

**Hope Seekers: Women as Harragas/ Migrants in Octavia Butler's  
*Parable of the Sower* (1993) and Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other  
Dangerous Pursuits* (2005)**

\* Ahmed DEBDOUCHE<sup>1</sup>, Karima SAOUDI<sup>2</sup>

Algiers 2 University, Algeria

LIRRADI Laboratory, Algiers 2 University, Algeria

التقاطع التخصصي للبحث تحليل الخطاب تعليمية اللغات و التداخل الثقافي

ahmed.debdouche@univ-alger2.dz<sup>1</sup> / karima.saoudi@univ-alger2.dz<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:**

In recent decades, border crossings have assumed a position of preeminent importance in both Western and non-Western literary traditions. Absent from these scholarly discussions, however, are the accounts of women who undertake such fatal journeys. Importantly, both *Parable of the Sower* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* depict the harsh living conditions and injustice practiced against women in near-future America and modern-day Morocco, respectively. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to provide a critical reading of the multiple interrelated forces that drive women to leave their homelands in the fiction of Butler and Lalami via a Postcolonial lens and Crenshaw's Intersectionality. It also seeks to delineate the representations of coerced border-crossing and its sound effects on the identities of those attempting to migrate. After careful investigation, it has been revealed that the leading factors behind forced displacement are political, social, and economic exclusions based on class, race, and gender. Reading this novel through such a lens provides an insightful depiction of the complex web of violence that continues to afflict the daily lives of marginalized communities around the globe.

**Keywords:** Displacement, Women, Injustice, Identity, Postcolonialism, Intersectionality



**1. Introduction**

The contemporary world is increasingly entangled in a web of interconnected global crises that have repercussions in all walks of life. The manifestations of these crises include, but are not limited to, pandemics, climate calamities,

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\* Ahmed DEBDOUCHE. ahmed.debdouche@univ-alger2.dz

economic stagnation, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Hence, it is notable that the rate of irregular migration has increased dramatically in many countries such as the United States and Morocco, albeit at different rates.

In the US, for instance, the tragic death of George Floyd in 2020 highlighted the extent to which the living conditions of people of color have improved since the Civil Rights Movement. Despite serious endeavors toward a more just society, his brutal death showcased that the legacy of slavery is posing numerous challenges for the black community. Regardless of the substantial progress during Obama's presidency, a 2019 study found that:

one-third of blacks (32 percent) reported experiencing discrimination in clinical encounters, while 22 percent avoided seeking health care for themselves or family members due to anticipated discrimination. A majority of black adults reported experiencing discrimination in employment (57 percent in obtaining equal pay/ promotions; 56 percent in applying for jobs), police interactions (60 percent reported being stopped/unfairly treated by police), and hearing microaggressions (52 percent) and racial slurs (51 percent). In adjusted models, blacks had significantly higher odds than whites of reporting discrimination in every domain. Among blacks, having a college degree was associated with higher odds of experiencing overall institutional discrimination. (Bleich et al., p. 1399)

As the quotation suggests, it appears that the painful history of slavery continues to shape the daily lives of black people in the US, despite efforts to reduce the Black-White disparities. Women of color, in this regard, are apt to face intersecting forms of oppression that are caused by race, gender, class, and sexuality. A 2017 report on The Status of Black Women in the United States revealed that, compared to other women, black women not only "experience intimate partner violence at higher rates," but also "are disciplined at higher rates than all other groups of girls within public schools." The disparity is clearly manifested on the ground that black women "aged 18 or 19 are four times as likely to be imprisoned as White women of the same age (32 per 100,000 compared with 8 per 100,000)" and even if they survive "domestic violence and low-income," they are highly likely to "experience heightened risk of criminalization" (DuMonthier et al., p.119). Thus, it seems safe to argue that race and gender interact to create unique experiences of marginalization, which probably fuel human trafficking and migration.

