's progress. In *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), the protagonist's mother stops wearing the hijab in Madrid for the first time in her life as a sign of her liberation from the oppressive codes of her native land. These two representations of the author resonate with the French colonial practices that aimed to "liberate" and "modernize" the Algerian women in colonial Algeria by unveiling them³⁰ as well as echo present-day controversies around "the assumption that women's powerlessness and/or empowerment is exclusively predicated on the veil- ing/unveiling binary" (Telmissany, 2016, p. 122).

Apart from Ghalem's two references to the Islamic veil, all three authors of my corpus of analysis address religion and the role it plays in women's oppression, with no reference to any specific religion or belief. While in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), Ghalem deals with religion in the context of general awareness and the necessity to acquire knowledge against superstitions, bigotry, and the politics disguised as religion, in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), she explores the phenomenon more specifically in the context of faith, a strong belief that shapes and prevents a woman—the protagonist's mother in this case—from questioning the subordination and oppression she is subjected to. This second dimension mentioned by Ghalem is also addressed by Ltaif, who, in her poems, discusses the significant influence of religion and patriarchal culture in Arab countries that position women in a marginalized and subordinate position and condemns the religious discourse that persuades women to find peace and salvation in faith instead of claiming their freedom and rights. Ltaif's poems also offer a critique of the

³⁰ See Ryme Seferdjeli's (2018) article for a detailed analysis of the topic.

acts of violence and crime committed for religious purposes. Farhoud, too, addresses religion, but not directly, as Ghalem and Ltaif do in their works. In *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), Farhoud mentions religion as an element that makes up the character of Lebanese society and emphasizes the elements of harmony and co-existence of cultures, languages, peoples, and religions that constitute the society while providing a sharp critique of Lebanon of the 1960s, with a social and cultural fabric that suppresses women. In all cases, the three authors emphasize religion as a tool of social and cultural control that limits women's freedom and agency.

The migrant identity of the female characters is another principal identity marker that interacts with other factors to inform women's condition, as represented in the novels and poems I focus on. Being an Algerian or Lebanese woman in Québec, an experience shaped by the intersecting factors of gender, ethnicity, and exilic circumstances, is portrayed in two ways by the authors of my corpus of analysis. Though the home country is not represented as heaven, which, on the contrary, is portrayed as a place of uninhabitable circumstances for the female characters and narrator, being far from home is a condition that puts an extra burden on their shoulders and positions them in a triple challenge: these female characters need to struggle in an unfamiliar linguistic, cultural, and social environment to adapt to their new contexts, to exist far from their roots, far from the anchor points that give strength to a person under normal circumstances.

On the other hand, what the exilic condition brings to the characters is a set of favorable circumstances to enable them to question what they left behind, namely their cultural and social background and their selves in that cultural and social context. Being able to distance themselves from the customs, traditions, rules, and ideologies that informed their mindsets and lives until that time creates an occasion to reconfigure their paradigms, find their identity, and create a new

self. Like Ltaif's narrator, for whom exile is a death and rebirth that follows it similar to the Phoenix's rising from its ashes (Britannica, 2023), Farhoud's and Ghalem's protagonists, too, undertake a questioning of the old self and reconstructing a new "I" in the mirror of others, an opportunity offered by their migrant identity.

The social class of the female characters in the texts I analyzed—their education and occupation—and its intersection with gender and ethnic identity manifests itself as a factor that informs their unique experiences. Ghalem and Farhoud, in many cases, represent class as one that determines women's freedom, agency, and self-expression. In their narratives, the protagonists, all educated women with a profession, either as a movie editor, a doctor, or an actress, are depicted in a position of contemplating their condition as women, questioning the inequalities between women and men, demanding their freedom and rights, and crossing borders, physically and metaphorically, to improve their unfavorable circumstances. The secondary female characters are depicted in a wide range of conditions; some are educated women with a profession and autonomy, and some others, like the elder female family members of the protagonists, are depicted as women with no formal education but who, nevertheless, are knowledgeable, wise, and strong figures. These two types of female figures are deployed by the authors as women who act as role models, as heroines who touch the protagonists' lives positively. Throughout the texts, some other secondary female characters, like the mother figures, who have no access to education, do not have an income, and depend on others for a living, are portrayed as women with limited or no autonomy and are exposed to male oppression and violence.

Third Research Question

In the frame of my third research question, I analyzed how Farhoud, Ltaif, and Ghalem represent migration and exile as a female experience in their artistic works. I also examined how these authors represent identities and contexts in this context.

