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Excavating the Odalisque: Rethinking Identity in the Border in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*

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ABSTRACT: *This study explores the treatment of the issue of El harga*[1]*—present day migration—in Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits (2005) by the Moroccan author Laila Lalami. More precisely, it targets the experience of women haragas as victims of essentializing gendered norms and neo-colonial dialectics through employing post-colonial poetics by Edward Said, Judith Butler, Gloria E. Anzaldua, in addition to Deleuze and Guattari. The study examines Faten's journey of becomingness and reveals that the contemporary Western society displays neo-colonial attitudes and relegates migrant Arab women to the periphery following Orientalist visions of identity and sexuality. It argues that Faten's story of self-affirmation, new consciousness and subversion of the odalisque affirms her ability to rehistoricize, recontextualize and demythologize the myopic renderings about Arab and Muslim women in the West. The article concludes by refuting the consideration of El harga as a mere border crossing through its representation as an ideological and cultural traverse leading to an emergent agency and consciousness.*

KEYWORDS: Borderland, Orientalism, Neo-Colonialism, Identity, Odalisque, New Consciousness.

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[1]In this article, the term "El harga" or "lahrig" is a noun coming from the verb "hrag" meaning in North African dialect "to burn". "Harag", singular form of "haragas", refers to clandestine immigrants who transgress the law whether by immigrating generally to Europe and burning their identity papers, or by overstaying their visa. See Hannoum. "The Harraga of Tangiers." for insightful explanations on the issue of El harga.

Introduction

"FOURTEEN KILOMETERS," is the opening expression of Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005). This distance does not only stand for the width of Strait of Gibraltar as the border between Morocco and Spain, but mostly for the frontier between two poles, two cultures, and two worlds (Lalami 2005). Crossing the "14 kilometers" to Spain is the ultimate goal of haragas who crave to escape misery in Morocco and unearth new chances of success in Spain. Yet, after surviving the crossing, they end up as displaced subjects undergoing experimentation and possible desolation in an unfamiliar territory. Unlike much of the literature about El harga depicting male experiences, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* targets the invisible experience of women due to gendered norms. Hence, while this study attests for the relevance and importance of the theme of illegal migration in contemporary times, its importance lays in the treatment of the issue in relation to Arab women, and the pitiable circumstances that await them in the West.

This article focalizes on the essentializing representations of Arab women as well as the despotism of neo-colonialism in the novel. It argues that through the experience of Faten, Lalami presents the confluence of Eurocentric, Orientalist, and androcentric discourses in muddling women's identity as migrants, liminal, and deterritorialized subjects traversing other borders. The present paper seeks to examine gender, ethnicity, and history as basic factors leading to Faten's subordination and infliction of Martin's, along with other Spanish men's superior, predatory, and colonial gaze. It sustains that in the process of displacement and suffering, adaptation and ultimate resistance, Faten undermines and subverts the mainstream discourse by endorsing a new model of womanhood generated by a new consciousness. As such, it will show that she provides an alternative model of womanhood replacing the clichés of the odalisque, exploited, and even subdued Arab woman by asserting that identity is a fluid construct. In so doing, the paper proposes that by border crossing, Faten also crosses gender and cultural boundaries in a liminal space.

Although it acknowledges that a considerable amount of critical attention has been directed to the issue of El Harga in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, this study seeks to provide a richer understanding of identity formation by illegal Arab women migrants through leaning on a comprehensive theoretical framework. In due course, it seeks to respond to considerations of Faten as a "fallen woman" by demonstrating that she is a survivor who displays unconventional strategies of endurance in order to invalidate the power paradigms of Western dominance which approach her as a commodity. In this sense, the article tempts to redeem Faten as being forced to instead of having engaged willingly in fallen actions or cheap pleasures. These actions, it will be shown, contribute to the process of building a dissident consciousness against the neocolonial attitudes against her.

1. Theoretical Foundations

In *Orientalism*, a book of cultural criticism, Edward Said (1978) delineates the type of relationship between the West and the East relying on the exaggerated differences and noticeable superiority of the West, against the fetishisation of the East. The latter is hollowed out and often reduced to "a topos, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics" (p. 177). Based on a Western hegemonic complex system, Said (1978) explains that the West is always the center, the dominating and manipulating force while the East is a mere "passive reactor" (p.109).

Said (1978) maintains that the fetishisation of the Orient originates from its perception as a hostile foreign subject that needs to be explored and understood. As a subject suggesting savagery and mystery, the Orient is looked at primarily for the sake of domination and control. In his *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2000), Said explains that this logic does not only rationalize the Western colonial mindset but also fossilizes the idea of the West as "a superior", "metropolitan", "overlord" whose burden is to rule the Oriental subject fixated in a territory of dependency and peripherality (p. 295).

In the same vein, Judith Butler, in her *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), discusses power paradigms yet on gender basis. She explains that the "regulatory norms" are powerful in framing the "materiality of bodies" (1993, p. 2-3). The latter is based on gender constructs that reduce the female body into specific traits fixed in a specific zone. Just like Said's idea of the Western obsession with examining and controlling the Orient, Butler maintains that sex acts as a "regulatory" force that "demarcate [s]", and "differentiate [s]", women (1993,p.1). In order to regulate women's bodies and behaviors and neutralize their status as a "threatening spectre," "identifactory practices" are imposed (1993, p. 3).