Likewise the US, much has been said about the living conditions of the underprivileged in Morocco. In the employment sector, for example, a study

conducted by the International Labour Office concluded that the 2016 economy was not “delivering enough decent jobs with sufficient income for the bulk of the youth population.” Therefore, numerous employees, including young women, found “themselves excluded or marginalized from economic activity” (2018, p. 3). In addition to this, Laura Kabis-Kechrid (2020) believes that

Morocco’s social peace remains fragile. Social unrest has flared recurrently, most prominently in the Rif region, as socio-economic grievances persist. The country continues to suffer from significant regional disparities, a poor education system, and high unemployment, especially among the young. Socio-economic deprivation and the perceived lack of opportunities have also been key drivers of radicalization and irregular migration, especially among Moroccan youth. (p. 7)

In spite of the King’s willingness to enact certain reforms, the marginalized in post-colonial Morocco face significant daily challenges and obstacles, which probably ignite smoldering feelings of alienation that ultimately push them to seek solace in migration from their deplorable home country.

Few literary works have used forced migration as a central theme while highlighting the plight of women migrants. Nevertheless, Butler and Lalami are among the growing number of authors who have been grappling with the status and voice of marginalized women under intersecting forms of oppression that may eventually fuel migration sentiments.

Butler’s Afrofuturist<sup>†</sup> *Parable of the Sower*, **POS** for short, is an apocalyptic climate-change novel that begins in the year 2024 and chronicles the tragic life of Lauren Olamina, a 15-year-old Afro-American girl who lives in a multi-racial gated community and who strives to survive after the loss of her family and the destruction of her home town due to exacerbated versions of social evils and climatic breakdown. Through her journey, readers observe Lauren’s growth and transformation as she attempts to find a place in a world of rampant exploitation and violence. Published in 2005, Lalami’s debut *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, henceforth **HOPE**, narrates the painful fate of a cast of young Moroccans of both genders who set sail across the Mediterranean to escape the miserable reality of “a corrupt regime, unemployment, gender discrimination, and class warfare.” The characters

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<sup>†</sup> Afrofuturism: is an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation. Whether through literature, visual arts, music, or grassroots organizing, Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future (Womack, 2013, p. 9).

narrate “their thoughts on postcolonial Morocco” (Richi, 2017, p. 42). Hence, the theme of illegal immigration, or *harga*, is central to this novel.

In Northern Africa, the word “*harga*,” which is derived from the Arabic language and is synonymous with illegal immigration, stands for “to burn,” referring to the process by which “*the harragas*,” or illegal immigrants, burn the borders and their passport papers, since they lack visas, in the hopes of a better life in Europe. Today, the term “*harga*” has become associated with what is commonly known as “the African Dream,” a dream that “leads people to construct this fantasy that life in a western country will be easier and filled with opportunity” and which, most likely, never meets “such high expectations” and “often a new set of problems becomes a reality for the migrants” (Senoussi, 2022, p. 37). As a result, tens of thousands of North African *harragas* have come to realize that the stereotypical portrait of Europe as a place of charity only exacerbates their suffering.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research paper is to provide a comparative reading of Butler’s *POS* and Lalami’s *HOPE*, concentrating on the main dynamics that fuel both *harrag’a* and irregular migration. It equally seeks to explore the ripple effects of border crossings on the lives and identities of those female migrants.

This study is fueled by the following research question: how does Butler and Lalami’s fiction portray women as forced migrants and explore their unique challenges, experiences, and motivations for irregular migration? Equally important, how does border crossing impact the lives and identities of female migrants?

