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Voicing The Unvoiced: Women Haragas Between The Wretchedness of The Earth and The Fantasies of the Sea in Laila Lalami's Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuit

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Abstract

When the issue of illegal immigration, popularly known as El Harga*, is specifically addressed, it tends to be stereotypically approached as a male phenomenon. The sex role socialization along with the domestic /public sphere polarization may account for this generic image of the male harag who burns borders to provide financially for his family. Women as heroines of the domestic harem, socialized to succumb spatially and behaviorally to patriarchal normativity, are rendered alien to this phenomenon. Accordingly, their unfamiliar experience with illegal crossing has remained quite invisible within the fields of migration and gender studies.

Using Laila Lalami's*Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005), the present article seeks to give a discursive space to women as border burners, and transgressors of sexual and cultural barriers. Female Haragas as a subaltern social category will be explored in light of a postcolonial feminist perspective to analyze how the plight of these women is intrinsically linked to the historical, political, and cultural realities of their Third World realities. A spotlight on the existential conditions of Lalami's female characters, Faten and Halima, would reveal that their Otherness as a second sex, combined with their socioeconomic precariousness contribute significantly to their illegal departure. Unable to cope with the physical assaults and masculine surveillance inflicted on them, both heroines turn to channel their emancipation via illegal crossing whereby they can attain a European paradise of both gender and social equality. The paper will show that even though Europe turns out to be a paradise lost wherein hegemonic practices are sustained against Haragas, it lets the resurrection of dissident female figures who are no longer willing to bow down to phallocentric rules.

In the selected narrative, Faten's migratory experience as a self-employed prostitute helps her comprehend that her gender is a congenital weakness that may just vary cross culturally. In her new diasporic positioning , she finds herself called to succumb to the whims of the Orientalist agendas requiring her to incarnate the myth of passivity and docility that the neologism *Muslim Women* stereotypically embodies. Aware of her double oppression both as a woman and as a Muslim, Faten decides to free herself from her sexual exploitation. In the

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El Harga refers to the illegal crossing of geographical borders on makeshift boats

same vein, Halima's aborted haraga project allows her to reconsider her condition, and cease play the game of sex role imposed on her . Her transgression of sexual and cultural barriers granted her the divorce she was looking for, and thus freed her from patriarchal bondage.

Keywords:Borders, Haraga, Laila Lalami, Muslim, Patriarchy, Transgression, Women**.**

I. Introduction

Much of the literature conducted on the phenomenon of El haraga, throughout the recent decades, draws on the experiential lives of male haragas, whilst embracing a myopic view on the female crossing of the sea. Liketheir male counterparts, women are likely to transgress borders and leave their homeland, when the latter ceases to be a comfortable space for them.

The invisibility of this social category within the mainstream migration studies may be quite comprehensibly explained by the persuasive entrenchment of the separate sphere doctrine. The categorization of women as the weaker sex, irredeemably and irremediablyincapacitated by their biological frailty, denies them any public existence beyond the domestic realm. By virtue of thisbiology frailty, women are called to succumb to the whims of the spatial genderization of sex,requiring them to tame and abase their potentialities in favor of their wifely and motherly avocations.Following the same patriarchal logic, the public sphere, thought to be incompatible with feminineavocations, is par excellence a masculine domain , suitable for the exercise of the supposedly male creative faculties.

In phallocentric societies, going against the status quo is not only a transgression of gendered spaces , but more dangerously a subversion of the existentially norms of gender intelligibility.The woman whodaringly transcends local barriers is not representative of her sex,and thus runs the risk of being demonized as fallen, not deserving any social approval . It is within the conditioning of this gender normativity that Laila Lalami voices out theplight of her female haragas. While the novel includes haraga stories of both genders, the article will specifically dramatize, through the border crossing of Halima and Faten, what is meant to be a woman haraga stuck in a purgatory living , between the realities of their Moroccan present and the fantasies of theirEuropean future .Lalami traces back this purgatory positioning to a social milieu plagued by economic precariousness and gender asymmetry that disfranchise women to act autonomously .Particularly, the story of Halima is a story of a submissive wife, incapacitated by a corrupt regime and debilitating cultural constraints to combat the male surveillance exerted upon her by her debauched husband. Lalami draws a very disturbing picture about a marital life which is emotionally, physically and economically disgruntling for Halima whois further impeded by the Moroccan Civil law to seek divorce. Subscribing to a marital existence where physical assaults are the order of the daybecomessomething no longer tenable for Halima, who decides to break free from cultural barriers by undertaking an escape route overseas. In the same vein, Faten 'story is grounded in a legal system which relegates its youths to a passionless and aimless existence, devoid of any autonomous expressions of the self. Her gender combined with her Islamic activism, which runs counter to the agendas of the ruling class, cost her expulsion from university and later, prompts her haragavoyage. Understandably, making a derogatory comment on king Hassen was enough to relegate Faten into the position of a self-employed prostitute, a position which comes to mark another episode for her victimization overseas. Realizing that she is congenitally catalogued as

