

20.3 What do we talk about when we talk about Fatamorgana (2018)

Technical details

HD video, 2:39, black and white, dolby 5.1 sound, 40 min, Portugal – France – Lebanon

Synopsis

What do we talk about when we talk about Fatamorgana reflects the casting sessions conducted in Beirut in 2016 during the research and development of *Fatamorgana* (2018-2019). Before being attributed excerpts of the text in Arabic, interviews were conducted with each one of the actresses. Questions inherent to the text and to the psychology of Hanan, the leading character of *Fatamorgana*, were discussed. Christine Choueiry, Roula Hamadeh, Caroline Hatem, Nada Abou Farhat and Claude Baz talk openly about their background and upbringing in Lebanon as well as their careers. They share their memories and their viewpoints on politics, religion, society and culture.

Credits

Directed: Salomé Lamas

With the participation of: Christine Choueiry, Roula Hamadeh, Caroline Hatem, Nada Abou Farhat, Claude Baz

Cinematographer: Boris Levy

Director of production: Elie Deek

Production assistant: Hanady Abi Raad

Location: Ashkal Alwan

Sound design and mix: Miguel Martins

Assistant sound design: Rodolfo Cardoso

Editing: Salomé Lamas

Additional editing: Rita Quelhas, Maria Inês Gonçalves, Francisco Moreira

Assistant editing: David Vicente

Graphics: Sofia Bairrão

Colorist: Andreia Bertini

Director of production: Joana Gusmão

Production and direction coordinator: Maria Inês Gonçalves

Sound studio: Walla Collective

Editing studio: Lamaland

Digital laboratory: Walla Collective

Producer: Salomé Lamas

Coproducers: Judith Lou Levy, Eve Robin, John Romão

This work was produced with materials collected for the project FATAMORGANA (2016-2019) by Salomé Lamas produced by Lamaland in coproduction with BoCA – Biennial Of Contemporary Arts, Les Films du Bal,

FATAMORGANA (2016-2019) was produced with the support of Ministério da Cultura – Direcção Geral das Artes, CCB – Centro Cultural de Belém, Culturgest – Caixa Geral de Depósitos, DGARTES – Direcção Geral das Artes, Colectivo 84 the development support of Marra.tein, Ashkal Alwan, CNAP – Centre National des Arts Plastiques, 2017 Falero | Sundance Mediterranean Screenwriters Workshop and the additional support of Colecção António Cachola, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Screen Miguel Nabinho, Walla Collective, Íngreme, Alexandra Moura, DB Studios, Hall of Fame, Escola das Artes – Universidade Católica Portuguesa, MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Fundación Botín

Dramatic structure and intentions

What do we talk about when we talk about Fatamorgana was produced with the materials collected during the casting sessions conducted in Beirut in 2016 for the research and development of *Fatamorgana* (2018-2019).

Fatamorgana is a political parody, where historical and contemporary personalities are given voice in an ironic way – explicit references are drawn from post WWII world history and geopolitics. Hanan – a Muslim cousin of Molly Bloom – finds herself, not sure how, in Beirut's Hall of Fame, after its closing hours; like the most virtuous Penelope, this woman waits for her husband; she appears to have set a date with him; but he has not arrived; where can he be?

The materials provided to the actresses prior to the casting sessions were a synopsis, intention note and excerpts of dialogues translated from Portuguese into Arabic.

Out of all the actresses who auditioned five were included in *What do we talk about when we talk about Fatamorgana*.

The actresses were auditioning for the role of the protagonist. Hanan is Lebanese and Lebanon is a territory where others fight their wars. Hanan's son has disappeared in the Lebanese Civil War. She believes her son is still a prisoner in Syria, but the uncertainty is devastating her. Her daughter studies Law in Cairo.

Her state of disarray reflects the coexistence of disparate realities, of modernity and barbarism, of pool parties and explosions on the streets every other day.

Hanan claims to have become incapable of hearing the explosion and seeing the dead. She walks past them and does not see them. Hanan has become deaf. She has become blind. At the end of the monologue, after having tried,

in vain, to clean and straighten out the dictators, perhaps she will become mute. Forever. After all, how good are words when no one hears them?

Excerpt I

Hanan: What time is it? My husband doesn't like dinner to be served after seven. Do you mind speaking a bit lower?

Yes, Allah damned the Americans. Yes, they are stupid. Yes, there weren't any American tanks in Bagdad. Yes, lower if you don't mind. I can't hear my thoughts. And my thoughts are increasingly fragile. I have to be alert otherwise they will slip through my hands like sand. Where do lost thoughts go? Sometimes I feel like my head is an empty vessel.

This morning he asked me to serve him breakfast in bed. I remember that. Labneh and raspberry jam. I'm sure of it. I remember. But where is he now? And where exactly am I?

I heard the sound of water and saw Christ the King with His arms held open. I began walking towards him. I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn so that he will rid me of wickedness of the things he created. Perhaps I will seek refuge in Christ's arms. Is Christ the Lord of the dawn? Or is he someone else? I'm not sure of that. In the name of God, who is merciful, who forgives... Forgive us for our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who made the rooster capable of distinguishing between day and night.

My husband always tells me that I shouldn't leave the house by myself. He says it is dangerous. "These are dangerous times, Hanan", he tells me, holding my hands between his. His hands are always hot and mine always cold. "Our time has passed, Hanan". "Our time was always dangerous, my love", I answer him.

Where is he? Why hasn't he arrived?

[Hanan continues before the figures of Hosni Mubarak, Saudi King Abdullah and Yasser Arafat] But there is dust in your eyes, gentlemen! Dust accumulates beneath them. You certainly can't see clearly! Allow me to help you, using the tip of my scarf. Scarfs, mine and yours, are good dusting cloths when we don't have one at hand.

Huda and Saiza took off their veils; they ripped them off their head at the railway station in Cairo. I hadn't been born yet. Christians lift their bride's veil at the altar, of the virgin brides. Tuareg men cover their face with veils, so that their enemies do not see what they carry in their soul. They do not know that scarfs and veils serve as good dusting cloths. How long has it been since they cleaned the dust from your eyes? It is very important not to neglect cleanliness.

The boy who wanted to sell me flowers was in need of a good bath. He was so dingy! He could not have been older than six. He needed his mother to take him in her arms and sit him in a bathtub; half filled with warm water, and gently and sweetly begin to lather him with soap.