This endeavor is significant on the ground that it critically attempts to draw closer two literatures, American and Moroccan, which seem wide apart but happen to have several things in common, notably when *POS* and *HOPE* are juxtaposed in a single study.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Since this research paper hinges on scrutinizing certain issues pertinent to lethal border crossings, socio-economic forces, and gender studies, the selected corpus will be chiefly read in the context of Post-colonialism and Intersectionality. The term ‘post-colonial’ is used to “cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.” Provided that several formerly colonized countries still suffer from the ripple consequences of their history of colonialism, post-colonialism is a body of research that is not only concerned with the colonizer-colonized encounter but also pays intense attention to its aftermath on societies, cultures

and identities (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 2). Consequently, postcolonial discourse is in dialogue with “gender, race, ethnicity, and class” and has a number of objectives, among which:

to reexamine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities. (Habib, 2005, p. 739)

The quotation effectively encapsulates the genesis of postcolonial literature and theory, which is critical for a thoughtful understanding of this field of inquiry. As above suggested, postcolonial literature seeks to contest and challenge the main stream of knowing, which is advocated by Western philosophy, literature, and ideology. In doing so, it endeavors to give voice and agency to the experiences and resiliency of colonized people for a more nuanced understanding of the colonial past from the colonized’s perspective. To this end, post-colonial literatures strive to dismantle and expose practices of oppression and exploitation in order to promote justice and empower oppressed communities.

A plethora of intellectuals, whose lives were profoundly impacted by the experience of colonialism, have been instrumental in the development of postcolonial studies. In this regard, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak are among the powerful voices that have contributed no little to postcolonial criticism and theory. Provided that *HOPE* is a postcolonial text that showcases women’s plight on both sides of the border, this article will resort to a postcolonial feminist framework that is advocated by Spivak, which “analyses range across representations of women in once-colonised countries and in Western locations” (McLeod, 2000, p. 172). Although it is argued that women are essentially oppressed on the premise of being women, numerous critics do believe that they “experience gender in different ways” (Roberts, 1993, p. 2). In postcolonial societies, sexism, classism, and colonialism interact simultaneously to produce unique experiences of alienation among Third World Women. Significantly, the feminist postcolonial agenda targets the experiences and representations of women in the postcolonial era and even those who are living in Western countries, say migrants, for example.

*HOPE* will be analyzed within the framework of Spivak’s most cited essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Captivatingly, the term Subaltern originally denoted “a commissioned army officer of lower rank than a

captain,” and it “owes its source to Antonio Gramsci, who adopted it to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of ruling classes.” Having entered the academic discourse, the word is commonly utilized to “imply a subject who is marginalized and oppressed,” notably those who happen to be women (Shenmugasundaram, 2017, p. 393-94). The protagonist of *HOPE*, Faten, is a marginalized woman who struggles against various types of corruption and violence, so the novel works well within the context of subaltern classes.

In this controversial essay, Spivak proposes the concept of “epistemic violence,” which provides fertile ground to analyze the character of Larbi Amrani, who openly practices *silencing*<sup>‡</sup>, through corruption, against female characters in the novels. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” She defines “epistemic violence” as a “colonial project to destroy and redefine native knowledge, culture and language” (2023, p. 76). Indeed, colonialism does not only denote the physical dispossession of lands; but, in Ngugi’s words, it is more of “a cultural bomb,” which “refers to the occupation of the cultural, spiritual and psychological space of the Other” (1986, p.3). In her provocative essay, Spivak makes use of this term “as a way of marking the silencing of marginalized groups.” These groups, which house, to mention a few, the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, and the proletariat, are the “populations that are routinely silenced or subjected to epistemic violence.” According to Spivak, one effective method of epistemic violence is “to damage a given group’s ability to speak and be heard” (Dotson, 2011, p. 236). In other words, Spivak is invested in the characterization of the subaltern classes, who are individuals from excluded status quos and are also voiceless. For Spivak, denying the marginalized a voice is a form of executing epistemic violence, which features the annihilation of their indigenous knowledge, beliefs, cultures, and languages under colonial rule. Interestingly, this parallels Larbi’s westernized lifestyle and efforts to muzzle Faten and Noura.