inferior both as a woman and as aMuslim, Faten takes the dissident step to free her body and soul from male sexual bondage .

Drawing onthe stories of Faten and Halima, the article will explore the gender and social motives that authorize the disclosure of the cloistered harem, whereby women are pressurized to burn geographical and cultural frontiers. The present article will accompany the haraga protagonists in their clandestine journey; exactly from the abasement of the self, mandated by their phallocentric milieu towards the assertion of the same self, urged bytheir migratory experience.

II. Under The Double Oppression of Private and Public Patriarchy: The Feminine Lot of The Battered Moroccan Wives

One of the vexed questions raised in feminist theory is the way women are stereotypically constructed via social conditioning as abject subjects, circumscribed by male surveillance. By virtue of cultural deliberations, women and men are hierarchically related within a complex interweave of relationships, where the female sexis assigned theauxiliary position. Simone De Beauvoir's formulation "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 2011:330)cannot be underestimated in anchoring the gender question within its sociocultural nexus, and redeeming the category of woman from naturalistic and biological assertions. Arguably, the generic notion of woman as a second sex is not an essence or a biological facticity, but an identity ascribed in circumstances of paternalistic dominance.The polarized categorization of the masculine and the feminine as dominant and dominated, respectively, would find a solemn echo in the present article. Framing the woman question within its cultural matrix would be useful in bringing into light the patriarchal praxis of sex dualism that comes to regulate gender relationships in the Moroccan society .

In*Hope and Dangerous Pursuit,* gender bias looms large in the marriage institution which proves to be the site wherein the differential treatment of sexes is overly maintained . Halima's matrimonial union with Maati is a union based on husband's domination and wife' subordination. This sex ascendancy is manifested in the way Maati consistently subjects Halima to an abusive treatment, and deprives her of her simplest wifely rights . Over baseless and senseless reasons, the husband mercilessly beats his wife with a connection cord, leaving her with incurable emotional and physical injuries . Maati's moral debauchery, coupled with his inability to meet the sex roles dictates requiring him to support financially his family fuels his outrage against his wife. It can be argued that the failure to fulfill his breadwinning role comes to shake his masculinity, and thus dislodges him from his position of the household patriarch . Amy Warthon comes very close to this line of reasoning when arguing that "success in the good-provider role came in time to define masculinity itself. The good provider had to achieve, to win, to succeed, to dominate… men who could not accomplish this were deemed unfit husbands and fathers " (Warthon , 2005: 87) . By inflicting pain on Halima,Maati hopelessly endeavors to enact his masculinity and reassert his position as the household master. It's clear from hisbehavior that violence and harshness are expressive of a masculine identity, and a way of doing gender among socially constituted norms of gender illegibility. Formany feminists, doing gender is the act of reproducing sexual differences and complying with normative behavioral patterns, which determine masculine and feminine intelligibilities. This means that gender as a social construct is performatively constituted

through the enactment of the norms of gender intelligibility. Echoing Judith Butler, it's the socially constituted gendered acts which give rise to the very idea of gender . Performing these various acts of gender would also involve socially intelligible subjects who can successfully meet the standards of gender normativity. Butler argues quite eloquently that "persons only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility"(Butler, 1999: 22). Maati enters the matrix of gender intelligibility by exerting control over his wife and asserting his physical ascendancy over her. According to the dictates of culture, a man is a man by virtueof certain behavioral dispositions like the exercise of impulsivity and aggression which are genderlized to be a masculine type of behavior. On the domestic front, he is encouraged,according to the Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi, to assume "the role of the master rather than the lover" (Mernissi, 1985: 113).It comes as no surprise that under the philosophy of male supremacy, the wife/ husband relationship turns to be articulated within the salve /master dialectics.Within these dialectics, women are bestowed docility and passivity which arestereotypically categorized as a pinnacle of femininity, recommended by culture to regulate gender interactions. Their social validity is then dwelled in their propensity to impart comfort to their husbands, and endure patiently their misconducts with a great sense of forbearance.