I didn't have time to ask him about his mother. The man who was smoking on the corner shooed him away. "Damn Syrians, damn Palestinians, they are the ones ruining this country! Lebanon would be the best country in the world if it wasn't for them", he shouted. I remained quiet. I had liked the flowers and was about to take half a dozen piasters out of my bag to buy them.

Perhaps I had left the house to buy flowers. Perhaps I had decided that I was going to buy them. Perhaps I would have taken the boy's hand, taken him home, fed him, removed the dirty clothes from his body and sat him in the bathtub, with warm water filled to the middle, gently and sweetly lathering him with soap. The smoking man didn't allow me to. He shooed him away.

Excerpt II

Hanan [face to face with Arafat]: And then my neighbor's house was bombed because they thought he was in there. His wife and children remained buried beneath the rocks. There was no way to ignore his hunger and anger, nor the anger and hunger of those who persecuted him. No line, no yarn, could protect us from you, or those who wanted to see you dead, you and all those on your side.

Also, the yarn of green wool began to slip from my fingers. The errors occurred. Despite all my effort, Lord of keffiyeh, I always found wholes in my son's sweater. They were bigger and bigger each time. They could have been caused by bullets. I undid the sweater. I started all over again. Undid it. And did it again. In order to make it right. To make it perfectly. To make it without wounds. To make it intact. To make it live...

[...]

Hanan [Sits next to one of the figures and rests her head in her hands.]: I'm feeling tired.

Bashar al-Assad: Hey, you here at my feet, are you Shiite or Sunni? Muslim or Christian? Arab or Kurd? Do you come from Turkey or Iran? From Saudi Arabia or Russia? From the United States? Do you belong to the Islamic State? To Al-Qaeda?

[...]

Hanan [Hanan gets up and faces Al-Assad.]: Hanan, I am Hanan, sir.

Bashar al-Assad: Hmm, Hanan? ... I don't know that movement. Who finances it? Who supplies your weapons? Who do you fight against? Oh, it's an ambush! Get out of here! Get out of here!

Hanan [with her hands held up, as if she is surrendering]: Hanan is my name. I am waiting for my husband. He doesn't like dinner to be served after seven. I have a needle and thread in my purse, but I don't know where I have left my purse. In my purse, I also have pictures of my children. My daughter studies in Cairo. I don't know where my son is. He left home and never returned. I don't know how long it's been. I know that time doesn't heal anything. I have this clip in my hair.

[Hanan removes the clip and lets her hair down.]

Bashar al-Assad: Where is Putin? I feel safer when the Czar is near me. Tartus will be his, while I'm in power! If it is up to me, no one will remove the Russians from the Mediterranean, did you hear me? It's a solemn promise I make upon you, Vladimir!
I feel feverish. [Bashar al-Assad, who studied medicine, checks his own pulse.] I'm having a heart attack. Help, Vlad! Vlad!

Excerpt III

Hanan [speaking to King Abdullah, of Saudi Arabia]: And does spring exist in your land?

King Abdullah: Spring? I never heard of it...

[Apoplectic] But how dare you leave the house without a veil? Two thousand lashes, now!

Hanan: God almighty created sexual desire in ten parts. He gave nine parts to women and one to men. Should I remind you to whom the Prophet turned to when he heard the voice of angel Gabriel for the first time, thinking he was going crazy? Khadija. Do you know who he asked for protection on his knees? Khadija. Do you know who encouraged him to trust his visions? Khadija. Do you know who was the first believer of Allah? Khadija. Khadija, the first Muslim woman never wore a veil. Khadija never lived in seclusion. Khadija died before the word of God proclaimed that men rule over women, because God created men to surpass them and because they spend their property [to provide for them]. If Khadija were still alive, and supporting her husband, it would be very strange for her to hear such claims from her husband. Remember this, oh king!

The following materials were produced during the research and development phase of the project FATAMORGANA, in Lebanon, in August 2016.

All of the actresses have domestic and international work experience. Before being attributed excerpts of the text in Arabic, interviews were conducted with each one of the actresses.

With a duration of approximately 30 minutes, questions inherent to the text and to the psychology of the leading character are discussed.

Fatamorgana (2018-2019) "Before being attributed excerpts of the text in Arabic, interviews were conducted with each one of the actresses. (...) Questions inherent to the text and to the psychology of the leading character are discussed."

The actresses talk openly about their background and upbringing in Lebanon as well as their careers.

They address the project's aims and relevance within today's geopolitical situation.

All of the actresses were resident in Beirut at the time of recording.
Most of the actresses have lived abroad in Canada, USA and France.

The interviews were conducted in English and French.

Fatamorgana (2018-2019) "The actresses talk openly about their background and upbringing in Lebanon as well as their careers" They share their memories and their viewpoints on politics, religion, society and culture.



Christine Choueiry in What do we talk about when we talk about Fatamorgana (2018)

Excerpt Christine Choueiry

"It's not easy to lose a child. I think it's the hardest thing that could happen in a life. I found the script interesting, as a woman. The way she's trying to find her child again. Or maybe to resurrect him, in a way, in her mind."

"I have friends who lost their child during the war. I lost friends during the war. After the war, I did go away for a while. And then decided to come back again."

"When I decided to go away it was because I couldn't stand it anymore. It is not easy to live a war. Because you feel everything is lost, everything is broken. You could not dream anymore, in a way. And your feelings stop. That's why I couldn't stand it. I needed to dream again, to be able to feel, to fly... And here it's not easy. When there's war it's not easy. When I decided to come back, in fact, it was because I had hopes that things could change. I came back in the late 90's and there was hope, in a way, during these years."

But things changed again. Now it's not only my country that is in war, it's the whole region; it's totally chaos everywhere. So, I don't really know if I will go away again. "

"I cannot think of any country in the world that is really without chaos right now. We have this conspiracy theory in Lebanon that everything is organized and decided by others.

I don't know why humanity has become such a degrading state. We should evolve, not go back. And we're going back."

"I've always heard that we never decide anything in the region, because it's always the others that decide for us. Because America has been ruling the world or whatever. I've always heard that. But I don't really believe it. If you are not willing to let others rule you and use you, you can decide your own destiny. But I'm not sure that the majority in this region has this conception of saying 'no' or can decide what suits them or how they should manage and rule their life. Maybe that's because we are young countries, mostly. Lebanon, as a country, with these borders, exists not very far from now."