Though in their *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Deleuze and Guattari deal with issues related to the modern Western culture in general, one pertinent concern is the power enterprise. They redefine power in relation to the concept of the nomad. While traditionally, nomadism signifies the physical crossing of borders, the Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective relates it to the transformative power of overthrowing strict hegemonic boundaries and engaging in an explorative journey that results in what they name as 'becoming'. Physical freedom is yet still significant since, according to Deuleuze and Guattari (1987), it allows the nomad to move from the striated to the smooth spaces. While the former "is striated" by "walls" and "enclosures", the smooth space is "open", fluid and characterized by dynamic various paths making all processes of transition and transformation possible (p. 306-81). In order to reach the status of 'becoming,' the nomad/individual needs to move constantly between both the striated and the smooth spaces. While Deuleuze and Guattari (1987) assert that the both spaces should exist in mixture, they emphasize the transformation and reversal of the striated space into a smooth one.

Gloria Anzaldua (2012) in her *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* also deals with border crossing and becoming namely for women of colour or the mestizas. By introducing *los intersticios,* she initially describes the life at the borderland as one causing loss between two different worlds. Crossing the borders equals crossing the "confines of the normal" often leading to "intimate terrorism" (2012, p. 5-42). Alienated from their "mother culture", trespassers (women of colour/mestizas) do not simply "enter" the new world (2012, p. 25), but pay the price of cultural shiftings by being considered as aliens in the dominant culture. To survive the conditions of the rigid cultural boundaries, the mestiza has to resort to "la facultad"(2012, p. 7). The latter, Anzaldua explains, refers to an emergent agency and a changed consciousness that allows her to embrace a comprehensive outlook towards her identity where notions of the periphery-center and of "subject-object duality" fade away and are replaced by more flexibility and tolerance (2012, p.102). *La facultad* transforms the mestiza into a *new mestiza*- a one who "operates in a pluralistic mode"— a mode that widens her vision and infuse her with more tolerance and acceptance (2012,p. 101). By resorting to a "conscious rupture" with all hegemonic traditions, the new mestiza learns "to transform the small 'I' into the total Self" (2012, p.104-105).

The ideas of Said, Butler, Anzaldua as well as Deleuze and Guattari provide a solid ground for analyzing the way those in power determine the identities of the unprivileged in Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. As a response to power imbalances, Faten's journey of El Harga stands for her subversive consciousness. Her desire to desert Morocco, standing for a striated space, makes of her the example of the nomad par excellence. Her aspiration for freedom never fades away when confronted with the neocolonial mindset and regulatory norms during border crossing and while in Spain. Though relegated to a fetishized Other whose existence is molded according to racial and gender basis, Faten as a nomad and new mestiza succeeds in recalibrating her subjectivity.

2. El Harga: The Trajectory of Faten's Escape from the Striated Space

The novel's central concern with illegal migration is best highlighted in its prologue, "The Trip." The latter shows that the characters who leave Morocco have *hopes* for changing their unfavorable conditions, but do not expect the *dangers* that await them. Faten Khatibi, among other four harragas in the story, is a college student who decides to leave her country to escape being arrested after commenting about the king. Her

story reflects the injustices of the Moroccan post-colonial corrupt regime based on gender and class discrimination as well as marginalization and abuse of the most deprived (El boubekri ,2014). By dealing with the atrocities of the post-colonial Moroccan society, the novel examines what Michel Foucault (1987) names biopower. The latter does not only manifest itself through absolute control over the population, but does also offer some privileges to those who comply with the system. In the same vein, Derrida (2005) describes those privileged as owning ipseity—a concept that stands for one's ability to maintain a self-sustained selfhood while being in harmony with the state's sovereignty, authority, and policy. As such, Faten suffers from both bipower and lack of ipseity in her society. The compilation of both depicts the mismanagement of the Moroccan government and renders surviving in Morocco impossible.

For Faten, Morocco has always been a site of repressing the dissenting voices and eliminating any possible self-fulfillment. Her militantism was against the corruption of King Hassan, the government, and the political parties" as well as the embraced Western liberalism that ravaged the youth (Lalami, 2005,p. 40). As a religious fanatic, Faten saw that any possible social and political reform could be attained only through securing a strict religious state. She has a different opinion, however, when it comes to cheating in exams and some other immoral practices (Lalami, 2005). Her deceitful and contradictory stances are but a confirmation of her instrumentalization of religion. After all, her fundamentalist religious viewpoints equate the ones of many unprivileged youths who have no choice but embracing radical ideas to empower them to face corruption, poverty, and economic as well as political exclusion. Faten clearly states this point of view during a conversation with Larbi when talking about lack of opportunities: "No one gives anything for free. That is the trouble with some of our youth" (Lalami, 2005,p. 67).