This normative code of behavior is deeply engraved in women's consciousness through an exalted discourse of feminine righteousness which aligns wifely subordination with religious earnestness. A virtuous woman is the one who uncomplainingly bears the wounds of her crucifixion, and preserves the sacredness of conjugal bonds by not unilaterally seeking divorce from her husband .Halima is pressurized to cling to the status quo and emulate the spirit of passivity in relation to her husband's assaults, simply because "The Lord is with those who are patient" (Lalami , 2005: 33). When seeking solace in her mother, the latter instructs her first to "curse Satan" (Lalami : 34), then reminds her that a devout Muslim "woman must know how to handle her husband" (Ibid).It's clear that Halimahas internalized the lesson of submission,as evidenced in her endeavors to console her assailant, as if he were the one who had been physically maltreated. Even worse, Maati's debauchery seems to weight heavily on Halima in financial terms, as she is obliged to take a janitorial work, make embroidery to neighbors, and sell off her own cab to meet financial ends. It appears that she is encouraged by culture to suffer in silence byshouldering the double responsibility of breadwinner and caregiver

A significant difficulty in combatting this bondage occurs when Halima is impeded by a corrupt legal system to seek divorce from her husband. To account for Halima's ordeal, we need to localize her experience within the social, political, and economic complexities of her Third World milieu. Post-colonial feminists devoted a significant attention to the situatedness of Third World women's experiences, pertaining generally to issues of class, race, politics, ethnicity, and religion. Exploring the plight of these women with reference to these issues wouldreveal the multifaceted dimension of the Moroccan feminine lot which operates within a context marred by class stratification, economic precariousness, and political corruption. Based on this insight, the absence of any legal measures protecting Moroccan women from marital violence would account for Halima's irresolution to pursue legal proceedings against Maati.For many Moroccan feminist activists, the Moroccan civil law remains unassertive

regarding the victimization of women in the institution of marriage.They argue that the Moroccan jurisdictions deals leniently with domestic violence by inflicting penalties only in cases of aggravated battery . Fatima Mernissi explains that in Morocco, wife battery can rarely appear as a significant cause for severing the marital unit. She explains that "the mistreatment must have reached a demonstrably unbearable stage for (women) to obtain a divorce. It's the judge who must estimate whether the mistreatment is bearable or not to seek divorce" (Mernissi,1985:111). With such trivialization of domestic battery, women like Halima are left under the mercy of judges who, according to Mernissi,rarely favor women in the Moroccan society. The patriarchal logic dictating that divorce is exclusively a male privilegewould account for this gender based inclination. Yet, adivorce at the woman's initiative can be instituted solely via what is known in Islamic jurisprudence as "El Khul",a procedure by which a woman can dissolve the marital bonds only in case she renounces her financial rights and repays the dowry given to her previously by her husband. Despiteits juridical sanction, El Khul is socially condemned and dreadful to contemplate for a woman whose dutiful conjugal bondage is seen as a perquisite for the preservation of patriarchal hegemony. Within the existentially orthodox understanding of femininity, the woman who breaks the marriage covenant may be incongruously charged of preaching western norms, and deviating from her indigenous traditions.