First of all, all of the writers represent exile as a setting where the protagonists undertake a journey into themselves. In accordance with Anissa Talahite-Moodley's (2021) perspective on the liminal spaces of borderlands as places where individuals can deconstruct and reconstruct their identities, exile, for the protagonists of my corpus of analysis, is a setting where they deconstruct and reconstruct their identities. What exile means for Ghalem's protagonist Chafia in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) is a search for identity, for autonomy, a quest for a free "I," while at the same time a process of struggling with madness. For Ghalem's nameless protagonist in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), who is in exile but also in a position of constant traveling to various parts of the world, exile means the narrator's exploring herself, finding and completing her identity in the mirror of different cultures and different people. Traveling and crossing borders is portrayed as an act that does not only heal the protagonist's wounds but also adds to her existence and becomes a means of [discovering oneself in new contexts] "de se découvrir dans de nouveaux contextes" in Ghalem's own words (Rachédi, 2010, p. 44).

For Ltaif's narrator, too, exile is a process of transition, self-transformation, and metamorphoses, as the title of her first collection, *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987), suggests. Exile, which initially means a symbolic death for the narrator, eventually becomes the opening door to her true self, to her resurrection. In contrast to Ghalem's protagonists and Ltaif's narrator, who are young adult and adult women, Farhoud's protagonists Aablè, Ikram, and

Faïzah are portrayed in their childhood, adolescence, and early 20s age, in their character formation period in a sense. Therefore, they are described in a position of constructing their identity rather than looking back, questioning their previous self and life, and reconstructing a new identity, as is the case in the works of Ghalem and Ltaif. However, what all the protagonists and narrator have in common is their experience of getting to know themselves better and building an identity in the exilic process.

Another common thread of the texts I analyzed in the frame of my thesis is that the authors represent exile as a liberating experience for women, a context that, despite all its challenges, fosters women's self-determination and agency. It is in exile that Ghalem's protagonist Chafia finds herself in a state of madness that takes her to condemn the war that steals her childhood from her as well as to question and challenge her mother, father, and the patriarchal order of her native country that limits women's freedom. For Ghalem's nameless protagonist in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), her mother and other secondary female characters such as Narrimen and Léda, too, leaving their city or country and migrating to another place are portrayed as a way to free themselves from the oppressive customs and traditions of their society. In Ltaif's poetry, the condition of the narrator and the women in her native land, which is one of oppression stemming from the religious, cultural, and patriarchal norms at work, is one of the reasons for the narrator's migration to Montréal. Ltaif's narrator denies the heritage of her father, which is nothing but the patriarchal rule that takes away women's rights, and chooses exile to flee an agonizing land, not to be consumed.

Farhoud, too, partly represents exile as a liberating experience for her characters. I say partly because in *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015), the female characters, Aablè, her sister, and her mother, are represented in a position of suffering from the same patriarchal norms of

Lebanon that continue operating and regulating their lives in Québec. Though their condition is depicted as more favorable than that of other women in Lebanon, their home country, an element of the novel that becomes clearer in the second part of this autofictional series, *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), it is not possible to say that the two sisters and their mother enjoy full freedom and autonomy in Montréal. Considering that the protagonist and her sister are at an early age, at a period of their lives when they are still dependent on their father, which explains their lack of autonomy and voice, I can say that this representation of Farhoud does not break the pattern of representing exile as a path to freedom observed in Ghalem's and Ltaif's texts. As a matter of fact, in *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), the protagonists, at a young adult age this time as Ikram and Faïzah, acquire a voice, challenge the patriarchal codes of their home country, and opt for exile, which they see as the road to freedom; Faïzah goes up to the mountains to live with the nuns to free herself from the male domination, and Ikram goes to France to flee her native land that gives women no right to live.

Consequently, the protagonists and the secondary female characters in the texts I studied are not portrayed in a static position, as the guardians of the family and home; on the contrary, they, too, travel or migrate for several reasons, either out of their free will or to follow their husbands or fathers; as a result, they do not display attachment to the city or country of origin. By representing women as active subjects migrating, traveling, and creating a sense of belonging for themselves wherever they go, Ltaif, Farhoud, and Ghalem depict women in a position not attached to a single home; their characters belong to many places, and they can make several places in the world their home. Thus, all three writers in my corpus of analysis represent migration as a feminine experience and challenge the traditional migration discourse that considers migrating as mainly a masculine activity.

One last common thread through the texts I examined is the three authors' representation of the female characters in terms of their position and stance face-to-face with the patriarchal codes of their native culture and society, in cases when they are exposed to systems of oppression. This part could have been analyzed in the frame of my first research question, where I focused on the authors' representations of the contexts of the female characters. However, the presence or absence of acts of resistance was an element that was clearly distinguishable for my study, and I decided to address it as a separate research question. Whether the female characters are featured in a victim mode and whether they show any acts of resistance and solidarity in such cases was the question I tried to answer in this context. The protagonists' and secondary female characters' role in perpetuating, tolerating, questioning, or resisting patriarchy and relations of power defining the male and female roles was important in this analysis.