Faten's ideas became threatening and fatal when starting to indoctrinate her bourgeois friend Noura—a daughter of a government officer. Noura, who has been raised and has always lived according to a Western lavish lifestyle, is metamorphosed into an activist and blatantly challenges her father Larbi by stating: "There's too much corruption in the system now, and I want to be a part of the solution" (Lalami, 2005,p. 64). Worried about the prospects of his daughter, Larbi, the epitome of the corrupt Moroccan bureaucrat in the novel, becomes determined to persecute Faten for manipulating his daughter and for sustaining non-conformist ideas. Faten's convictions and appearance pose a threat to the Moroccan elite by opposing their Westernized lifestyle (Mehta, 2014). Consequently, participating in a march against the government and making indelicate comments about the king were fair enough for Larbi "to deal with Faten once and for all" and use his position to ruin Faten's life (Lalami, 2005,p. 26). Expelled from university and facing arrest, Faten was left with no hope for a better life in Morocco.

A victim of a socioeconomic political precariousness and masculine surveillance, Faten starts a new journey as a haraga—a journey that transforms her from a religious fervent to an odalisque. Though she stated earlier that "we're so blinded by our love for the West that we're willing to give them our brightest instead of keeping them here where we need them" (Lalami, 2005, p. 67) ,she eventually turned to the West for survival. Faten, like many unprivileged youth, was a victim of "a war that has caused a strong enough sense of despair to lead individuals to flee regardless of the risks of drowning" (Abderrezak, 2016, p. ix). She stands, to borrow from Said (1993), for the many "unassimilated to the emerging structures of institutional power, rejected by the established order for their intransigence and obdurate rebelliousness" (p. 402-403). Because of her insubordinate spirit, Faten had to reject the Moroccan power system and seek a new territory for self- assertion.

Understood from a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, Faten who chooses a nomadic journey over staying in her country is an epitome of those who resist to fit in the repressive "striated space" (1987,p. 478). In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Deleuze and Guattari draw the difference between striated and smooth spaces. In contrast to the striated spaces which are "hierarchical, rule-intensified, strictly bounded and confining" smooth spaces are "open dynamic and allow for transformation to occur" (1987,p. 360). The idea is, actually, relevant to Faten's status in Morocco and her expectations from Spain with its promises of freedom. Morocco stands for the striated space which imposes

homogeneousness and exerts absolute control over its residents. Spain, on the other hand, seems for Faten as a smooth space which celebrates diversity and heterogeneousity and offers multiple directions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This European country, she assumes, is the territory where she can wander freely away from her restrictive homeland.

Faten's downfall explains much of the state's corruption, youth elimination as well as the gendered limitations placed on women in Morocco. In the novel, while the story entitled "The Fanatic" depicts and decries the plight of the Moroccan woman as a bereft object, "The Odalisque", through the act of migration, celebrates her ability to destabilize fixed notions about femininity by transcending geographical and cultural boundaries through surviving the act of crossing (Ricci, 2017). Both stories articulate Faten's determination to contest all forms of domination and fixedness, undermining, in due course, all the forms of injustice she has been subject to. Her determination is the outcome of a pertinent female consciousness peculiar to Maghrebin Muslim women, labeled according to Marlene de la Cruz- Guzmán "*Mghribiyya*[2] consciousness" (2008, p.137).The latter is the outcome of the many years of struggle against successive colonization and repressions. Through insisting on activism and agency, this emancipatory consciousness takes advantage of the local cultural heritage and modern opportunities to overthrow disparate forms of oppression. It opens avenues for detraumatization, experimentation, and self-assertion.

3. The Trip: Survival at the Borderland

"The Trip" is the link between "The Fanatic" and "The Odalisque". It does not simply crystallize Faten's intentions of leaving Morocco and moving to Spain, but mostly gives readers an idea about the crossing ordeal. A former member of a Muslim community, Faten's first contact with the West was disturbing. The crossing experience denationalized her and immersed her in interstitial subjectivity. Faten's experience echoes Anzaldua's depiction of life at the *borderland* as: "Alienated from her mother culture, 'alien' in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits" (2012,p. 42). Similarly, Faten is stuck at the limbo. She is petrified even before reaching Spain, she "were sulking" (Lalami, 2005,p. 7). Her agitated state of mind is symbolized by her physical paralysis; she is unable to swim or to hold to Murad, another illegal immigrant with her. "Her eyes open wider but her hands do not move" (Lalami, 2005,p. 19), describes her status of being caught in *los intersticios* altering Faten from a decisive and determined person to an etherized and immobile one.

While Anzadula describes the space forcing subjectivity, loss, and alienation as *borderland,* Judith Butler names it as the "zone of uninhabitability". The latter refers to the territory that delineates the limits of abject beings that will later on be defined as subjects relying mainly on the "materiality of bodies". In hostile milieus, power dynamics and regulatory norms are very powerful in recasting bodies. The sense of performativity related to the materiality of bodies shifts to deal with the "reiterative power of discourse" in producing and regulating abject beings. Power paradigms affect more the construal of sex or gender. And in the process of body materialization, instead of having gender as a construct based on biological traits, it turns to be based on purely hegemonic norms reducing the subject into specific tropes and limiting it to specific zones (Butler, 2008, p. 2-3).