Halima decides to dethrone herself from her wifely vocation and buy her own divorce, not by giving Maati the financial compensation recommended by El Khul, but rather by bribing the judge. It's clear that Halima prefers to give the five thousand dirhams to a corrupt judge, rather than submitting to the greedy whims of her husband.Yet, her experience with the threating behavior of the judge allows her to understand that the latter ,as a representative of state justice, is another patriarchal power replicating the same domination exerted on her by her husband . Patriarchy, in this regard, appears to be a multifaceted system whichpermeates all institutions and spheres of everyday life. Interestingly, Halimaseems to be attentive of patriarchy in its public form which reigns far from the domestic realm , particularly in social and governmental institutions . Sylvia Walby in *Theorizing Patriarchy* explores the idea of public patriarchy in a quite accurate fashion. For her "public patriarchy is a form in which women have access to both public and private arenas. They are not barred from public arena, but are nonetheless subordinated within them. The expropriation of women is performed more collectively than by individual patriarchs" (Walby,1990:178). It would be fair to argue that public patriarchy is no more than as an extension or an outgrowth of private patriarchy with the state emerging as representative of the household patriarchs. With this collusion of private and public patriarchy, Halima's victimization comes to attain a harrowing apex, which will subsequently bring her into awareness about the forces of her subjugation.

Halima becomes aware, in this regard, that in a male normative society, her gender and disadvantaged social class are chronic weaknesses hampering her own development. As a slum dweller, her day to day existence is blighted by makeshift tin roofs, and brown waters seeping into decaying streets. These low housing conditions, which constitute the landscape of many neighboring towns,arebetter explained by the inability of the government to build sustainable development, and the prevalenceof corrupt practices among its institutions. The corruption rampant within the state institutions hampers equal wealth distribution among citizens,and weakens the social welfare.

Given the way women like Halima are wretched and discriminated against in their native Morocco, it becomes difficult for themto negotiate their survival within the existentially abrasive conditions. For Halima , the sole glimmer of hope stems from the sea , exactly from Spain, where she can at last find gender and social equality . Accordingly , her survival is keyed in crossing the Straits of Gibraltar, which would hopefully grant her an apartment , a washing machine, a car, but more importantly her emancipation from her husband . Suffice it to say, her clandestine departure was an attempt to find better future prospects, and to make a rupture with a disempowering past that represses her existence . Lalami describes pointedly how Halima and her children were risking their lives to reach the Spanish shore:

> Halima could have drowned with the others, they said. The captain had forced them out of the boat before they could get ashore. The water was cold, the current was strong, Halima didn't know how to swim. Yet Farid had pulled her to safety somehow. And even though the Spanish police were waiting for them right on the beach, at least they were alive. Besides, the boy had helped his sister, Mouna, and his younger brother, Amin, as well. They had *all* survived. (Lalami: 67)

At the Spanish seafront, Halima is interdicted by the coast guards to concretize her Haraga fantasies, and soon becomes subject to deportation proceedings. Re-traversing the Strait of Gibraltar straight towards Morocco is something hardly endurable for Lalami's protagonist , who has already channeled her survival via this illegal crossing. Her repatriation would not only mean the abortion of her aspiration for a better life, but more deceitfully her confrontation with the same powers that used to curb her sense of freedom.Yet, Halima decides to confront these powers with a new found determination to assertively reclaim control over her life . Upon her return to Casablanca , she doesn't join her mother in her apartment ; rather, she resorts to rent a room with her children in Sidi-Moumen, a slum away from the city . Her resolution to live apart from familial attachment highlights her quest for a sense of individuality beyond any sort of influence. Her post- haraga experience pushes her to claim access intotraditionally masculine spaces and professional niches in order to financially support her children. The narrator explains that Halima "couldn't find a janitorial job like the one she had before she left, so she joined the hordes of day workers at the market, spent her time squatting on the dirt road, waiting for a nod from someone who needed laundry" (Lalami: 67).With this role reversal , Lalami's protagonist triumphs over the cultural constraints that decry the philosophy of sex roles, and successfully marks her claim for self-fulfillment as an independent woman . Even though her haraga dreams were crushed in their embryonic stage, they pave the way for her emancipation from Maati, without submitting to his material greedor even bribing the dishonest judge . Feeling ashamed by his wife's transgression of domestic borders , Maati was obliged to divorce Halima and thus frees her from his marital bondage . For him, it's no longer possible to exert authority and enact masculinity on a woman who defies cultural prohibitions in order to reclaim her subjectivity, and frame her own scope of empowerment beyond any paternalistic surveillance.By becoming unable to subscribe to the norms of gender intelligibility , Matti is compelled to

renounce her role of the household patriarch,as a way to cope with dictates of sex normativity set by his patriarchalculture . While the degenderization of cultural barriers erodesMaati's masculine identity and impedes him to maintain his household authority , it gives Halima the requisite power to redeem herself from theself-sacrificial role allocated to her by regimentedcultural edicts .Equally important, the disclosure of the home circle authorizes the resurrection of a self-assertiveHalima,unwilling to submit again under hegemonic whims, and adamant to raise her children alone as a divorced woman.