"I wish the whole world didn't have borders, but is it really feasible? When I said, I feel Lebanese, I feel Lebanese not because of the borders, I feel Lebanese from the inside. I belong to my memories, the memories of my childhood, even though there was war. I belong to that. I don't belong to borders. For me, a country it's not that. For me a country is your memories, your friends, the people around you, the one's that you love. Your country can be bigger than where you live, if you have memories outside. I wish there were no borders. But that's not the way people think life should be."

"Ironically, during the war, we used to make games with the sound of bombing, trying to imagine or see where the bomb was going to fall, when we heard it going up. Me and my brother said: 'now it's going from here to there; and we are going to run and see how many seconds it'll take, then see if it's going to hit us or not' – we used to invent things like that, and we used to laugh about it. Even though we were afraid, we laughed, we laughed about our fright. It's weird, but we did that.

What I didn't like about war it's the many times we had to move and leave our house.

I don't know if you know the history of the war in Lebanon but you had the Palestinian, the Syrians... I didn't really get in touch with the Israeli enemy because I was far from that region; so, my enemies were the Palestinian and the Syrians. They were attacking me because I belonged to a part of Lebanon that was probably more Pro-Israeli than Palestinian or Syrian. But for me: we were just being attacked by people I didn't know – I didn't know what it meant to be Israeli or Palestinian when I was a child.

The war in Lebanon is very weird because each part of Lebanon was considering the enemy differently. So, when the Syrian attacked us because we were considered as Pro-Israeli we we're held by them for a week. With no food, with no water... For me, as a child, it was very traumatizing, because we

were forty or fifty people in an underground room that were not allowed to go out. There were people with guns everywhere, and we didn't know if we were going to stay alive or not."

"Democracy... I'm not sure that democracy exists. They say that democracy is the dictatorship of the majority, in a way. So there are always some people that feel frustrated. I do believe that if we really want we can have a fair system for everybody – but I don't know how."



Roula Hamadeh in What do we talk about when we talk about Fatamorgana (2018)

Excerpt Roula Hamadeh

"If I relate to the characters I'm playing? Not really, because it's a journey of searching in yourself. It's not really interesting to search for the same character and the same personality every time. So, for me, it's an acting value when the character doesn't relate to myself. But I am from this school that says you cannot reincarnate totally, in a hundred percent in a character. You have to bring something from you. If not, it's not going to be real. This is my understanding. (...) As an actress, I have responsibility towards the people and towards my country. If you are giving me a script that is, let's say, for example, Pro-Israeli, I won't do it, of course not. So this is the responsibility towards your people and your country."

"To grow up during a war it's awful, actually. It's awful... But that's it. This is your life. And as much as you try to detach from that, you can't. And you cannot understand what I'm saying because you were raised in peace, in a normal country, where you have dreams... That is not our case. This is totally different. Now it's better, of course, but the war is still there. (...)

We are a very corrupt country, with a very corrupt government. And people follow their religious leaders. And one doesn't want to get out of his religion, because he feels that if he gets out of it, he is not secure anymore. You have to believe in god, because there is no hope."

"Every family has a son or a daughter that is gone. Lebanon is a waiting area on an airport. We raise our children just to be immigrants afterwards, because there is no future here. If you don't have money – and, of course, you don't

have power – then there is no place for our children to build their future in Lebanon. This is very unfortunate and very sad. So every family has a kid who is working outside, living outside. But there are also families that lost their children in the war, in crimes or in explosions. And there are some who have their children missing. These people don't lose hope. Because how can you lose hope of a son that is missing if you don't know and you're not sure that he's dead? You cannot. It's psychological. You have to believe that he's alive some way. And a lot of mothers die before knowing where their children are."

"I immigrated twice to Canada, and all my family is there. I'm alone here. I couldn't detach from my people, from this energy that I have here. Even though there's a lot to say about it, who doesn't dream of living in a very developed country? Where you can do whatever you want, where you can dream whatever you want. But for me, my dreams are here. Of course, I want to do work outside. But this is the base where I find everything I want for my work, for my brain and for my soul. I couldn't connect in Canada. I couldn't."



Caroline Hatem in *What do we talk about when we talk about Fatamorgana* (2018)

Excerpt Caroline Hatem

"So, my first reaction to the script and the project outline...this woman... I could appreciate how her flow of thoughts is giving the lively element to the script. And it gives the detour, basically, like concrete sensible detours to political situations. I found her very moving, I mean, I could see her. I immediately saw that she would be older than me, especially because of that idea that she would have lost a son that was already in his 20's. I can imagine that kind of pain very well, but at the same time I was thinking: 'I can't see how my face could reflect the twenty years that would've passed by this pain.' (...) I found the part about religion very successful. I liked it because I have an allergy towards religion in general and I found her way extremely delicious."

"The tragedy of mothers today is that nobody's telling them where are the tombs. I grew up in a kind of setting where everything was ephemeral: you're here then you're not, your car is here then it's not, the building is here, then it's not."

“That’s hard how to portrait trauma...I think people at different stages of their lives and age have lived this trauma differently. So I can only give my own version.

When you’re from the inside, I mean, not looking at it from a peaceful place, you get the stuff as if somebody is shouting at your face. And it constitutes you. It definitely constituted what I became. It’s a sort of ‘blindness with holes’ – you can’t see clearly, you don’t feel pain, but eventually, in your life you realize ‘fuck, there’s a hole’. And there’s blindness, there are things I cannot see.

When I went abroad I saw people who had not had the same history. And I could compare. They had that kind of confidence that things were going to stay and remain as they were, at least for a while. I think – and I think I can associate my whole countryman with me on that – is that we are really standing on a needle. (...)

So you don’t have an idea of the trauma you’re carrying unless there’s some trigger, as happens in every kind of trauma. So, for instance, you hear the 4th of July, or fireworks, and you start shouting.

But, more over, I think it gave me, personally, a sort of empathy. As if every pain that has been lived goes through me. There’s a kind of psychosis that goes on, you can feel the bullet in somebody else’s flesh. I think this is where the trauma lies – but probably because I was a child. In 2006 I was an adult, so it wasn’t unconscious. And what happened (the war) made me grow terrible old. I could see with my awareness what was happening.”