The relationship between “self and place” is a major feature of post-colonial literatures. It is therefore largely preoccupied with displacements and cultural encounters, and this is how research on the “post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being” (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 8). In this respect, Edward Said contributed no little to the field of identity studies and colonial discourses, for he published widely on the experience of luminal selves at the crossroads of conflicting spaces. In his influential *Orientalism*, Said (1979) argues that by mode of discourse with “supporting institutions, vocabulary,

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<sup>‡</sup> Italics mine.

scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles,” the West “was able to manage-and even produce-the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (p. 2-3). Indeed, such images have persisted across time and space, creating a prejudiced body of myths and fantasies about the Orient, especially Arabs and Muslims. Such representations play an important role in constructing identity, including the stereotyping of Muslims. Interestingly, Said’s insights are of use to gain a deeper understanding of how cultural identities and power dynamics are shaped in *HOPE*.

On a different note, Kimberle Crenshaw has significantly contributed to the grasp of intersectionality and its detrimental impact on the experiences of people of color around the world. In 1989, she coined the term “intersectionality,” which investigates “the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color” (1991, p. 1244). Because racism, classicism, and sexism cannot be understood independently, Crenshaw acknowledges that individuals are more apt to experience overlapping structures of penetration. In this regard, her insights are particularly helpful for comprehending Butler's fiction, for her protagonist Olimina’s experience is distinguished by the overlapping and interconnected identities of being black, female, and working class.

### 3. Home as Exile: Narrating Afro-American Women’s Dilemma in Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*

In “Migration and Capital of the Body,” Gregory Hamilton (2005) argues that migration occurs as “a result of economic adjustment.” Because of widespread scarcity, heightened class, and racial animosities, a person’s body is relocated “voluntarily in hopes of relocating it in a better economic situation or environment” (p. 56). Butler’s fiction is primarily concerned with the politics of difference to enact powerful critiques to all the ideologies that economically and racially oppress minorities worldwide. It should come as no surprise that Butler’s fiction is so invested in hierarchy that her main theme is “fundamentally about social power” (Potts and Butler, 1996, p. 334).

In *POS*, Butler revisits and revitalizes the rigid socioeconomic fabrications of the past through the politics of race by introducing the reader into an imagined near-future America, which is heavily devastated by socioeconomic disparities. In this futuristic book, readers are introduced into a dystopian environment, whereby the US is “falling apart” (p. 260),

becoming “barely a nation at all anymore” (p. 21), where “most people have given up on politicians” (p. 20). Having degenerated from civilization into barbarism, one could easily sense echoes of the old west coming from the 2024 Los Angeles, which has turned into “a radically segregated city polarized by class and race” with sustained efforts “to keep the visible poor restricted to a small portion of the downtown” (Miller, 1998, p. 348). While it is argued that “race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination...to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (Crenshaw, p. 1242), the narrative affirms that in the neglected area of Robledo, where Lauren lives, oppressed groups struggle to survive the chaotic world. It unveils that Robledo is more of a “dying place” (p. 74), “a tiny, fish-bowl cul-de-sac community” (p. 12), an “island surrounded by sharks” (p. 46), where “most of the street poor- squatters, winos, junkies, homeless people in general- are dangerous” (p. 10), with “at least two guns in every household” (p. 36). For all these groups, say Afro-Americans, identity-based politics, knowing that it bears social significance, largely contributes to their oppression and marginalization.

In *POS*, Butler portrays a vexing world where security is made available only to privileged groups. In contrast to the few rich, who “have plenty of other security devices” (p. 37), Olamina’s father asserts that the police “can’t protect you” (p. 36), and that even if you call them, “they won’t show up for hours- maybe not for two or three days” (p. 66), primarily because we are “too black, and too Hispanic to be of interest to anyone” (p. 113). Surprisingly, this is consistent with Crenshaw’s arguments in “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” where she emphasizes that

women of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds. When reform efforts undertaken on behalf of women neglect this fact, women of color are less likely to have their needs met than women who are racially privileged. (p. 1250)

Despite all the endeavors towards a more just community, it is noticeable that Butler believes that the old-fashioned American racism will continue to shape the everyday experiences of the black community in the US.