Faten's entire journey, starting from the moment she leaves Morocco and while in Spain, is controlled by a complex system of knowledge—a system that encapsulates her as a figure representing the Orient. And just like the Orient that is reduced to "a topos, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics" (Said, 1978, p. 177), Faten is reduced to a subject starting with her name which significantly means in Arabic

[2]The word Mghribiyya is the adjective coming from Maghreb. The latter refers to the Northwest of Africa including mainly Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Mghribiyya stands either for northwest African women in general, or to Moroccan women in particular since Maghreb/Maghrib refers in Arabic to Morocco.

charming, seducing, or enchanting. Its significance becomes pertinent especially in the part of "The Odalisque" where she is portrayed in accordance with the Orientalist vision towards Arab women as exotic alluring creatures. Having the Spanish guard calling her Fatma instead of Faten while awaiting border check is but an example of the Western man's fetishisation of the Arab female body. In the same context, Jarmakani explains the significance of the use of the name Fatma in the West as a one that replicates the Western mindset about Arab women based on "orientalist props" and "exoticism" (2008,p. 118). Furthermore, the use of this oriental name does not only bear the notion of fantasy towards Arab women, but mostly reduces Faten into a voiceless and nameless Arab woman to be taken and thrown away to the street. The practice echoes desire to impose power hegemony by enforcing on her a different name other than hers.

Faten's condition is accentuated with her status as an exiled, injured, and mobile body bearing estrangement and violence (Friedman, 2004). She finds herself obliged "to play this game of acquiring labels, to fit in a narrative… in exchange for a marginalized status"—a status that relegates her into a mere commodity (Zetter 2007,p. 188). She is trapped in the circuit of checking, containing, and controlling the moving body. More than just control and classification, Faten becomes subject to "Structural violence"—a concept developed by Johan Galtung (1969) explaining the violence on the human body and suffering during the process of migration (p. 168). In exposure to structural violence, Faten is affected by unjust racism depriving her of the basic need for dignity and respect.

Though Faten cannot speak the language of the Spanish guard, she understands his gaze: "The guard had taken her to one of the private exam rooms, away from everyone else. He lifted her skirt and thrust into her with savage abandon. He was still wearing the surgical gloves he'd had on to examine the group of migrants who'd landed that day. And, all the while, he kept calling her Fatma" (Lalami, 2005,p. 231-232). While Galtung (1969) differentiates between actual violence and potential violence, it is evident that Faten is exposed to actual and direct violence when the shore officer rapes her (171). Her status as being socially and racially weaker makes her prone to more structured violence. In Anzaldua's terms, however, this refers to what she names as "intimate terrorism" (2012, 42). She explains that "those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.' Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot" (2012,p. 25). Since Faten has crossed over the confines of the normal and overthrown the role assigned to her as a Muslim woman in Morocco, she becomes an easy prey for "intimate terrorism".

Few minutes before the rape, Faten "remembers what her imam had said back at the underground mosque in Rabat— that extreme times sometimes demanded extreme measures'" (Lalami 2005,p. 231). Afraid not to meet the requirements of entrance, Faten silently accepted being raped. Her acceptance of the rape reinforces Said's idea of having the West as "the actor" and "the Orient a passive reactor" (1978,p. 109). Her silence stands not only for the price she paid for her entrance to Spain, but also for the beginning of her metamorphosis. More than being a simple trespasser, Faten becomes subject to controlling forces and identity reconfiguration paradigms. Being an illegal immigrant and an Arab woman force her to be exposed to neo-colonial forces manipulating the exposed vulnerable bodies on the borderland. Raped while the guard still wears the gloves to keep him clean is symbolic of the array of measures taken against trespassers in general, and Arab women in particular. Though exotic and alluring, Faten, as an Arab woman, "offends sexual propriety by offering "dangerous sex" and threatening hygiene (Said 1978,p. 167). By wearing the gloves, the guard expresses his sense of disdain and anxiety over his own protection on one hand, and his concern about setting symbolic and literal boundaries over the *other* on the other one.

Once Faten is intimately terrorized, marked, and broken, she can be released into Spain as the *other*, without fear of being distinguishable. Her move to Spain is quite safe after being formed as a subject conform to the "normative phantasm of 'sex'" (Butler 2008,p. 3). Understood from this perspective, Faten has been successfully transformed into a subject to repudiation—a repudiation which "produces a domain of abjection" and without which the subject cannot emerge, survive, and cross the borders (Butler, 2008, p.3). Faten is no longer a "threatening spectre" only after imposing "identifactory practices" regulating her

according to normative practices related to her sex and origins (Butler, 2008,p. 3). By surviving the brutality of the crossing experience, she has, according to Andersson (2014), successfully passed "The Darwinian selection" test (p.3).