“Nobody took the pain from us by doing that essentially healing thing that is to remove ‘the pain from your chest’ and just put it in front of you, so that you can actually see it and eventually heal. It was never done. This is notorious, in Lebanon. History was never written or studied in school after 1945.

I had just moved to Arizona when the 11th of September happened. I was in college, and it happened when we were asleep, because it’s three hours earlier in NY. And immediately everybody wanted to talk about it. The teachers said ‘we’re not going to give the class, we’re going to talk about it’ – and something in me just said: ‘no, I don’t want to talk about it’. We were in some kind of Russian literature class, and the teacher spotted me and asked: ‘Caroline, what’s the meaning of Taliban?’ Everybody looked at me because I was the only Arab around. I answered: ‘student’. And then somebody stood up and told me: ‘we want to kill you all, my uncle is still in those towers’ – and I couldn’t react.

When I went to the other class, in my own department, the teacher said again ‘we’re going to talk about it’ and I thought: ‘but what is this fucking habit of talking about it?’ I raised my hand, though. I don’t remember what I said but I was just crying – because what had just happened had traumatized me and I needed to talk about it. I had no clue I would do it. The whole class started hugging me and I felt good. I thought: ‘wow, it’s great to talk about it!’ Nobody ever asked us how we felt when we were kids. After my own house was bombed, nobody asked me ‘what are you feeling, do you want to talk about it?’ Our parents were not really in the mood to ask us that. They had this need to just go on. So this process has never been done.”

“I always cry whenever I read a story, whether in the past or present, of reconciliation between communities. As it happened in Syria recently, when there was a lot of inter-communal help in Aleppo. It makes me cry a lot. The way I lived this whole thing is probably different from other people. It made me have a very wide sense of darkness but at the same time I was preserved (...) so I have this feeling that I can be a ‘fighter of light’.”

“Traditionally, before modern times, by definition, this region was not homogeneous. So geographically you have populations who actually have different kinds of lifestyles and histories.

I find extremely charming the absolute incredible mix of people coming from everywhere, talking an infinite quantity of languages, with different religions and different ways of dealing with politics. So you have people living in the mountains who always fought for a sort of autonomy from any kind of power that was there. (...)

There was a sort of a unity in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, the same kind of features and the same language, and a sort of sweetness in living together.

What happened after the First World War suddenly gave us different directions – it was like being in a family where each member, suddenly, acquires a different story.

Now we have dictatorship in Syria, a sort of fascism in Palestine, and anarchy in Lebanon.

And it imprinted a different personality to people. When you live under a dictatorship you’re always scared and terrified. You live like a zombie. When you live in chaos, you become corrupt. And when you live in fascism, you become aggressive.

So yes, I can believe in any conspiracy theory about wanting this whole region to die: because it worked. Every country in the Middle East is fucked up today. That took them only 50 years, not more.”

“I was in the United States when they wanted to attack Iraq. And I was going crazy. I was thinking – How? This can’t be true! And I was arguing every night in bed with my pillow, telling myself that I should understand. And one day I realized – why do I want to convince the American people of anything? Why do I give a fuck about what they think? In any case, we are the defeated of history – of the 20th and 21st history. We’re the defeated ones. I’m on the wrong side. But at least we could do it with grace, whereas I find them quite ugly and vulgar.”

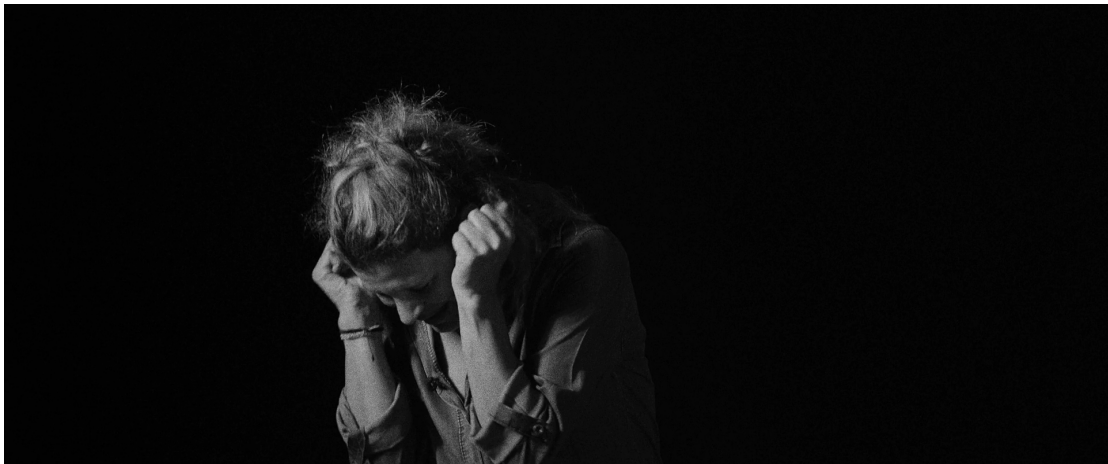
“I’m very happy that I’m right next door to Syria. I go often to Damascus, until now. And I knew Aleppo quite well; it’s a city I just adore. I couldn’t go to Aleppo anymore, but I thought: ‘Syria has become some sort of nightmare, have I dreamt Syria? Does Syria exist?’ I took a cab and I just wanted to have a coffee in Damascus. So I went to Damascus, it took me 2 hours, and had a coffee there. Just to make sure that I didn’t invent Syria in my brain.”

“When I came back to Lebanon, five years ago, I was thinking: ‘I’m not coming back to just one country, I’m coming back to the whole region. It’s very open, it’s wide, I can travel around and I’m not going to feel imprisoned’. And then all these wars started. I can’t even go to Egypt now without even thinking – what has become of Egypt?”

“Democracy? Democracy now: I love Jean Jacques Rousseau. In an ideal world we would be citizens in a state where the state is the citizens and the citizens are the state. And we vote. Some say that is only possible in little villages.

When Israelis attacked Lebanon, I remember what Nietzsche said: ‘it’s too bad the Judeo-Christian ideas are taking over the world’. And I thought: ‘you’re so stupid’. They never took over the world. They just pretend they did it. And I wish they were more honest (...) that would be simpler and nicer than pretending.

I live in a shit hole of corrupt Lebanese people. (...) I would love it if we could have a clean democratic state. (...) But my Lebanese people don’t want to be citizens, because it’s not in their culture yet. So, one day... Democracy, one day...”