In *POS*, the aforementioned concept is manifested clearly in the governmental decay, which leads exiled groups to contend that “it is crazy to live without a wall to protect you” (p. 10) and shield “from what goes on in the world” (p. 35). Principally built to provide safety, Lauren renders the wall “more threatening than protective” (p. 5) due to its false and relative security.



This is especially true in Lauren's story since the massive wall does not safeguard its inhabitants from their worst fears, namely murder and rape. Being both unloved and uneducated, Amy Dunn's tragic death is one of the most moving stories in *POS*. Lauren Olamina heartbrokenly recounts,

Amy Dunn is dead. Three years old, unloved, and dead. Someone shot Amy right through the metal gate. It had to be an accidental hit because you can't see through our gate from the outside. The shooter either fired at someone who was in front of the gate or fired at the gate itself, at the neighborhood, at us and our supposed wealth and privilege. Most bullets wouldn't have gotten through the gate. It's supposed to be bullet proof. But it's been penetrated a couple of times before, high up, near the top. (p. 44-6)

Such massive walls, as Hampton notes, are "literally a socially constructed border that serves as a marker of economic difference" (p. 61) between the "haves" and "the have-not." This, in turn, showcases that the body is in a war zone, which is the product of capitalist economy and inefficient law enforcement system. As a result, Lauren is constantly alarmed, believing that "change is inevitable" (p. 25). In the end, she admits that "Amy was the first of us to be killed like that. She won't be the last. Rape, robbery, and now murder ... *I wish I could get out of here*"<sup>§</sup> (p. 48). It is unsurprising therefore that intense sense of impending doom haunts Lauren, who firmly believes that the walls are to be breached sooner or later.

Butler foregrounds a flawed world where people of color are not only vulnerable to economic disparities, but also to unpredictable eco-disasters that are apt to force them to leave their homes. In *POS*, Butler projects a harrowing world where climate catastrophes are rampant. The story unveils that,

early-season storm blowing itself out in the Gulf of Mexico. It's bounced around the Gulf, killing people from Florida to Texas down to Mexico. There are over 700 known dead so far. Most of the dead are the street poor who have nowhere to go and who don't hear the warnings until it's too late. (p. 14)

In the near-future America, the everyday experiences of minorities are seemingly defined by total insecurities, which are likely to cause bodily displacements. For it finds no protective shelter against different forms of danger, including climatic breakdown, the body is thus constantly at risk. As openly stated above, safety is almost nonexistent for exiled groups; therefore,

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<sup>§</sup> original

it is unsurprising that they are the most affected by eco-disasters. Unlike the few rich, there are no safe places to hide in for the poor, whose life is characterized by fear and uncertainty. Such annihilators may force displacement, notably for those who seek a simple way of living as fully human.

Inside the walls, Black women have no agency, and are hence in conflict with men over control of their own bodies and rights. In this regard, Crenshaw confirms that “the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (p. 1242). *POS* shows in graphic details that the fate of women inside the wall is excruciating as they are not only noted victims of patriarchal manipulative ideals but also sexually exploited by their own race. Richard Moss, an African descendant, “claims that God wants men to be patriarchs, rulers and protectors of women.” Not only this, but some upper class men “prove they’re men by having one wife and a lot of beautiful, disposal young servant girls” who are left to hang after being impregnated (p. 34). In doing so, the book represents imagined psycho-sexual traumas in which the body becomes the landscape of persistent violence and abuse. Under such oppressive tendencies, it is unsurprising to find Butler stressing how men aim to render women’s identity as both obedient and silent, which largely adds on to their feelings of insecurity.

The atrocious destruction of the community forces Lauren to become “one of the street poor, now. Not as poor as some, but homeless” (p. 146). Earlier in her diary, Lauren writes that “we’ll have to seed ourselves farther and farther from this dying place” (p. 74), where the dynamic overlap of race and gender frequently poses numerous life-threatening tendencies. For safety concerns, she chooses to depend on androgynous appearances and to travel as a man. Lauren notes that “my name is androgynous, in pronunciation at least – Lauren sounds more like the more masculine Loren” (p. 199). She justifies her gender passing by arguing that being a lone black woman is a threat and that “two men and a woman would be more likely to survive than two women and a man” (p. 200). Because she is descended from African origins, Lauren’s physicality is an asset to her survival in the falling, violent world outside as she is both “tall and strong” and has almost “a man’s chest and hips” (p. 200). Thus, her newly forged identity as a man is the inevitable outcome of her desperate need to survive the inescapably merciless world where “mixed couples catch hell out here” (p. 191).