First of all, the female characters throughout my corpus of analysis are portrayed as being subjected to various kinds of discrimination, oppression, and violence. However, all three writers also show ways of resistance for these marginalized women. In some cases, it is the female solidarity and sisterhood that they emphasize; when these women are represented as subordinated and oppressed or in difficult circumstances, it is other women, educated or uneducated, but all of them possessing wisdom and intelligence, who exercise agency and give a helping hand to women in need. This female solidarity is embodied in the characters of Madame Chaussé in Farhoud's text, Hayat, Latifa, Amti, grandmother, mother, and the protagonist herself in Ghalem's texts, and the narrator in Ltaif's text, who is ready to be Medusa "to keep away the curious, the contemptuous" from her sisters (Ltaif, 1991, p. 46).

Yet, not all female characters are represented as part of female solidarity and in a position to support other women. The mother character in Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) is

resented by her daughter for not warning her against men, their use of female sexuality, and the horrors of life. The mothers in Farhoud's two texts, too, are represented in a passive position, not raising their voice against their husbands and thus giving tacit consent to the injustices their daughters are subjected to. Other secondary female characters in Farhoud's novels are depicted in a position of son preference and undervaluing of daughters, an example of misogyny prevalent in Lebanese society as well as in many others. Drawing on Norma Claire Moruzzi's argument that "one is not born but becomes a patriarch," May Telmissany (2016) draws attention to patriarchy as a social role adopted and supported by both men and women (Moruzzi, 2013, as cited in Telmissany, 2016, p. 122). What Ghalem and Farhoud emphasize in this context is this social role adopted by women and thus women's complicity in their own subordination and oppression, which is an inherited chain of misfortune, a "cyclical history" (Azzouz, 1998, p. 42) that passes from mother to daughter. Ltaif, too, presents a similar perspective in her poems, where her narrator states that she does not speak the language of power, but she does not speak that of the suppressed either (Ltaif, 1991). The narrator, thus, declares that she is not on the same side as those who tolerate oppression instead of resisting it.

In addition to these few secondary female characters who tolerate or perpetuate oppression against women, all three authors of my corpus of analysis—Ghalem, Farhoud, and Ltaif—represent women as characters questioning the female condition and resisting the systems of power in various ways. They emphasize the significance of women having a voice as a form of resistance against the imposed silence that women have been subjected to throughout history. Women's need to speak and be listened to, and the importance of telling, is exemplified by both Ghalem and Ltaif in Scheherazade, the heroine of the famous story collection *The Thousand and One Nights* (Britannica, 2023). Scheherazade's telling stories and eventually being successful in

stopping the king from killing girls, which can be read as a way of resistance and an act of female agency face-to-face with the dominant power, symbolizes the visibility of women as well as the recognition of female voice and power. Women's having a voice and the need to express themselves is illustrated by Farhoud through her protagonists, Aablè and Ikram, Farhoud's fictional selves in her two autofictional novels. It is acting, the protagonists' and Farhoud's lifelong passion, that serves as a means of survival, a way of coping with exile, a way of expressing herself for the young Aablè, and a profession that adds meaning to her life for Ikram. Like Scheherazade, who is telling tales to be able to survive, Farhoud's protagonists need to act to be able to continue existing.

Thus, the three authors whose works I analyzed in the frame of my research do not represent their female characters in a position of victimhood only; except for Farhoud's *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015), all the texts have a happy ending in terms of women's condition and show the ways to remain hopeful. In the context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, May Telmissany, drawing on Gilles Deleuze (1988), discusses Spinoza's (1677) critique of "passive sad passions (promulgated by the slave, the tyrant and the priest) as opposed to active joyous passions that are fundamentally empowering" and emphasizes the importance of defying the politics of despair supported by the repressive regimes and nurturing the politics of hope that prompt people to liberate themselves (2016, p. 120; 2021). The texts in my corpus of analysis can be read with a similar perspective: Ghalem, Farhoud, and Ltaif, through their representations of the female characters and women's condition, reject the politics of despair and nurture such a politics of hope in their works in my corpus of analysis.