III. From a Fanatic to an Odalisque: Mapping the haraga trajectory of Faten

In the previous section, the haraga dreams for a prosperous future did not see daylight and soon got reoriented to theirbirthland in order to negotiate other means of survival . In Faten's story , the clandestinevoyage is successfully concretized, but dissociated from its prospects for a better future . The migratory space occupied by Lalami's protagonist in Spain becomes soon fissured by feelings of estrangement and Otherness that come to intensify her oppression. The Spanish shore turns to symbolize an adventure encompassing only the transgression of geographical and cultural barriers.Her gender remains insurmountable and unsusceptible to any transgression.

Before delving into the existential condition of Faten as a woman haraga, it would be imperative to explore the socio economic motives that nurture such an illegal departure and thus,entrap her subsequently into a vicious cycle of oppression .

The article has argued previously that the regulations women are subject to vibrate strongly with the political and socioeconomic realities of their countries. Correspondingly, the story of Faten is no exception, as it interacts meaningfully with a repressive regime that muffles any dissenting voices which may clash with its liberal politics . As a fanatic and a fervent partisan of the Egyptian dissident Sayyid Qutb, Faten rails against what she sees as "the corruption of King Hassan, the government, and the political parties" (Lalami: 18) . Faten is also outspoken against the ascendance of western liberalism which, according to her, proves to be devastating in its effects on Moroccan youths. The remedy, for her,should be funneled through securing a religiously devout state,orchestrated around the strict adherence to Islamic jurisprudence. Yet,Faten's brand of religion seems to be tolerant to exam cheating and other illegal conducts that stand at odds with the very teachings of Islam she is supposed to preach. As a member of the Islamic Student Organization, Faten is paradoxically unable to recognize her dishonesty and the contradiction she is displaying . Even worse, she solicits the father of her friend, Noura, to use his social connections in order to help her getting her effortless academic degree . It would be safe to argue that her activism at the university, along with her deceitful stance are just a form of rebellion and a revengeful strategy against the multilayered state injustice. Even her determination to wear the headscarf is not based on any religious fervor, but rather related to her militant agendas against the repression of the liberal government. It's clear from Faten's reading of books on political Islam that sheinstrumentalizes religion to combat the injustice of the ruling class. Her religious absolutism is symptomatic of the pervasiveness of fundamentalist thoughts among Moroccan youths who, due to the lack of state support, get easily entrapped by radical ideas. This means that poverty, lack of job opportunity, exoneration of youths from influential positions, and political corruption are all contributive factors that nurture such fanatic militarism. An

accurate understanding of this resonance between state corruption, poverty and youth radicalization is essential for explaining Faten's downfall. Living in the Douar Lhajja slum and unable to meet simplest life requirements, Faten finds refuge in extremism as a way to voice out her sufferings, and find a sense of agency within the dire circumstances surrounding her. Arguably, radicalization offers Faten an enabling ground for her quest for subjectivity, being constantly overlooked by the corrupt regime .

Faten's dissidence strays in a dangerous grounding when she starts indoctrinating Noura, a daughter of a government official, into abandoning her supposedly western lifestyle in favor of a radical one. Absorbed by Faten's thoughts, the Descartes schooled Noura, with her manicured nails and lavish clothing, is metamorphosed into a veiled activist willing to combat the injustice of the regime. Even thwarting, She daringly voices this willingness to her corrupt father : "There's too much corruption in the system now, and I want to be a part of the solution" (Lalami:26). Feeling overtly concerned by these dissenting words, Larbi is now urged to advantageously use his connections to persecute Faten and thus, put an end to her ascendant threat. As a state official, Larbi's determinationto persecute Faten mirrors the endemic corruptionpermeating the Moroccan state apparatus, and the way the latter copes inadequately with the non-conformist claims of its youths . Faten's participation in anti-government protests along with her derogatory comments against king Hassan were enough to expel her not only from university, but from her Morocco as well. The surveillance maintained against her by the police compels her to embark on an illegal voyagein a hope to find a better and safer existence abroad. Yet, the ocean route towards SpaincostsFaten her dignity , modesty, and control over her own body. The seawaters separating Morocco from Spain come to separate alsoFaten, the veiled fanatic, from the Faten, the self-employedprostitute , or more precisely the odalisque as claimed by her sexual clients .