Left alone, Lauren is set “to go north” (p. 116) and “go out posing as a man” (p. 130). On her way, she assembles a multiracial group of individuals

to create a community based on “care, and work; to educate and benefit their community, their families, and themselves” (p. 246). These essentials, however, are the results of a lawless world torn apart by interracial feuds. In *POS*, Lauren’s journey into the North is presented in somber details. Butler demonstrates that the outside world is rife with “slavery and prostitution” (p. 277), people are “being watched and behaviors recorded” (p. 163), “get killed on freeways all the time” (p. 167), and, shockingly, “there are cannibals” (p. 274). It is on this ground that Lauren determines to teach her multiracial group to “Embrace diversity. Unite- Or be divided, robbed, ruled, killed/ By those who see you as prey. Embrace diversity Or be destroyed” (p. 185). Therefore, this journey has turned into a process of becoming to overcome the profoundly inherited racist practices that are deeply rooted in the American societal set-up.

The feelings of imminent risk prevail in the final chapters of the book as Lauren heads north in search of “a place where water doesn’t cost more than food, and where work brings a salary” (p. 159). To illustrate, early on the morning of August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2027, she is awakened by the sound of “gunfire, nearby and loud” (p. 234). In addition, as Lauren states, homeless people “stay alive out here by being suspicious” (p. 196). In the last chapter of *POS*, Butler narrates that Lauren could establish a community in an isolated place “miles from everywhere with no decent road leading” to it (p. 303). They decide to name the place “Acorn” (p. 311), and its “first responsibility is to protect is children- the ones we have now and the ones we will have” (p. 305). The tale continues in *Parable of the Talents*, where more intriguing events unfold.

#### **4. Women as *Harragas*: the Representation of Forced Migration in Lalami’s *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits***

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Engels argue that “the history of existing societies is the history of class struggles” (2008, p. 3) between the bourgeois and proletarians, where the bourgeoisie “has concentrated property in a few hands” (p. 7). The proletarian is therefore economically oppressed and unjustly alienated from their community. In *HOPE*, economic hardships, indignities, corruption, and power abuse lead Lalami’s characters to turn to Spain, which has become “to be preferable to the rejection they have experienced in their own society” (Alami, 2012, p. 144). In other words, these political, social, and economic exclusions lead the leftovers to take such hazardous journeys for better living standards.

Through Faten, Lalami exposes the sinister underbelly of socio-political and economic set-ups that systematically abuse women on both sides of the straits. In “The Fanatic,” Faten Khatibi is introduced as a young fanatic who wears “a gray, pilled sweater and an ankle-length denim skirt, and her hair was covered in a headscarf” (p. 23) and is entangled in a corrupt and impoverished postcolonial Morocco. In Rabat, Faten becomes “a regular visitor” (p. 25) to Noura’s house, where a maid cooks the food, Noura’s mother is a lawyer, and her father, Larbi Amrani, works in the education ministry, despite sending his own children to private French schools. In doing so, Lalami shows that women from lower-class backgrounds may have fewer opportunities for education and employment, making migration a more viable option for improving their economic prospects. Conversely, women of higher social standing may migrate for educational or career opportunities.