It is possible to outline the overall journey of the protagonists in my corpus at three points of convergence. First of all, these are relatively young female protagonists. They are

rather young women who have received an education and have a profession, often unlike their mothers. The second commonality is about their living conditions or the context they are in. The situation of the protagonists is difficult at the beginning of the story but formative (evoking Bildungsroman [Larousse, 2023], the coming-of-age stories) for all at the end. Certain female figures who surround them act as models, offer valuable support, and contribute to the formation of strength of character. The protagonists benefit from the solidarity of women and, more rarely, of men (an uncle-in-law in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* [2010] and two brothers in *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* [2017]). Thirdly, all the protagonists go through a transformation, an existential ordeal (mental illness, forced return to the country of origin, suffocation). Additionally, being directly exposed to at least two cultures, they can make informed choices for their lives more easily than their elders. They all choose the life they want for themselves (except for Aablè in *Toutes celles que j'étais* [2015]), namely, they succeed in reclaiming their lives and can flourish.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I analyzed the selected literary works of Arab Canadian women writers Nadia Ghalem, Abla Farhoud, and Nadine Ltaif. In the frame of my research, I examined Lebanese Canadian author Abla Farhoud's two autofictional novels, *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015) and *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), Algerian Canadian writer Nadia Ghalem's two novels *Les jardins de cristal* (1981) and *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), and Lebanese Canadian poet Nadine Ltaif's poetry collections *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987), *Entre les fleuves* (1991), and *Élégies du Levant* (1995).

My first aim in this project was to explore the works of these three women artists to see how they engage with gender and migration from a feminist perspective, which is rare in migration and exile studies. As migration is mostly considered a masculine phenomenon in conventional theories (Averis, 2014; Averis & Touré, 2016; Brunet, 2005; Kaminsky, 1993, 1999; McDaid, 2017) and the female experience and its representations in literature are less frequently explored, my first objective was to increase women's visibility in the field and contribute to the debates with a feminist critical voice.

My second objective was to conduct research that combines an intersectional and materialist feminist framework. The materialist feminist and the intersectional methodological perspectives are rarely used as literary analysis tools; only a few critical analyses of literary works use these two frameworks (Dolan, 2012; Hubler, 2010; Loh, 2015; Václavíková, 2022; Wayne, 1991), and the works they analyze are neither on exile nor produced by women artists in exile. As most of the studies that look into the artistic products of the migrant women writers focus on thematic content and formal techniques with cultural and historical perspectives, I

aimed to offer an original look at these novels and poems and provide a more complete portrait of the representation of the women's migration through this combined framework.

To that end, I set up three groups of research questions to conduct my study. In the frame of my first research question, I focused on the living conditions of the female characters depicted in my corpus. I analyzed how women's relationship to modes of production, the social classes they belong to, and the patriarchal and gendered social structures, practices, and relations they are subjected to inform their marginality and the different positionalities they occupy in the family, society, and state. The cultural and material contexts in which those women are depicted by the artists were my point of focus in this research question. In the frame of my second research question, I analyzed the literary works in my corpus with a focus on how factors including race, gender, class, religion, and sexuality are involved in the experiences of the female characters and how they shape their experiences of exposure to discrimination or oppression, and I probed into the artists' representation of the influence of ethnic and cultural identity on women's subordination. In the frame of my third research question, I analyzed how Farhoud, Ltaif, and Ghalem represent migration and exile as a female experience in their artistic works and how they portray identities and contexts in this framework. In the organization of my research, I dedicated one chapter to each work of Farhoud and Ghalem. As for the analysis of Ltaif's works, I tackled the three selected collections of Nadine Ltaif in one chapter due to the more condensed form of the poem compared to that of the novel.

In the first chapter where I probed into Nadia Ghalem's novel *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), with the exilic experience and the psychiatric condition of the protagonist portrayed as a background where the female protagonist undertakes a quest for individual identity and questions the values and norms of her family and native country, the author provides an open critique of

war as well as the patriarchal system that positions women in a subordinate and subjugated position. The salient motifs I found in this analysis were men, as a class, inflicting oppression and violence on women, the notion of womanhood, female sexuality, and motherhood imposed on women as factors causing female oppression, women's complicity in their own subordination, and the importance of solidarity among women as a remedy and as an act of resistance against male domination and violence³¹.

In Ghalem's novel *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), which I analyzed in my second chapter, war, loss, exile, and the condition of women in family and society are the recurrent themes addressed with a background of the female protagonist's constant traveling to different parts of the world. The author provides a critique of war and injustices in the world as well as questions women's place in a patriarchal society in the frame of the traditional discourses of femininity that relegate women to a marginalized position. What I also found as another significant aspect of this text is a multitude of female characters who are not portrayed in a static position, as the guardians of the family and home, who, on the contrary, are described in a position of traveling or migrating for several reasons, with no attachment to their city or country of origin. Ghalem, in this text too, emphasizes the significance of sisterhood and female solidarity.