The protagonist's entrapment into sexual slavery begins earlier when she was raped by a member of the Guardia Civil, just upon her arrival toSpain.The violation and the dispossession of Faten's body take a dangerous turn with her financially vulnerable situation in Spain. Realizing that her veil and religious fervor are a stumbling block for her survival in her new diasporic positioning,Faten resorts desperately to sell her body as a way to cope with her financial difficulties. With this newly acquired status, otherdecisive variables come to be added in the equation of her victimization. Her gender and her 'Muslimness' are seen as congenital weaknesses that systematically come todefine and justify herperipheralstatus abroad. Her experience withMartin, a Spanish guy, allows her to understand that as a Muslim woman,she is called to incarnate the myth of passivity and docility that the neologism*Muslim Women* stereotypically embodies. According to Martin, allArabandMuslim women are inherently obedient to men and subject to their regulatory practices. Sexual services are not the sole thing solicited by Martin; obedience and subjugation are also of paramount importance in his relationship with Faten. Martin's Eurocentric prejudice against Arab women can hardly be underestimated when informing her that "women in this country don't know how to treat a man. Not the way you Arab girls do…I've been reading up about the duties of the woman to the man and all that. It's a fascinating subject." (Lalami: 83). Hisbiased viewabout Faten emanates from essentialist and Orientalist constructionsof Arab women are a generic signifier, embodying problematic assumptions regarding Islam's treatment of women.On the basis of their historical and cultural realities, women like Halima and Faten are

homogenized as a monolithic group,and categorized as a subaltern entity prone to Islam's repressive treatment of women .

Subsumed under the rubric *Muslim women*, Faten is inevitably made to comply with the stereotypical assumptionsassociated with this gender category.Docility of character, delicacy of feelings, and passivity of behavior are all normative attributes that Faten is supposed to reflect in her relationship with Martin. On the other hand, self-assertiveness,self-confidence, or any sagacious expression of the mind are thought to be irreconcilable with the normative images annexed with the signifier*Muslim women*. Building on this essentialization, Faten is simply required to reflect the essence of the Orient with its inculcated Otherness. Thisparochial logic is clearly demonstrated in the way Martin reduces Faten to a mere physical body, devoid of any autonomous development of the self, whilst destined solely for his sexual gratification. Martin tries to infantilize Faten by making extravagant promises and pretending to help her getting her immigration papers. According to him, her taken for granted voicelessness would enable him to exert the same control supposedly maintained against her in her Arab- Muslim background.

Postcolonial feminists are attentive to the way the category *Muslim women*has been discursively constructed by the representational politics of western feminism . For them, some culture-specific practices like polygamy, veil, Female Genital Mutilation are stigmatized and systematized by western discourse to bestow mediocrity and alterity on Third World women. This essentialist portrait isoften cloaked within a language of powerhierarchy that defines First World women and Third World women in binary terms. It comes as no surprise that the image of the backward oppressed Third world women would stand in an oppositional positioning with that of the liberal educated western women. Anchored within the same power imbalances, Muslim women as an ideological category come to systematically symbolize this divide between the Orient and the Occident.For the feminist writerMiriam Cooke, the systemization of difference, and the account for a singular monolithic model of subalternity would problematicallyresultalso in a singular monolithic model of female identity. By linking Muslim and woman in one word, Cooke created the neologism *Muslimwoman* as a discursive construct that reflects these hegemonic inclinations. She argues eloquently that *""Muslimwoman"*is both a noun and an adjective that refers to an imposed identification the individual may or may not choose for herself. The *Muslimwoman* is not a description of a reality; it is the ascription of a label that reduces all diversity to a single image" (Cooke, 2007: 140). Reducing diversity to a holistic image of subalternity would mean that Muslim women are categorized only as arbitrary and ideological subjects regardless of class, ethnicity andreligion. Understandably, their identitiesare relegated to absolutistic metaphors of wretchedness and submissiveness, irrespective of their heterogeneous feminine experiences which may reveal moments of resistance and subversion. Laila Lalami uncovers these Orientalist tendencies,particularly inthe way the Spanish coast guards are adamant to call Faten Fatma, instead of her real name. For them, all women coming from Arab-Muslim background are subsumed under thehomogenous appellation, Fatma,and thus made to subscribe to the arbitrary images associated with it.Fatma is not only a label encompassing essentialist portraits, but extends to referto Faten's newly ascribed identity, which is maliciously destined to define her position and dictate her social relations in Spain.