4. Martin's Territorialisation and Imposed Performativity on Faten

Though Faten thought that after passing the test, she will move to a smooth place, the cycle of extreme measures continues and reaching the Spanish shore turns out to be a mere passing over of geographical barriers. Unsusceptible to any transgression, gender and ethnic regulations become more pertinent, and her new position marks a new episode for victimization. By becoming a prostitute, Faten becomes a locus for more social as well as ideological confines and oppression. What was different this time, at least momentarily, is that unlike in the past when she had never "argued" and "had done as she was told" (Lalami, 2005,p. 211); as a sex worker, she is able to sell her sexual services and gain capital.

In a moment of introspection, Faten compares her past in Morocco, and her present situation in Spain stating: "That was the thing with money. It gave you choices" (Lalami, 2005,p. 227). Just like many Muslim immigrant women, Stroll maintains, Faten distances herself from strict religious practices (as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 64). She does not really seek a total break from the spiritual or moral dimension of Islam, but rejects its "instrumentalization … to serve patriarchal or political interests" (as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 64). Gradually, however, she understands that the money she gains does not stand for economic independence, but more for a commodification of her vulnerable body due to existing stereotypes about racial and sexual identity. After all, with no degree and no other skills, Faten is forcibly driven to prostitution—the unique option that offered a living. In the same context, the cultural theorist, Iain Chambers (2008) explains that migrants are the very victims of the cultural and historical power paradigms making them helpless to encounters that they definitely cannot control (p.27).

Three years after the rape scene, we find Faten as a prostitute in Calle Lucia, Madrid, entertaining a Madrid teenager client named Martin, who becomes her "favorite client". During these years, Faten "had had time to hear all the fantasies, those that, had she finished her degree, she might have referred to disdainfully as odalisque dreams. Now they were just a part of a repertoire she'd learned by heart and had to put up with if she wanted to make a living" (Lalami, 2005,p. 232). Faten becomes familiar with her status within the domineering layers of the Western society—a status based on timeless Orientalist ideas and that relegates her to an object satisfying the sexual whims of Western men. While Nawal El Saadawi (1980) explains that the libertine mindset as far as women's sexuality is concerned does not only equate freedom but enforces the commercialization of their bodies (p. x), Faten's problem is deeper than that. Her body becomes a signifier of "culture mythology" epitomizing the timeless East vs. West opposition and struggle (Jarmakani 2008,p. 4).

To assuage his phantasms, Martin expects Faten to narrate her past back in Morocco but in a way that accentuates her otherness, odalisque image, and existence in the harem. He awaits her to tell him that she was growing up in a Moorish house with six sisters teaching her "the art of pleasing men" (Lalami 2005,p. 232-33). No wonder that Martin is obsessed with the mediaeval logic of the Harem since it is, according to Jarmakani (2008), the best "imaginative space through which to project masculinist and heteronormative fantasies of erotic desire and male power, as organized around male access to and possession of women" (p.3). It is the image of the harem as a mysterious enclosed space where sexual plurality and excessive freedom are permeated for the sole purpose of narcissistically ministering the master's indulgences that awakens the hegemonic Western fantasies in Martin (Jarmakani, 2008).

The effect of the image of the harem equates the one of Sherazede—a major female storyteller in the famous collection of *One Thousand and One Nights* (1885) and a symbol of Arab femininity. But while the former was imposed by Martin, the latter was tactically embraced by Faten. Disfigured by the Western domineering patriarchal gaze, the character of Sherazede turns out to be a symbol of sexual satisfaction and

seduction. Her wit and shrewdness were suppressed and disregarded by the Westerners and replaced by their obsession with the Arab woman's mysteriousness and sexuality (Mernissi, 2001). Faten, however, restored the lost intellectual Sherazade with her distinguished sagacious faculties. She plays the role of Sherazede when Martin questions her about her past. Once she realizes that Martin is "pleased with the game" (Lalami 2005,p. 233), Just like Sherazade who fools the Sultan by telling fictitious stories Faten says: " I didn't see much of my father. I spent all my days in the harem. …They initiated me in the art of pleasing men" (Lalami 2005, p. 232-33). By using storytelling and choosing what exactly to say, Faten disrupts not only the image of the captivated Sherazade but also that of the voiceless woman. As such, storytelling equates self-expression and manipulation of the other. The analogy between Sherazade and Faten, makes it evident that there is a tightly knit relationship between Arab women's body, sexuality, manipulation, and self-expression. Fedwa Māltī Dūğlās explains that

> Shahrazâd demonstrates to her literary cousins and descendants that an intimate relationship must be created between writing and the body. [She is] a sexual being, who manipulates discourse (and men) through her body. It is the latter that permits her to speak, as male violence is metwith her sexuality, articulated through her body and words. At the same time, Shahrazâd uses narrative to redirect desire and, hence, sexuality. (as cited in Ricci, 2017, p.46)

Above all, it becomes evident that Faten is on the route towards her freedom. Her transgressive reformulation through impersonating the harem and Sherazade prove her emergent subjectivity and experimentation with new roles.