In my third chapter, I focused on Farhoud's novel *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015), the first text of her autofictional series, which tells the story of a six-year-old Lebanese girl migrating to Québec and growing up in exile. In this text, which I found as a critique of the patriarchal norms of Lebanese society and culture and their impact on female subordination, the salient themes were discrimination between boys and girls in family and society, deprivation of

³¹ The exceptions are two brothers, Adib and Daoud, in *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), and an uncle-in-law in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010), who provide support to the female characters.

the right to study, the social pressure and obstacles put in front of women to hinder their self-development and prevent them from realizing their full potential as a free individual, economic exploitation of women, and sexuality as an overarching system of regulation on women's bodies and conduct.

The second part of Farhoud's autofictional series, *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), was my subject of analysis in the fourth chapter. In this novel that tells the story of a return from Québec to Lebanon and the protagonist's adaptation process to her homeland, which I read as a heavy critique of Lebanese society of the 1960s in terms of its cultural and social norms that suppress women, the salient themes were exile, identity, the oppression of women, and the use of female sexuality and virginity as merchandise.

The last part of my analysis was on Ltaif's three collections, *Les métamorphoses d'Ishtar* (1987), *Entre les fleuves* (1991), and *Élégies du Levant* (1995), which explore the narrator's struggle to cope with exile, a separation from the home country as well as from the mother and mother tongue, and her quest to find an individual identity through a metaphorical death and rebirth that include her many transformations in this process. In addition to being a critique of the devastating effects of war and the vices of mankind, the text highlights the negative condition of women in Arab countries and the importance of female freedom.

My examination of the authors' representations of the identities of the female characters showed that factors including ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and sexuality, along with the exilic condition, are involved in the experiences of the female characters, and the intersection of these social categories highly informs these women's unique experiences of exposure to discrimination and oppression. The Lebanese and Algerian ethnic and cultural identity of the characters in the texts is largely covered as a strong marker that places women in a marginalized

position in family and society. Women's experiences are also represented as inextricably shaped by their social class; being educated and having a job gives female protagonists the power to question their condition as women, challenge the norms, and cross borders, physically and metaphorically, to improve their negative circumstances. Chafia, Ghalem's protagonist in *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), is an educated woman and a movie editor. Ghalem's nameless protagonist in *L'amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) is a doctor working for NGOs and traveling all over the world. Aablè, Farhoud's protagonist in *Toutes celles que j'étais* (2015), is represented as a child and adolescent attending elementary and secondary school in different years, as well as a girl in the early years of her acting career. The young adult protagonists in *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), Ikram and Faïzah, are an actress and shop manager, respectively. All these female protagonists have a certain level of education; if adults, they have a profession that provides them with economic freedom. Thus, Farhoud and Ghalem represent education and financial self-sufficiency as key factors for female empowerment.

War manifests itself as a significant element that shapes Ltaif's and Ghalem's lives as well as their works. These two authors migrated to Canada as a teenager (Ltaif was 19 years old) and a young adult (Ghalem was 24 years old). Both writers witnessed war in their home country—the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) respectively—unlike Farhoud, the third writer in my corpus of analysis, who was only six years old at the time of her migration and did not personally experience the war. The war and its terrible effects are represented as a key source of pain and a reason for migrating for the protagonists and are critiqued by both writers using several references and symbols throughout their works under study. It should also be noted that Ghalem dedicated her *L'amour au temps des*

mimosas (2010) “À Ftéma, la résistante désarmée” [to Ftéma, the disarmed resistance fighter], a female pioneer of Algerian patriotism and nationalism (p. 7).

In my analysis of the selected works of Farhoud, Ghalem, and Ltaif, I focused on the protagonists as well as on the secondary characters. In the frame of my research, I found that the authors represent female characters in a variety of contexts. First of all, all the works I analyzed have strong autobiographical elements, and all the protagonists are represented as carrying some characteristics of the authors. The protagonists are represented as having an Algerian or Lebanese identity, like the authors themselves, and all the texts include abundant references to their home country. The protagonists, all single women aged between 6 and 40, are portrayed as active women, either a student or professionals, but never limited to the private space of the home. All of them are struggling to cope with exile, even when it is a reverse exile, as is the case with Ikram and Faïzah of *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), while at the same time engaged in a process of constructing “the self” or finding their identity. The exilic condition is represented as a suitable setting for these characters’ quest for a new “I,” as they leave all their points of reference behind and find themselves in an optimum condition to reset their paradigms. All the protagonists are depicted as women who, in the present or the past, are subjected to the patriarchal norms and customs of their home country in various ways and question and challenge them boldly and vehemently. In *Toutes celles que j’étais* (2015), the protagonist Aablé is portrayed over the years, from childhood through adolescence. In *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), Ghalem’s protagonist Chafia is depicted in a period of her life when she is sick and struggles with mental problems. It is possible to say that in these two cases, the protagonists are depicted in a state that potentially limits their understanding of the cultures they negotiate. Lastly, all the protagonists are portrayed in a relationship with their mothers, and the mothers are represented

as homemakers with no profession or no active working life. They are generally portrayed as women who have no education and who suffer from their marginalized status in family and society.