The construction of Muslim women as a fixed and ahistorical category based on cultural essentialism detracts attention from their real conditions, and eclipses the existentially powers that incapacitate their development. Interestingly, the Algerian feminist and sociologist Marnia Lazreg draws attention to what she calls "the fetishization of Islam", and how the latter "obscures the living reality of women and men subsumed under it (and) erases the socioeconomic and political context within which it unfolds". (Lazreg, 1988: 81). Both Martin and the coast guards are ignorant of these socio-economic conditions, as they appeal solely to Islam as the main cause of women'sdegradation. Faten, on the other hand, is aware of both the western and local powers handicapping her. Sheparticularly grows into awareness that she has been victimized under a multifaceted form of Otherness , ranging from political corruption, socioeconomic instability and Orientalist presumptions . Her coming to voice then necessitates acts of dissidence, acts which can subvert the same gender and Orientalist biasesthat have been maintained against her. Lalami shows that when Martin "started talking about howhe would help her get her immigration papers in order, how he cared about her, she raised her palm to stop him. "I don't need your help" ". (Lalami: 84). Realizing that Martin is not dissimilar from his racist and anti-Arab father , Faten decides to cut ties with him by informing him : "I think you should find yourself someone else next time" (Ibid). It becomes clear that Faten is no longer willing to align herself with the role of the odalisque, proclaimed by enigmatic conceptionsof the harem. Her refusal to succumb to Martin's malevolent impulses is a refusal to subscribe to his engraved "Scheherazadian image", and thus play the game of sex role inscribed within . Post-colonial feminists are careful to point out that the fetishization of Scheherazadein *One Thousand and One Nights* (1885) holds serious implication on the construction of Arab women as ornamental and alluring creatures, subject to domineering masculine gaze. They further argue that Eastern Scheherazade, with her wits and sagacious faculties, has been flagrantly disfigured by Orientalist frames to appear as an emblem of sexual gratification. Commenting on the western translations of this mythical figure, Fatima Mernissi sees that "the intellectual Scheherazade was lost in all these translations, apparently because the Westerners were interested in only two things: adventure and sex. And the latter was expressed only in a bizarrely restricted form confined to the language of the female body" (Mernissi, 2001: 62)

Locating Scheherazadewithin the body politics would covertly or overtly diminish her scope of fulfillment and incapacitate her to act autonomously. Yet, in Lalami's novel,the disempowering and sensual projectionsofScheherazadefall on a shaky ground with Faten's rejection to play the role of sexual servant.Fatensubversively transforms the image of Scheherazade as an erotic and exotic object, lacking agency and self directedness, into an independent subjectreclaiming control over her own life . By rescuing her body from sexual whims and reclaiming her subjectivity out of Orientalist politics , Faten moves on to carve her own space of empowerment in Spain .Her haraga experience is an occasion to introspect her life and reconsider her position, but more importantly reconcile herself with her native Morocco .Faten embarks on a retrospective journey to reexamine the past, so that she can attain moments of self-discovery and self-knowledge. It is only at this point in the narrative that Faten is able to recognize her entrapment into fanaticism, and how the latter combinedwith systemic corruption befell her into sexual slavery in Spain .Faten bitterly recalls that if these incidents had not been "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: 81/82).These recollections trigger moments of nostalgic longing for Morocco,and for bygone times when she joyfully celebrated El Eid with her mother in Rabat. Even though "there were never any new clothes to wear or a barbecued lamb to eat or shiny coins to feel in her pocket, still, she had a certain fondness for those special times" (Lalami: 82). Faten then decides to recycle the past and celebrate ElEid with Batoul , her roommate , in the same manner she used to have in Morocco . The decision to celebrate El Eid is a decision to re-align herself with her home country,and to find a sense of a self in the midst of the power imbalances maintained against her . The story ends with Faten's making claim for herself in Spain as an independent Moroccan subject,unsusceptible to be crushed by her gender , religion, lack of legal immigrant status , financial vulnerabilities, or any other considerations.