In a rendezvous, Martin tells Faten that he has been reading up "about the duties of the woman to the man and all that" (Lalami,2005,p. 234), and that "he *knew* things about her people", and that "it's a fascinating subject" (Lalami, 2005,p. 149). While he claims that he is trying to understand her, he is in reality willing to, using Said's words, "dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion" (1978, p.xiv). By mentioning her origins and her duties as a woman, Martin alludes to his power over her as a European man. In a way, he is referring to the center- periphery relations regulating the power structures between the West and the "Rest" (Hall, 1992,p. 277). Furthermore, by stating clearly that it is an interesting subject, Martin provides an insight into Said's idea of the attractiveness of the Orient and its evocation of curiosity. Said (1978)explains the way "the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire" (p.188).

In one of their encounters, Martin declares to Faten: "I like the smell of your skin—salty like black olives…. And your breasts— ripe like mangoes" (Lalami 2005,p. 214). By classifying her according to what Stuart Hall (1997) calls "repertoires of representation" (p.225), he adheres to the Western rhetoric of othering. Furthermore, these "culinary references" evoke "Martín's set of dormant desires embedded in his culture" reducing the Arab women to a fantasized flesh serving the carnal pleasures of Western men (Mami, 2021,p. 95). The Spanish man reduces the Moroccan girl to a set of characteristics most of which highlight Faten's difference and exoticness. As an Arab woman, Faten symbolizes the entire Orient which is in the Westerners' eyes "a living tableau of queerness" (Said, 1978,p. 103). And just like the living tableau which "quite logically becomes a special topic for texts … Its foreignness can be translated, its meanings decoded, its hostility tamed" (Ibid), Faten is objectified and scrutinized by Martin with the hidden intention of subjugation and rendition.

Martin's fixation on the flesh and reduction of Faten's body into particular images equate Judith Butler's concept of *performativity*. The latter refers to the hegemonic constructs about the body, its performativity, and its limits: "the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (Butler, 2008,p. 2). Frederick Jameson's concept of the "carnival figure" is highly relevant in this context too. From this angle, Martin envisions Faten as a "carnival figure" (as cited in Jarmakani,2008,p. 181). As such, she is turned into a fragmented subject reduced to disparate elements often labelled as a "pastiche of the stereotypical past" the opposite of

a "referent past" (as cited in Jarmakani, 2008, p. 184). This fragmentation leaves her with no center or coherent existence around which to achieve/build her subjectivity. Whether a carnival figure or a subject of performativity, the dominant discourse denies Faten the right of self-representation and replaces it by forced images.

In the domain of prostitution, Faten shared the streets with other immigrant women from Eastern Europe namely Romania and Ukraine. This situation highlights women's status in the postcolonial cultural war as victims of exploitation. More precisely, it is women from less privileged and less wealthy countries whose bodies are turned into a battlefield for the capitalist struggle rendering prostitution more of a global issue. Both of Al-Hassan Golley (2004) and Mehta (2014), maintain the same premise about the capitalist exploitation of non-European women. While the former explains that they receive more pressure to be more "sexual and seductive" (p. 527-528), the latter points out that "competing geographies of dispossession from the global South and the Eastern bloc vie for ascendancy in a globalized prostitution ring that provides invisible (working-class) service to the insatiable Spanish cravings for the exotic" (p.143). In this sense, the less privileged and the non-European women, like Faten, are more likely to be treated as commodities whose bodies are sold in exchange for money, stressing in due process the fetishist aspect of displacement.

Though Faten shared the burdens of the capitalist system with other prostitutes from Eastern Europe, she carried the load of being an Arab on her own. Sex as a "regulatory" force that "demarcate [s]", "differentiate [s]", and controls her was not enough for Faten (Butler, 1993,p.1). She is subject to the double jeopardy of sex and ethnicity. Her special attributes differentiate her from other Spanish and European counterparts. When explaining, "Women in this country, he said, shaking his head. 'They don't know how to treat a man. Not the way you Arab girls do" (Lalami, 2005,p. 233), Martin reveals his "trans-past and trans-cultural" ideas (Kareem, 2017,p. 234). His biased view emanates from stereotyped constructs about Arab womanhood. Based on historical and cultural encounters and relations between the Orient and the West, Martin categorizes Faten as a subaltern subject prone to abeyance and docility. These essentialist ideas bereave Faten of any sort of freedom, self-assertiveness, or self-expression. Her voiselessness stemming from her Arabo-Islamic origins gave Martin the right to infantilize Faten, reduce her to an object of his sexual whims, and transform her entire body into a territory to be invaded and controlled. He simply rekindles his colonial heritage and restores Faten's past to territorialise her as an Arab woman. More importantly, Martin, places Faten in what Anne McClintock labels as "anachronistic space" (as cited in Jarmakani, 2008, p. 134). According to this trope, present and past, as well as history and time no longer function in the conventional way for the colonized subjects. They come to "…exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency" (as cited in Jarmakani, 2008, p. 134).