In “The Odalisque,” the narrative exposes that Faten’s father has “left them and the child support the court had ordered him to pay never having materialized.” Thus, Faten “had been sent to live in Agadir with her aunt because her mother couldn’t afford to keep her in Rabat.” This reflects the exploitation of the poor under the complex net of capitalism as they are relegated to low-wage jobs that often maximize the profits of the owners. Nevertheless, her aunt decided to go back to the capital because the “single man next door had started coming around on the silliest of excuses,” targeting Faten, who “turned fourteen and her breasts grew into a D cup” (p. 128). Feeling at risk, Faten moved in to the “Dour Lhajja slum, the kind of place where couscous spots were used as satellite dishes.” Faten, in the word of Noura’s mother, is not “an enfant gatée,” the kind of kids that Larbi favors; despite this, Faten could “graduate from high school, go to college, find God, and join the Islamic Student Organisation” (p. 129). In Spivak’s terms, Faten represents the subaltern class, who are struggling against the exploitation and marginalization of the ruling class in Postcolonial Morocco. In addition, her gender contributes no little to her vulnerability to economic exploitation and social marginalization.

Equally important, *HOPE* projects an overt critique of the corrupt Moroccan regime through its unflattering characterization of those who run power, namely Larbi Amrani, and the battle between “the haves” and “the haves-not.” Although Larbi holds an important position at the Moroccan Ministry of Education that gives him the power to decide “where newly graduated teachers would perform their two years of civil service” (p. 20), he is himself corrupt as he “was not above taking occasional bribe” (p. 21). Besides, He does not want his children to be part of the school system he has

“helped to administer” (p. 25) or befriend economically disenfranchised characters like Faten. To his surprise, Faten’s fast impact on Noura is so tremendous that the latter no longer wears makeup (p. 30), starts reading books on “political Islam...by Sayyid Qutb” (p. 31), and eventually decides “to start wearing the hijab” (p. 32), which is, in her family’s eyes, associated with “the pagan times of jahiliya, not the twenty-first century” that makes one look “like some ignorant peasant” (p. 34).

Interestingly, Larbi embodies what Spivak calls “epistemic violence.” Due to his unwavering obsession of the West, Larbi is thought of as a more of a colonial product. He is thus a noted victim of Hispanic-Moroccan turbulent history and the colonial epistemic violence on the ground that he normalizes drinking beer at home (p. 25), directly asks “what?” and “Why?” when Noura considers wearing hijab, and finally stopped mentioning her at work, for he “felt it was beneath someone like him to have a daughter in a scarf” (p. 38). More importantly, he is so blinded by his love for the West that he spends slavishly on the studies of his children. Nadir, for instance, is “studying electrical engineering in Québec” (p. 22) while his sister, Noura, was “supposed to have gone to NYU” (p. 23). Accordingly, Faten is viewed as a threat to Larbi’s family and thus he “had to deal with Faten once and for all” (p. 47).

Despite this, Faten is outspoken and challenges hegemony and corruption. From the onset, there are echoes of discontents to Larbi’s mindset. After being invited for dinner, Faten is especially critical to Larbi’s beliefs and westernized way of life as she tells him:

I think it’s a shame that we always value foreign degrees over ours. 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.  
(p. 43)

In this regard, Faten critiques his beliefs about the superiority of Western culture in all walks of life, including education. Unsurprisingly, Faten’s firm comments “made Larbi’s sink. He was losing control of his daughter to this girl” (p. 44). Faten openly expresses her faith as an outspoken religious woman, articulating different forms of resistance to the corruption of politicians, who endeavor to articulate women’s identities as silent and submissive.

In Faten’s story, religious and political pressures nurture her desire towards migration. As a “member of the Islamic Student Organization” (p. 44), Faten refuses to remain silent and provides overt critiques against all types of corruptions that plague the Moroccan community during the reign of

King Hassan II. While going to get a beer, Larbi overhears a conversation between Faten and Noura, where the former openly says:

The injustices we see every day...is proof enough of the corruption of King Hassan, the government, and the political parties. But if we had been better Muslims, perhaps these problems wouldn't have visited on our nation. (p. 25-6)