The representations in my corpus of research include the critique of patriarchal cultural norms and customs of the authors’/protagonists’ home countries as elements of oppression against women and point out the importance of female freedom and agency. The social and cultural pressure on the female characters manifests itself in the form of deprivation of the right to study, restrictions in terms of personal growth or career choices, metaphorical imprisonment within the private sphere, imposition of household and familial responsibilities, forced marriage, domestic violence, social control on female bodies, and exposure to male exploitation, sexually and economically. Farhoud’s protagonists, Aablè, Ikram, and Faïzah, as well as Ltaif’s narrator, make direct references to Lebanon and Arab countries as a geography that keeps women in a subordinate position and present a dichotomy of East versus West, oppression versus freedom, regarding women’s status. This black-and-white depiction of the home culture and host culture, of the Middle East and Canada, evokes Edward Said’s (1979) critique of Orientalism based on “the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (p. 42). As for Ghalem, her protagonists under study here also question women’s place in the male-dominated society of their home country and condemn the socio-cultural constraints faced by women. However, these works do not suggest sharp boundaries between the East and West; on the contrary, the narrative in *L’amour au temps des mimosas* (2010) is based on the multiplicity of peoples, places, and cultures and their relationship with each other and offers a perspective that focuses on commonalities rather than differences. Nonetheless, in both cases, it should be noted that all the works in my corpus of analysis are fiction—though with strong autobiographical

elements—, thus, the narratives reflect the perspective and the point of view of the characters, not that of the writers.

A common thread running through my corpus of analysis is the abundance of female characters used in the texts in addition to the protagonists and mothers. These women are either elder family members, female ancestors, or other women the protagonists meet over the course of the story. These are the characters who contribute to the protagonists' construction of a better self as an individual, positively touch their lives, and enlighten their way. Besides, several other female secondary characters whose experiences of exposure to discrimination or oppression are used by the authors to illustrate women's condition in their native country. In this frame, Ghalem, Farhoud, and Ltaif emphasize female solidarity and sisterhood; they represent contexts in which women, educated or uneducated, but all of them possessing wisdom and intelligence, exercise agency and give a helping hand to other women exposed to discrimination and oppression. Moreover, the texts of Ltaif and Ghalem share the commonality of including historical, mythological, and legendary figures from their Mediterranean and Middle Eastern roots, which they use to create historical continuity between the women of the past and today and foreground these strong and exemplary women as muses and role models for women of the present time.

The transformation of the protagonists is an important dimension of the narratives in my corpus of analysis. The representation of migration and exile can be a means of illustrating the difficult balancing of values and options which often occurs when one is confronted with more than one opinion, perspective, or discourse on a topic. This applies to the texts I have examined for my research; the painful exilic experience gives these women the chance to reframe their paradigms, discover who they are, and forge a new identity when they are able to break free from

the traditions, laws, conventions, and ideas that shaped their lives and mindsets up until that point. It should also be noted that transformation often comes in crisis situations such as collapsing mentally, giving birth, or being prevented from doing what one feels is essential; accordingly, they create a liminal or third space (Delaisse et al., 2022) for change. For instance, in Ghalem's *Les jardins de cristal* (1981), the word "freedom" is given significant weight, and the personal story of Chafia, the protagonist, resonates with the "big" story of the wars and conflicts in general and the Algerian War of Independence in particular. The mental crisis she experiences puts her in a state of battle with herself and ultimately brings out transformation and freedom.

In my research, I also found that women's freedom is a recurrent motif, and the artists represent exile as a liberating experience in their texts. Along with a few secondary female characters who tolerate or perpetuate the oppression women are exposed to and who are illustrated as being complicit in their own subordination, Ghalem, Farhoud, and Ltaif represent women as characters questioning the female condition and resisting the systems of power in various ways. These female characters are able to link their experiences between their culture and the new culture and make the best choices for their own lives. Despite all challenges, these women set powerful examples of resistance and resilience and exile eventually becomes a liberating and empowering experience for them, with a deep impact on their sense of self and identity.