It is interesting to examine the way Martin defines and demarcates Faten. In doing so, he equates Anzaldua's belief about the cultural supremacy of men over women. It is men who define cultural values—values that are deemed unquestionable and unchallengeable (2012). Faten's attitude confirms Anzaldua's idea when she "stared at Martin in silence, trying to visualize herself in the way he saw her, the way he wanted her to be -that was the price she would have to pay every time if she wanted to see him" (Lalami, 2005,p. 75-76). Her silence is not simply a sign of obedience, but a one of internalizing the version of reality he is communicating. Based on his Orientalist ideology, he convinces her of performing her role as a subservient sexual figure.

Martin's taken for granted superiority allows him to further manipulate Faten while pretending to help her get the immigration papers to give her a "new start on life" (Lalami, 2005,p. 71). Though he pretends to be different from other men, he desires to exert more manipulation and control over her. As such, he echoes Said's concept about the colonized subject as fixated in a territory of dependency and peripherality ruled by "a superior", "metropolitan", "overlord" colonizer (2002,p. 295). This also replicates Jarmakani's idea of the colonial/neo-colonial logic perpetuating the dichotomy of "victim and savior" (2008,p. 216). Ironically, just like his ancestors who pretended to embark on a mission of civilization and

salvation of the non-Europeans, Martin takes the burden of saving and freeing Faten. In reality, however, the more Faten is controlled and fixed in an inferior position, the better Martin' superiority is insured.

Initially, Faten thinks that Martin is different from the other Spanish clients: "He always got out of the car, too, which is more than you could say for the others, the men who talked to her while they bent over their steering wheels, as if spending more than a minute deciding who they were going to fuck was too much of an imposition on their time. He was different" (Lalami,2005,p. 207). Faten ends up understanding that beneath his chivalrous conduct, lies the vestiges of imperial and andocentric desires when telling her "can we get on with it?" (Lalami, 2005,p. 219)This leads to Faten's confirmation that "even when they said they only wanted to talk, they always wound up wanting some action, too" (Lalami, 2005,p. 219), and that she is still catalogued as more of a fantasized flesh fulfilling the Spanish men's carnal pleasures. Faten finds herself obliged to yield to the Orientalist dialectics requiring her to embody the role of the Arab woman with its remarkable passivity and docility.

5. Reversal of Neocolonial Dialects/Politics: The Odalisque giving way to the New Mestiza

Border crossing has not only subjected Faten to different forms of subordination, but most importantly has armored her with skills to survive these atrocities. In Anzaldua's terms, Faten as a *new mestiza* has redrawn her psychological borders. She has trespassed all the boundaries that controlled her in the past. Her newly acquired flexibility, tolerance for contradictions and emergent pluralistic vision enable her to survive the harsh conditions in Spain. After all, disregarding the rigid religious regulations by being a prostitute is just a temporary measure taken by Faten. In the same vein, Anzaldua (2012) explains:

> She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries… Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity… She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (p. 101)

Eventually, Faten decides to rescue her body from the Orientalist misogynic dialectics reclaiming her own subjectivity. Lalami shows this when Martin started talking about how "he could help her get her immigration papers in order, that he knew of loopholes in the law, that she could be legal, that she wouldn't need to be on the streets, that she could get a new a real job, start a new life" (Lalami, 2005, p. 236). But Faten "raised her palm to stop him. 'I don't need your help, 'I think you should find yourself someone else next time,' she said. She opened the car door and got out" (Lalami, 2005,p. 236). By so doing, Faten proves to be the antithesis of the stereotypical Oriental idea about Arabs as being static subjects. While Said (1987) critiques the idea that "the Arab accumulates no existential or even semantical thickness. He remains the same" (p.230), Faten crystalizes this critique by subverting the myopic renderings about Arab women. Though a prostitute occupying the lowest position, she re-appropriates power relations and inverts the victim stereotype. No longer in need to feed Martin's illusion of possession, superiority, and control, Faten decides to impose her own terms in the abusive relationship.

The agency that Faten demonstrates as an Arab illegal immigrant invokes serious examination and literary consideration. The experience is the result of being exposed to harsh conditions and contradictory social systems ultimately resulting in what Anzaldua terms as "la facultad". The latter refers to the "notion that individuals (primarily women) who are exposed to multiple social worlds, as defined by cultures, languages, social classes, sexualities, nation states, and colonization" will have a changed consciousness (Anzaldua 2012,p. 7). Gradually, they cease to lead a liminal life oscillating between the periphery and the center through developing the agility to overthrow essentialist cultural and social constraints. Similarly, Faten develops *La facultad* that permits her to embrace a fluid approach rather than being subject to the static conceptions of social stratum and identity. By moving from being a religious fanatic, to being a prostitute, then rejecting the objectification of her body, Faten becomes the perfect incarnation of

experimentation, resistance, and rejection of all sorts of stigma. While Anzaldua calls this changed consciousness *La facultad,* Paolo Freire (1993) names it *conscientizaçao* standing for "real consciousness" of the world (p.96). According to him, it is the result of understanding one's previous consciousness and the actual one. It is the analysis, comparison, and comprehension of one's past perceptions and the actual one that generates a double cognizance as the key for women's liberation. It is no surprise, then, that Faten after deep reflections and introspections develops agency and desire to exert power.