Nada Abou Farhat in What do we talk about when we talk about Fatamorgana (2018)

Excerpt Nada Abou Farhat

“When I read the synopsis, I said to myself “this is not my place”, because I’m very bad in politics. But I liked the way you are treating subjects that are very sensitive nowadays - religion and politics are very sensitive. And I liked your political analysis; I felt that you really need “guts” to do that.”

“I lived three wars. The first one I was a baby, the second one I was from eight to eleven, and the last one was ten years ago, the Israeli war, in 2006. Two days ago, I was talking about the war memories with my family and friends, after I saw Omran, this small boy, who was rescued in Aleppo, in Syria, two days ago, when a strike came into his building... He was rescued and he was put in an ambulance... And he was all in blood, his head, his eyes... And he was like “stoned”. He had no reaction in his face. And someone took his picture, some journalist who lived there. We were all like this during

war – like “stoned” and we lived in denial. We lived in hope but not real hope – because we knew that we, the people, could not do anything. We didn’t have the power to change, so we had to stay at home, waiting for “them” to finish their games.

Each time I see what is happening in Syria right now I remember what I went through with my family. We lived in the first floor of a seven-floor building. And the whole building used to come down and sit with us in the small corridor, which was the safest place in the house. Our building was in the middle of the two “militias”. The war was between them and our building was in the middle, so both of them, were bombing us. I remember that, in the corridor, my mother was sitting next to me, with my five sisters, my father, my grandmother and my aunt; and we were there with the all the people of the building.

When I heard the first bomb, I put my head in my mother’s lap, covering my ears, and I heard her say: “Virgin Mary! Virgin Mary!” (*in Arabic*). When I heard the first one it was very strong. That means that the place was very near: “Virgin Mary! Virgin Mary!” – the sound was very near, and it was seven strikes at the same time. So when we heard this, we were shocked, covering our ears, because we thought it was in our house. It was very close. After that shouting, screaming and crying; and after one hour of tension and prayers, we went out there and the strikes had hit the building in front of ours. You can never forget this feeling.

It was very dangerous! We still live in a very dangerous way in Lebanon. It’s a very dangerous country, even if there’s no war now, you feel like you have tension every day. What are you doing in Lebanon?!”

“In the 2006 war, I did this movie called: “Under the Bombs” and we went to the south (we really went “under the bombs”). I saw the big families there and their shelters; and I saw mothers, who lost their children. I saw them strong. They were like: “I’m ready to give birth to ten children, and I’m ready to lose them all.” This kind of thinking... When they politically hypnotize you... It becomes inhuman. It’s an inhuman thinking, when you think that you’re ready to give your child away. I’ll never understand this.”

“As an actress, I feel like I have responsibility towards my society, to choose subjects that are related to women in my projects, to empower them, to show them their rights, especially here in Lebanon. And this is what I’ve done in my projects. I’m known for that, here in Lebanon.”

“The enemy next to us? I believe in peace. I believe that it’s not the population that makes the war. And I believe that there are many people like me in Israel, who think the same thing. I believe in humanity, in human rights. We’re hit by this *propaganda* all the time. And it’s very hard for us to get out of it, especially for non-educated people. They get hypnotized in a very easy way.

We already lived this in Lebanon, we had Lebanese enemies. There used to be a struggle between Christian and Muslim people. We were enemies in Lebanon, and now we live together. So we had the same war in Lebanon that

the enemy is having with us. And now we live together. So for me it's not logical not to find other solutions.

“Who created the borders? If we knew who did this, I think that would be part of the solution. I think that we always have to fight for our ideas and for what we believe in. This is what I feel every day. I'm hopeless but I never stop fighting and I never stop expressing my ideas and what I believe in. I think this is the best way. Because if it's not now, maybe in two hundred years, something will change. Humanity will govern.”



Claude Baz in *What do we talk about when we talk about Fatamorgana* (2018)

Excerpt Claude Baz

“I'm a victim of this kind of game, because we should live in a normal manner. We are not living here as human beings. Especially when we have politics as we have now: without a president, without laws. I follow politics by afar, so I can have a global idea from afar. But I don't go inside, I don't like it, it's dirty.”

“We were sad here, and we are still sad. We don't live. It's just a routine. We have no time to see outside. I would like to travel. I travel to my daughter's place, she's in Barcelona. I need to go to her, to renew my body a little bit, my ideas. (...) I'm learning Spanish now, to try to start a life there. I don't want to continue my life here.”

“Democracy? Democracy isn't a part of nature. It's not between and among people. There's no democracy. You say democracy but there's no democracy – there's dictatorship. Democracy is a right of the human being, the right to give your opinion. As a synonym, democracy means liberty, no? Means freedom! You don't explain it as so.”

“When I know my limits, why would I take other people's freedom? This is my country. I keep it and I need my limits. Any kind of human being should have limits.”

Dialogue list

CHRISTINE CHOUEIRY

– In fact, this is the story of my life.

When I decided to go away it was because...
I couldn't stand it anymore, in fact.

And...It's not easy to live...a war.

Because you feel everything is lost.
Everything is... is broken.

You could not dream
anymore, in a way.

And...your feeling stops.

You had the Palestinians...you had the Syrians...
you had...

I didn't really get in touch...with the Israeli enemy
because I was far from this region.

So my enemies in a way...at some point were the
Palestinians and the Syrians.

Because they were attacking me.

They said that this part of Lebanon...was probably more...
pro-Israeli than Palestinian and Syrian.

So, for me being attacked by people that I don't know...
and I really didn't know what was...

what it meant Israeli or
Palestinian or whatever...when I was a child.

So I was just being attacked
by people that I don't know.

And for me, they were
the enemy at this point.

So...the war in Lebanon is very weird.

Because every...part of Lebanon...was considering
the enemy differently, at some point.

So...when we were attacked...
by the Syrians because we were...

considered as Phalangists...
I mean the town as Phalangist...pro-Israelis.

We were...being held by them for a week.

With no food, with no water...
with whatever.

So it was for me as a child
very traumatizing...

because we were like 40 or 50 people...
in a room...underground...

and we were not
allowed to go out.

There were...people with guns...
everywhere.

And we were not really aware...if we were going
to live or not.

I did go away for a while...after the war.

And decided to come back again.

When I decided to come back,
in fact it was because...

I had hopes...
that things could change.