In addition, the female characters in the texts I studied are not portrayed in a static position, as the guardians of the family and home; on the contrary, they are depicted as women who travel or migrate for several reasons, either out of their free will or to follow their husbands or fathers, but who, as a result, do not display attachment to the city or country of origin. Thus,

the three artists in my corpus of analysis represent migration as a feminine experience and challenge the traditional migration discourse that considers migrating as mainly a masculine activity.

The use of the terms “migration” and “exile” throughout my research has proven to be appropriate in terms of their respective meanings; the former having the dimensions of social, economic, or cultural accommodation and the latter being the result of the individual's intellectual, political, or identarian struggle (Averis & Hollis-Touré, 2016). In all the works I analyzed, the female protagonists’ experiences are represented as both a migration and exile since they are not only in a process of adaptation into their new social and cultural contexts, but they are also in a state of in-betweenness, going through an existential crisis in which they question their identity, their place and roles in both societies and cultures and which direction to take in their new life. The term “exile” fits in the context of Farhoud’s novel *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), too, in that even though it is the protagonists’, Ikram and Faïzah’s, “home country” that they return to, Lebanon is not the place where they were raised; they are like strangers there and they experience this new phase of their life as a reverse exile. It should also be noted that it is the father’s decision to repatriate his family to the home country and therefore, the two sisters do not migrate there out of their free will. As a matter of fact, Abla Farhoud, in an interview about her book *Au grand soleil cachez vos filles* (2017), expresses that she has been very much affected by memories of those “extrêmement difficiles” [extremely difficult] years in Lebanon and that she has been able to let go of “une boule” [a lump] that had been suffocating her for more than 40 years through writing. (Maalouf, 2017). As a final point, the use of the term “exile” for all the works in my corpus of analysis is consistent with its metaphorical meaning, in the sense that it mirrors the female protagonists’ experiences by

pointing to women's state of exile and feeling of alienation in a patriarchal society; exile is inextricably linked to the condition of women, it is the very fabric of their reality.

In terms of methodology, I used both a materialist feminist perspective and an intersectional approach in my thesis. In the frame of my materialist feminist framework, I set out to use Colette Guillaumin's (2003) concept of "sexage" and theory of the appropriation of women, Paola Tabet's (2004) concept of "conjugal amalgam," a tool for examination of marriage relationships, Tabet's (2004, 2012) concept of "sexual-economic exchange" to refer to the continuum of sexual relations for which men pay women in certain ways, Monique Wittig's (1992) political system of complex power relations, and Christine Delphy's (1984) theory that analyzes the oppression of women on the basis of "class" and in the frame of the domestic economy. All these tools proved to be useful in my research and helped me examine my corpus through a materialist feminist lens.

As a methodological tool, I also planned to use Jules Falquet's (2014) theoretical model that combines the French materialist feminist theory and intersectionality, a "materialist-imbricationist feminist synthesis," illustrated with the metaphor of "communicating vessels," showing that class, sex, and race relations coexist and are connected with each other (2014, p. 236, 238). This concept was partly useful for my analysis since the representations of contexts and identities by the three authors were mainly not suitable for its application, and only one case allowed itself to be explained from Falquet's perspective.

As for the intersectional approach, "the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2015, p. 2), which I also set out to use as the methodology of my research, also proved to be

useful in my analysis of the selected literary works in my corpus. The course of my research process showed that my decision to deploy a combined framework of materialist feminist and intersectional approaches was a right one since these two perspectives complemented each other and enabled me to shed light on different aspects of the representations of migrant women and exile. Nevertheless, I also saw that I could use a materialist feminist lens as a standalone methodological approach since it offered a wide range of tools that could be applied to the representations in my analysis and enabled me to conduct research in depth, whereas the use of the intersectional approach as a standalone tool would provide me with more limited research.

My thesis set out with the argument that “Arab Canadian female artists Abla Farhoud, Nadine Ltaif, and Nadia Ghalem’s works illustrate that the female protagonists experience migration and exile as doubly and triply marginalized subjects, and patterns of female existence in society are highly informed by their relationship to modes of production and to patriarchal and gendered social structures,” and my research confirmed this argument. It is interesting to note that the three writers chose to remain faithful to the facts regarding the situation of migrant women and focus their craft on the aesthetical illustration of these facts. It indicates a desire to draw the attention of the readers to the situations these women face so that they are no longer ignored.