In her route towards liberation, Faten resorted to many strategies to escape the psychological torment and agony her status as a border crosser has generated. Her conduct resembles in a way the defense strategies developed by Anzaldua. While the latter split and disowned parts of herself that others rejected or admired, insulated herself against exposure, and internalized rage as well as contempt against herself and the others (2012), Faten tactically chose to be explorative rather than self-hateful. She, instead, valorized her body as a commodity and moved from invisibility to experimentation. Though many consider Faten's pornotroping as a failure, it can equate self-exploration. In a sense, "self-fleshing" is synonymous of "self-fashioning" (Mami ,2021,p. 100).. The latter becomes significant especially when she imposes her own conditions on Martin whenever he wants to meet her. By deciding when and how to and not to work, she "has become an expert in encounters and becoming, a transgressive rhizome that enjoys her space, regardless of the pornotroping economy" (Ibid). By making decisions and being able to act rather than simply react, Faten proves to be a "transmigrant"—a concept that celebrates the modern transnational identity through highlighting immigrants who develop individual agencies in the mid of the struggle between two worlds (Basch, et al 1994,p. 7).

Little wonder then that Faten's non-compliance with the Eurocentric, Orientalist, capitalist, patriarchal worldview happens in parallel with her reconciliation with her origins, religion and past in Morocco (Ricci, 2017). At a moment, she imagines what would have happened to her in Morocco: "maybe she would have graduated, maybe she wouldn't have said what she did about the king, maybe she would have finished school and found a job, maybe, maybe, maybe" (Lalami, 2005,p. 228). In an attempt to revive some "special times" she had in Morocco (Lalami , 2005,p. 229), Faten decides on the day of the *Eid,* a Muslim holiday, to stay at home to celebrate it rather than going out for work. Her decision along with her reconciliation with her roommate, Batoul, suggest her changing views about religion, her reliance on sisterhood, and her over all revalorisation of historical memory as central components for her emancipation. More importantly, what is worthy of analysis is the relationship between the two women. They discuss their situations and reflect on their past as well as their present in Madrid. Faten is relieved by creating a sort of female community with her Moroccan roommate. They both narrate their stories and experiences which, according to Hasna Lebbady, is not a mere entertainment but a venue to voice traumatic experiences and seek healing through sharing and finding possible solutions (2005).

Faten's journey and final decisions confirm not only her ability to survive the crossroads, but also her newly acquired vision of the world. Her rejection of strict dichotomies of self and other, colonized and colonizer, superior and inferior, in addition to that of fanatic and odalisque are the outcome of her developed *Mghribiyya consciousness* or what Anzaldua names as *mestiza consciousness*. In the last scene of the novel, Faten is very calm and satisfied with what she has achieved simply because she is equipped enough to face the unknown future. According to Anzaldua (2012),

> En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness.
>
> The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. …This step is a conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. She communicates that rupture, documents the struggle. She reinterprets history and,

> using new symbols, she shapes new myths….She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking….She learns to transform the small "I" into the total Self. (p.102-105)

In the same context, throughout her journey, Faten has learned how to construct and deconstruct visions and revisions, when to make herself vulnerable or strong, and when to surrender to the familiar or engage in the struggle against the unknown. Gradually, she creates a new consciousness and succeeds in breaking down the paradigms that enchained her and deprived her of dignity in a new territory away from her homeland. Her "mestiza consciousness" is the space of reterritorialisation that helps her face the fetishism and objectification that imprisoned her within the trope of the odalisque for so long, to reshape a new image of herself and culture with a stronger agency.

Conclusion:

This article has tried to shed light on the relevance of *Hope and other Dangerous Pursuits* due to its concern with migration and mobility dynamics as well as cultural and political rhetorics. It has looked at the way the novel attempts to bridge the gap between the West and the Arab world in an era dominated by growing tension between the two sides. This clash is best seen through the essentializing representations of Arab women characters in the novel highlighting the despotism of neo-colonialism. The latter often presents a reified model of the Arab women's identity and sexuality relegating them to the periphery. Faten's story, in particular, is an example of the many Arab women immigrants whose lives were haunted by postcolonial politics about identity construction. Immigration, thus, becomes not only a simple geographical border crossing, rather an ideological and a cultural one leading to an emergent agency.

The end of Faten's story confirms her ability to rehistoricize, recontextualize and demythologize the myopic renderings about Arab and Muslim women. No longer a mere site of victimization, the borderland becomes a zone of negotiation and subversive discourse. By reconciling Islamic fundamentalism and European progressivism, Faten develops a rhizomatic transnational modern identity. Furthermore, narrating the story of Faten back in Morocco permits Lalami to highlight the dangers of youth marginalization, economic deprivation, and political corruption leading to youth radicalization and eventual harga. She, most importantly, re-envisions the notion of homeland. After all, home can be a site of violence, while security and a self-assertive selfhood can be realized only through moving even to the dangerous space of El harga. Lalami, through the character of Faten, succeeds in representing the experiences of displaced subjects, redefining the post-colonial identity, and uprooting of dualistic thinking in general.

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