IV. Conclusion

Unfolding the stories of Halima and Faten has permitted to shed some light on the women haragas as a subaltern social category, constructed by micro and macro politics which inform social, economic and political structures. Particularly, the article has explored that female haragas are by-products of patriarchal surveillance, economic marginalization, and a fragmented regime that lacks political transparency.Giventhe way the condition of these women is being shaped by contextual factors, the feminist slogan *The Personal is Political*would be a valid statement to make. The slogan points to how the plight of women is intrinsically interwoven with the larger political context within which it operates. Correspondingly, *ThePersonal is Political* would pave the way to the politicization of the private predicament of Halima and Faten and thus, uncovers the micro hegemonic powers that disempower them.

The article has responded to this politicization by unveiling the struggle of battered women to obtain divorce from debauched and violent husbands. The latter find, in what the Egyptian feministNawal El Saadawi calls the injustice of justice,(El Saadawi, 1980:19) an enabling ground for boosting their tyranny. The same feminist slogan was unconsciously advocated by Faten in her anti-state protests which root the misery of Moroccans to an impotent government, unable to cope adequately with its youths' claim for agency. By voicing the personal plight of Faten, Lalami reveals how youth marginalization can dangerously end in youth radicalization, then youth embarking on a clandestine journey towards an unknown future.

Lalami has shown, throughout the narrative, that this illegal embarking resonates strongly with a debilitating patriarchal system which relegates women to the status of abject subjects. The constant masculine gaze directed against women provides another impetus for transgressing geographical and cultural borders towards a supposedly European paradise of gender and social equality. While Halima's aspirations for a sense of entitlement arecrushedby her repatriation, Faten's haraga status allows her to unveil the repressive layers of western culture, and particularly its Orientalist prejudices against Muslim women. In Spain, she comes into an epiphanic awareness that she is not man's equal or life companion; but rather, his sexual object whereby he can gratify his sexual appetites. Lalami encapsulates the idea that even in Europe, where gender equality seems to govern social life, women are

still discriminated against and relegated to a secondary status .The appearance of Spanish women like Isabel as prostitutes having no control over their own bodieslays bare the objectification of women in western societies . For Nawal El Saadawi, gender equality in western societies remains a feminist ideal which fails to find a living echo within the complex interweave of social interactions. She convincingly argues that "sexual rights as practised in many Western societies do not lead to the emancipation of women , but to an accentuated oppression where women are transformed into commercialized bodies and a source of increasing capitalist profits" (El Saadawi :x). Building on this insight, the ex -covered body of Faten which was used to disturb the Europeanized regime turns out to a battlefield within which material and sexual interestsare exchanged.

The article has argued that the Othering of the female haragas stems not only from their gender and socioeconomic precariousness , but also from what Gayatri Spivak calls epistemic violence(Spivak , 1995: 25). By epistemic violence, Spivak refers tothe discursive categorization of Third World women as helpless and hapless creatures in need to be rescued from the phallocentrism of their culture . Given the wayfemale haragas are subjected to a manifold form of repression, Spivak's problematization of the resourcefulness of the subaltern would be relevant in this context. Lalami responded positively to Spivak'sinquiry by allocating voice to her haraga protagonists in orderto surmount the forces that preclude their self-actualization. Echoing the Afro-American feminist,Bell Hook,these female border burners succeeded to turn the liminal space of the margin into "a site of creativity and power, (an) inclusive space where (they) recover ourselves, where (they) meet in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer" (Hook, 1996: 54) . It's then the margin, whether in the sea or in the earth,which emancipates Faten and Halima from male sexual and physical assaults. It's also the same margin which compels them to reclaim their subjectivities and redeem themselves from the Other role. The marginalized space of El haraga, with all its gaping wounds,turns to be a vehicle through which means of empowerment are negotiated and framed to stifle the patriarchal energy seeking to crucify women like Halima and Faten under multiplelayers of repression.

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