In terms of the relevancy of my research, when I began to work on this thesis approximately five years ago, migration was an increasingly widespread phenomenon, along with the number of artistic products created by migrant individuals rising simultaneously. The need to examine these works with a critical eye was necessary at that time, as it is today with an ever-growing number of people from various countries and diverse backgrounds leaving their homeland and migrating to other countries (UNCHR, 2022). As we are talking about “the

feminization of migration” today, namely with more women migrating independently as well as with their families, the necessity to consider migration from a gender perspective draws the attention of migration experts (Chammartin, 2002; IOM, 2019; Paiewonsky, 2007; Talahite-Moodley, 2016). In view of the tendency in conventional exile and diaspora discourses to treat migration and exile as men’s activities and ignore the female experience and its representations (Averis, 2014; Averis & Touré, 2016; Brunet, 2005; Kaminsky, 1993, 1999; McDaid, 2017), a special focus on the representation of women's migration is needed for critical studies in the literature. Considering that women experience migration as doubly and triply marginalized subjects, it is crucial to add broader and more inclusive perspectives to the analysis of women’s experiences and their representations of migration and exile (Bourque & Hogikyan, 2010).

In this framework, I chose the selected works of Nadia Ghalem, Abla Farhoud, and Nadine Ltaif, three Francophone Arab Canadian female authors who live(d) in Montréal, Québec, and produce(d) literary works that cover the themes of women and migration/exile. I chose these artists with Arab origins since they experienced migration and exile in similar contexts and addressed the challenges women encounter in terms of their social and cultural backgrounds. In my choice, I also considered the fact that migrants with Arab origins constitute an important and growing portion of the migration population, especially after the Syrian Civil War (UNCHR, 2022).

Throughout my literature review, I saw that, despite the existence of a wide literature on the literary representation of exile, previous studies have not always taken a gendered perspective. In addition, most of the studies on the representations of migration and exile by women artists who are themselves in exile mainly undertake a literary analysis addressing the thematic and formal aspects, with particular focus on the author’s style, motifs, and symbols as

well as autobiographical elements in the texts. Previous studies that examine my corpus of analysis, the selected works of Nadia Ghalem, Abla Farhoud, and Nadine Ltaif, are few in number, and some of them follow a similar path and offer a literary perspective where certain aspects of women's experience of migration and exile may be left unaddressed or may be addressed inadequately. The critical studies that consider a feminist framework, partly or as a whole, in examining the works in my corpus of analysis are even rare. Furthermore, neither a materialist feminist approach nor an intersectional perspective has been taken in any of the previous critical studies on the literary representations of women's exile, neither in Québec nor elsewhere.

Considering the timeliness of questions surrounding female migration, the necessity of analyzing the issue in its different dimensions, and the scarcity of analyses adopting a gendered approach, my thesis, which examines the representations of migration and exile by three female authors who experience(d) exile, Nadia Ghalem, Abla Farhoud, and Nadine Ltaif, with a combined framework of materialist feminist and intersectional approaches, proves to be relevant in terms of shedding light on the understudied aspects of these representations and hopefully bridges a gap in the critical literature on migration and exile. The specific choice of methodological tools as ones that have not been previously used in the analysis of the literary representations of migrant women and exile can be considered my thesis' contribution to various academic disciplines, including migration studies, exile studies, women's studies as well as materialist feminist studies and intersectional studies in particular. I hope that my research makes a contribution to the current body of research with its focus on migrant/exile literature in French compared to the more prevalent and more extensively studied migrant/exile writing in English. Lastly, I also hope that my research contributes to Arab Canadian studies by illustrating the

accomplishments of Arabs in Canada and adding to the examination of women's place in Arab immigration to Canada, with a much-needed gendered perspective in the analysis of Arabs in the country, as highlighted by Houda Asal (2020).

One limitation of my research is the scarcity of previous critical studies that analyze the selected works in my corpus of analysis. Along with the limited number of analyses on Ghalem's two novels (1981, 2010) and Ltaif's three poetry collections (1987, 1991, 1995), the studies on Farhoud's two novels (2015, 2017) are even more rare due to their relatively more recent publishing dates. The second limitation I faced is similar to the first one in terms of the rarity of critical research that uses a materialist feminist and intersectional approach in the analysis of literary works and the absence of research that focuses on literary representations of exile using these two perspectives. These are the limitations of my thesis since I had few sources to draw on and little or no previous research to compare and contrast and thus enrich my research. Therefore, what constitutes a gap in the literature and is important in the context of the relevancy of my research manifests itself as two limitations of my thesis.

My first recommendation for future studies would be the investigation of literary representations of migrant women and exile in different settings, contexts, locations, and/or cultures. Another recommendation for future scholars would be to undertake research in this area focusing on different literary genres, including plays and short stories, as well as different art forms, such as film and theatre. Lastly, different theoretical and methodological approaches can be recommended for further research on the literary representations of migrant women and exile. All these directions for future research would contribute to the enrichment of the literature dealing with migration and exile from a feminist perspective and increase women's visibility in the field.

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