I came back in the nineties, so...
there was hope in a way...

during these years.
The nineties. Late nineties, in fact.

But...
things changed again.

I cannot...I cannot think of...
any country in the world that...

is really...
without chaos actually now.

I really don't know.
I don't know why.

Why...humanity has become...
is in such a degrading state, in fact.

Sure I feel Lebanese.

And I feel French also, because I lived
in France and I have the nationality.

So I feel both.

That's why I'm not...
But I truly feel Lebanese.

Lebanese.
The whole Lebanon.

Not Lebanese as a part,
or a sect or whatever of Lebanon.

But I do truly, profoundly
feel Lebanese.

I belong to...to a country where...
I belong to memories, in fact.

Of my childhood.
Even though it was war.

But I belong to that.
I don't belong to borders.

Or to...Or to trees or to whatever.
For me, a country is not that.

For me a country is your
memories, is your friends,

is your people around you.
The ones that you love.

Your country can be bigger than where

you live, if you have memories outside.

ROULA HAMADEH

– Lebanon is a waiting area
in an airport.

So, we raise our children, just to...
be an immigrant, afterwards.

You know? Because
there is no future here...

If you don't have money...and, of course,
you don't have power...

then there is no place for...
for our children...to build their future in Lebanon.

This is very unfortunate,
and this is very sad.

So every, every family has a kid
who is working outside, living outside.

But there are also families
that lost their children

in the war... or in crimes...
or in like... explosions.

And then there are
some who have...their children missing.

These people don't lose hope.
Because...

How can you lose hope of a son
that is missing, if you don't know,

and you're not sure
that he's dead?

You cannot.
It's psychological.

You have to believe that
he's alive somewhere.

And a lot of mothers die...before knowing where
their children are.

You have to believe
in God actually.

Because there is no hope.
That's it.

Everybody is...
is in a kind...

Doesn't want to get out of...
of his religion, because

he feels if he gets out of it,
then he is not secured anymore.

But it's not in our hands.
It's a plan...

And...You know?

This is what we believe...
that there is nothing in our hands.

Media shapes the public opinion,
and there is a bunch of people who decide...

the future and the destiny
of the whole universe. Period.

I emigrated twice to Canada.
And all my family is there. I'm alone here.

I couldn't.
I couldn't detach from my people.

This energy...
that I have here, even though...

there is a lot to say
about it... You know?

Who doesn't dream
of living in a very developed country?

Where you can do

whatever you want,

you can dream
whatever you want.

For me, my dreams are here.
Of course I want to do work outside.

But...This is the base where...
I find everything I want for my work.

For my brain...
and for my soul.

I couldn't connect
in Canada. I couldn't.

It's a diaspora inside...

It's being... Not knowing
who you are...where you are, and what to do.

This is being Lebanese.
Shattered. Unfortunately.

I cannot...

I cannot tell you my opinion
until I read it all actually.

If you are giving me a script
that is... let's say pro-Israeli...

I won't do it.
Of course not.

So this is the responsibility towards your people
and your country.

I needed to read the script.
You know?

Because it can be...
very important...

and it can be very,
let's say, shallow.

But the potential is here.
Like, it's an interesting idea.

CAROLINE HATEM

– I could appreciate how...her flow of thoughts
is giving that lively element.

And gives the detour, basically.

The right concrete
sensible detours to...political situations.

I found her very moving.
I mean, I could see her.

I immediately saw
that she would be...she would be older than me.

Especially that idea that
she would have lost a son

that was already in
his twenties, I believe...years ago.

I can imagine that kind of...
pain very well.

But at the same time I was thinking...
my face couldn't...I can't see how it can reflect...

twenty years that would have
passed with this pain.

I found the idea of these
characters around...

that would start talking,
like talking heads.

I told you that it reminded me
of Futurama...

there are this heads,
talking heads...preserved in alcohol and...

I can't remember well but I think
they were famous heads like...

past presidents or something like that.
I found that hilarious...

I mean I could imagine immediately
how this could be just

a hilarious kind of
installation and contrast.

I mean I could see.
I could see it.

It's already very present, in the text.

But when I reread it again
this morning and yesterday,

I still thought that...
I realized because I read it better,

that the politician parts
could be funnier.

You know? Could be
a bit more hysterical. But less literal.

Even some images...of the children refugees,
I could see them.

That comes from an exterior eye.
This is kind of visible.

I love the way you inserted it,
and how you made it.

"I wanted to buy flowers and
then I couldn't buy flowers

because he prevented me from
buying the flowers..."

Still I can see.

This is not exactly how we
live it from the inside.

I mean, as Lebanese. There is something a bit
more [...] for us.

She's being very tender, I feel.

With whatever is surrounding her and...
it's making good around her.

Moi, ça me fait du bien.
Ce qu'elle fait.

What she's doing is very gentle
and peaceful and delicate...

And it's you, basically, who wrote it.
Who's making it.

You're just putting
a gentle hand on it.

I don't think at all that she's...waiting for her husband,
she's in love with him.

That's not the case. She's just...

Maybe she wants to free him
from that house and his warm hands.

I think she is more
into... looking for...for a road.

You know? She's not
looking for a home.

It's not Penelope.
She is Ariane.

Democracy...
democracy now...

Democracy.
I love Jean-Jacques Rousseau!

In an ideal world...we would be citizens...
in a state, where the state is the citizens and the citizens are the state.

And we have a *forum* and we vote.
Some say it's only possible in little villages.

Honestly, it happened to me once.

I was representing somebody,
at a building meeting in Paris.

And at some point, the woman
said: "so let's have a vote".

And I was like: "this is so beautiful".
"This is so beautiful".

That was my one
experience of democracy.

I think it can be limited to a building,
a neighbourhood and a village.

I mean, I live in a shithole...
of corrupt Lebanese people.

I don't even give a shit about other countries.
I mean, the supposedly evil.

And...I only think that... I think that
only violence could work.

I wanna hang them all.
Or if not, put them on a boat, and push them...

towards... Malibu.
With some money.

And I would love it if...
we can have a clean democratic state.

But, in fact...
What we realized this last year.

It's easier to kill Georgescu...
because he's just one man.

Then to kill the hydra...
of hundreds of corrupt men.

And my Lebanese people
just adore them.

And crawl in front of them.
And they don't want to be citizens.

Because it's not
in their culture yet.

So one day...
Democracy, one day.

So you have the *dictature*...
in Syria.

A sort of fascism in Palestine.
and anarchy in Lebanon.

And it imprinted...
a different personality to people.

You know, when you live
under a dictatorship, you're always scared.

You're terrified.
You live like a zombie.

When you live in chaos,
you become corrupt.

You find ways of survival.
You become smart.

And you can become
either very noble and parish...or base.

And when you live in fascism...
you become aggressive.

So...sure I mean I can...
believe any conspiracy theory...

about wanting this whole region to die.
Because it worked.

Every country in the Middle East
is fucked up today.

It took them 50 years.
Not more.

Syria has become a sort of nightmare.

Have I dreamt Syria?
Does Syria exist?

I took a cab and I said:
"I just want... to have a coffee in Damascus".

So, I went to Damascus.
It took me two hours and a half.

I had a coffee there. Just to make sure it's still...
That I didn't invent Syria in my brain.

When I came back to Lebanon,
five years ago...

I was thinking: "I'm not coming
back to just one country, I'm coming back to a whole region".

It's very open, it's wide,
I can travel around and...

I'm not gonna feel...
imprisoned in a narrow place.

And then these wars started.

I can't even go to Egypt now,
without thinking: [...] "What has become of Egypt?".

Or...It seems very fake to go
to Jordan, now...But I don't feel trapped at all.

I mean, I can't imagine
being in Norway and...

eating salmon, I mean...I grew up, I mean,
I was born with the war.

So, it was very eminent,
it ended when I was sixteen.

And...a very common word
was *inkhataf*: "He got kidnapped".

Usually people used to get
kidnapped at checkpoints. Or killed.

And those who are

kidnapped are usually killed.

I mean, those who have
disappeared are just...lying down in some ground.

And the tragedy of mothers today
is that nobody is telling them where the tombs are.

I mean, I grew up in a
kind of setting where...everything was ephemeral.

You know, you're here
then you're not.

Your car is here, then it's not.
The building is here, then it's not.

But you know how,
when you're a child...

it just becomes... as if...I had told you:
"All the bees in the field are dead". "Just got poisoned".

When you're a child, you hear that and...
God knows how it translates really...

I'm sure it gets inscribed
very deep in your cells.

When I went abroad I saw people
who had not had the same history.

And I could compare.
They had that kind of confidence...

that things were going to stay
and remain as they are. At least for a while.

I think... And I think I can
associate all my countrymen with me on that.

Is that we are really
standing on a needle.

Which is the present second...that second, and we jump
to the other second.

and from jump to jump

we never know...where it's gonna lead us.

There's really absolutely no certainty.

Nobody took the pain of doing
that essentially, clinically...

healing thing that is
to remove it from here,

and just put it in front of you
so then you can actually see it, and eventually heal.

It was never done.
This is notorious in Lebanon.

History was never written or
studied in school after 1945.

I was in Tucson, Arizona,
I had just moved to Arizona, when the September 11 thing happened.

I was in college...And it happened when we
were asleep, because it's three hours earlier.

And immediately everybody
wanted to "talk about it".

So the teachers said: "we're not gonna give class,
we're gonna talk about it".

And something in me just said: "No...
... I don't want to talk about it".

We were in a kind of Russian Literature class
given by an awful British man. And he spotted me.

Nobody knew me in class,
it wasn't my department.

He said: "Caroline,
what's the meaning of Taliban?".

So, everybody looked at me because
I was the only Arab around. And I said: "student".

And so somebody
stood up and told me:

"We want to kill you all...
...my uncle is still in the towers!"

And I couldn't react.
I was like: "okay".

And then, I went to the other class,
in my own department.

And then the teacher said again:
"we're gonna talk about it".

And I said: "But what is this
fucking habit of talking about it?"

"I don't want to talk about it".
I raised my hand though.

And I said: "Well I'd like
to say something".

I don't remember what I said,
but I was crying.

Because what had just happened
had traumatized me, basically.

And I needed to talk about it.
I had not clue I would have.

The whole class was hugging me
and loving me and crying.

And I felt good.
I thought: "Wow, it's great to talk about it".

Nobody ever asked us how we felt when we were kids.
After my own house was bombed.

Nobody came and asked me:
"What are you feeling? Do you want to talk about it?"

Our parents were really not
in the mood to ask us:

"Do you want to talk about it?"
They had a need to just go on.

So, you don't have any idea of the trauma you're carrying unless there's some trigger.

As usual. In every kind of trauma.
Colloquially.

For instance, you hear...
the 4th of July...fireworks, and you start shouting.

But more over, I think...
it gave me personally a sort of empathy.

It's as if every pain that has...
been lived impersonally...goes through me.

So I could...There's a kind of psychosis that goes on.
You can feel the bullet in somebody else's flesh.

I think this is where the trauma lies.

NADA ABOU FARHAT
– I lived through three wars.
The first one I was a baby.

The second one
I was from eight to eleven.

And the last one, ten years ago.
The Israeli war in 2006.

We lived in denial.
We lived in hope, but not real hope.

Because we know that
we cannot do anything.

We people. We don't have
the power to change.

So we have to stay at home and wait for...
For "them" to finish their games.

Each time I see what's
happening in Syria right now...

I remember what I went
through with my family.

And the whole building.
I remember one time, we...

we lived, when my parents
still lived there...

in the first floor of a seven...
... seven-floor building.

We lived in the first floor.

So the whole building used to
come down and sit with us

in the small corridor which was
the safest place in the house.

And our building...I used to live in Adonis.
It was in the middle of the two sections.

The Lebanese force, and the...
and the *Aoun*. *Geagea* and the *Aoun*.

The two..."malices", I call them.
So the war was between them.

Our building was in the middle.
And both of them were like... bombing us.

So I remember, in the corridor,
I was sitting and my mother was sitting next to me.

And we are five sisters.
We are a big family.

And my father and my mother.
And my *teta*, my grandmother. And my aunt.

They used to live with us.
And the whole building, so we were there.

I heard the first...
the first bomb.

You hear the attack...
And then [...] and the big thing.

So I heard the first one.
I put my head into her lap.

I pressed like this,
and I heard her say...

I heard her say:
Maryam Al Azraa, Maryam Al Azraa

Maryam Al Azraa, Maryam Al Azraa
Maryam Al Azraa is the Virgin Mary.

When I heard the first one,
it was very strong.

That means that the place
would be very near.

Maryam Al Azraa, Maryam Al Azraa
I was like this [...].

It was very, very near the sound...
and the *rezma*.

Rezma that means seven strikes
at the same time.

So when we all heard this...it was like...
we were... shocked. And like this, pressing.

When we thought it was in our house.
It was very, very, very close...

And after that shouting
and screaming and crying...

And after one hour of,
you know, tension.

And prayers and everything.
We went out there.

And the strikes were at
the building in front of us.

You can never forget this feeling. It's...
You feel like everyday you have tension, you have war.

What are you doing in Lebanon?

CLAUDE BAZ

– Le monologue, ici...

Pourtant, je n'aime pas la politique.

Je vais être très franche,
je n'aime pas la politique, mais...

Ça ne veut pas dire
que je ne peux pas...faire le rôle.

Parce que ça me casse la tête,
C'est des choses vraiment très...

Très encombrants...
Je n'aime pas.

C'est compliqué. Ça complique la vie.
Ça complique l'intelligence.

Et puis ce n'est que...
des mensonges.

Ça c'est que je trouve, moi.
C'est...

C'est un *game* sur le peuple.
Sur tous les peuples du monde...

Ça c'est la politique pour moi.
Je n'aime pas.

I'm a victim of this kind of game.
Because...

Basically we should live...
In a normal manner.

We are not living here as human beings.
Especially when we have politics as we have now.

Without a president.
Without laws.

On a créé des lois.
Mais on ne les suit pas.

C'est des lois qui...Qui leur...
Qui leur conviennent à eux.

Financièrement.
C'est tout.

Et qui nous font...qui nous rend...
qui nous rend pauvre. Ça c'est les lois du Liban.

I would like to travel.
I travel to my daughter. She's in Barcelona.

She lives in Barcelona.
I go every year.

But I cannot go every
two, three, four months.

For example. Because she is unique.
I need to go to her.

To renew my body a little bit, my...
... ideas.

I'm learning Spanish now. To go there.
I don't want to continue my life here.

Comment j'ai vécu la guerre?
Je l'ai vécue...

J'avais peur parce que...
Les bombes arrivées jusqu'à chez nous.

Puis quand je me suis mariée
à l'âge de vingt-cinq ans, j'ai eu ma petite fille.

Je ne savais pas où est
que je veux la cacher.

Pour le pas être atteint...Pour que elle ne soit pas
atteint d'une bombe.

Donc on descendez dans les...
... dans les chambres de chauffage.

La où il y à les...
les tuyaux et tout ça.

Les réservoirs de mazout.
Parce que c'est *underground*.

Et c'est encore plus...
C'est dangereux.

La guerre à commencé quand
j'avais 14-15 ans.

Puisque c'était un peu loin,
on est dans la banlieue de Beyrouth.

Donc que c'est un peu loin.
C'est Beyrouth qui a été bombardée.

Mais après c'était toute la région chrétienne
que a été bombardée.

Si on veut parler de "chrétienne".

Bien sûr, on été divisées.
Les Chrétiens ont été divisées.

Nous sommes toujours divisées.
Malheureusement.

Je ne sais pas.
C'est dégueulasse.

Et ça me fait mal au cœur parce que...
C'est pas ça. C'est pas ça le message des Chrétiens.

Si on veut parler de religion.
C'est pas ça le message des Chrétiens.

Le message des Chrétiens
c'est aider l'un l'autre.

Si moi, je vois un pauvre,
donc je l'aide.

Ce n'est pas que je lui donne
un coup de pied. "Va te faire foutre".

Je ne sais pas.
Je n'ai même pas...

Ce n'est pas comme ça, non.

Ce n'est pas comme ça. C'est aider l'un l'autre.

Et même si ce n'est pas un Chrétien,
je peux aider le Musulman.

Je peux aider le Bouddhiste.
Je peux aider tout le monde, puis que c'est un être humain.

Si je parle des Chrétiens,
puis que je suis chrétienne.

Ce n'est pas ça.
Ce n'est pas...

Ce n'est pas notre...
Ce n'est pas notre mission.

Ce qu'on fait maintenant
ce n'est pas notre mission.

Que ce soit du haut jusqu'au...
jusqu'au plus petit.

Non, non.
La religion c'est personnel.

Non, c'est personnel.
Chacune... à son Dieu.

Mais ici, ici au Liban.
C'est on a vécu d'une façon...

Musulman / Chrétienne.
C'est comme ça.

Mais j'ai beaucoup des amis
qui sont musulman,

qui sont chrétien, qui sont...
druzes. Qui sont shiites.

J'ai beaucoup des amis, mais je suis
vraiment très ami avec eux.

J'ai pas de problème.
C'est pas un identité.

Ça veut pas dire que

c'est mon identité. Non.

Democracy isn't in nature.
It's not between and among people.

There is no democracy. You say democracy,
but there is no democracy.

Je ne sais pas pourquoi on
ne fait pas une révolution.

La révolution peut faire
beaucoup des choses.

Mais parce que nous
sommes différents.

Voilà, we are divided. We are divided.
So if we go on the road...

We are divided.
I am what I am...

You are what you are.
We are going to fight all together.

Instead of going and make the revolution...
for the people we are meant to go.

I feel so...I feel like that...
I want to eat...I want to have my shower.

I want to go out...I want to shout!
You have no right...no right to stop me.

Why? Who are you?
When I know my limits, why to go there?

Why to take the limits of other people?

I know my limits. This is my country.
I keep it. I keep my limits.

I need my limits, yes.
Every... every...

Kind of...the human being...
He should have...limits.

Most of the Lebanese people...
And Syrian, and Turkish, and Iraqis.

Iraqis... It's really... it's sad.
We were sad here.

We were sad here.
And we're still... sad. We don't live...

J'aime mon pays, mais...
Il est basé sur la mensonge.

J'aime mon pays, mais il est
basé sur des mensonges. Sur des bandits.

D'ailleurs si vous allez...
si vous allez, à le voir...

l'histoire des libanais c'est...
Nous étions des phéniciens.

Si vous allez sur l'encyclopédie,
on écrit sur les phéniciens.

C'était une bande de bandits,
de trafiquants.

Voilà, c'est ça, c'est notre histoire.
Alors, c'est où la base?

Il n'y a pas de... Il n'y a pas quelqu'un de
sérieux qui vous dirige.