As the excerpt suggests, Faten is an outspoken religious revivalist who struggles for a voice and willing to speak up against corruption and oppressive regime of King Hassan. Rebellious females, like Faten, pose "a threat to the Moroccan Europeanized elite by contesting their Westernized lifestyles through her appearance and convictions" (Ricci H., 2017, p. 43). It is no wonder then that after having "the misfortune of making a derogatory comment about King Hassan within earshot of snitch," her imam advised her "to leave the country. She had done as she was told" (p. 129). Her subsequent voyage to Spain was thus the outcome of her "desperation and fear of political reprisal" and her "removal from university" by Larbi, who epitomes "the corrupt Moroccan bureaucrat in this novel," for "education was the only viable outlet for her...into economic prosperity, predicted by moderate nineteenth century reformers in Morocco" (De La Cruz-Guzman, 2016, p. 144). By and large, poverty, domestic corruption and religious fanaticism are the driving force of Faten's illegal crossing.

In the first chapter, titled "The Trip," Lalami masterfully presents illegal crossings as a dangerous journey into the unknown as her story unfolds with a frail, overcrowded boat floating in the Mediterranean. She writes:

the six-meter zodiac inflatable is meant to accommodate eight people. Thirty huddle in it now, men, women, and children all with the anxious look of those whose destinies are in the hands of others- the captain, the coast guards, God. (p. 2)

Regardless of the dangers, the characters are adamant about leaving their homeland for an imagined and propagated utopia over the sea. To this end, it is clear that Lalami is projecting an overt critique of all the socioeconomic disparities that render Moroccans invisible in their communities and force them to flee the country despite the dangers.

As the boat starts moving, readers get a bleak and poignant portrait of the *Harraga's* treacherous journey, the unspeakable miseries, panic and hysteria they undergo. As they approach the Spanish borders, the *harragas* are obliged to "swim the rest of the way" (p. 10) to avoid being apprehended. In the deep cold water, Murad's heart goes "still for a moment," "he hears howls and screams," and people around him "are slowly scattering." For

those unaccustomed with water and swimming, the situation is worse- Faten is a prime example. She “can’t swim,” and Murad “turns and holds his hand out to Faten,” however it is helpless (p. 12). Overall, Lalami depicts the *harga* as a thorny journey through which only handful will survive.

Faten’s daydreaming of a better life is quickly shattered when the Guardia Civil catch Her. In a private exam room, one of the guard “lifted her skirt and thrust into her with savage abandon” (p. 141). Because “extreme times sometimes demanded extreme measures,” her imam once told her this, Faten exchanges her freedom with sex. Faten thus becomes a sex worker on the streets of Madrid, and she is able to sell her labor successfully and to accumulate capital without difficulty in this production of odalisque dreams for Spanish men (De La Cruz-Guzman, 2016, p. 145). Through Faten, Lalami questions the agencies that permit the double colonization of the female body. Hence, Faten is not only a victim of domestic corruption and exploitation but also of imperial regime. Her rape is “symbolic of various levels of injustice” (Alami, 2012, p. 155), which is practiced on docile female bodies regularly. In addition, his “action could be read as neo-colonisation of the exposed body on the border, reflecting in a symbolic manner the fact that the former European colonial power is continuing to exert control” (Kareem, 2017, p. 233). This can have long-lasting effects on the colonized people, who may feel a sense of loss or confusion about their own cultural identity.

The effect of migration is so immense that she has undergone an identity shift from a devoted fanatic into a prostitute. Spain therefore becomes a “space for identity negotiation” for alienated subjects who are torn between modernity and tradition. Indeed, Faten’s new identity as a fallen woman is the outcome of Islamic fundamentalism and a fake European progressivism” (Ricci H., 2017, p. 48-49). In Spain, Faten shares the street with women from different cultural backgrounds, be they Spanish, Romanians, or Ukrainians, who strive to improve their living standards by joining a wide network of “a globalized prostitution ring” (p. 6). Faten, estranged from her native culture and religion, gradually assimilates into the host culture as her body becomes a battlefield for the white man’s penetration.

The relationship between the East and the West is clearly manifested through Faten’s interracial relationships with Spanish clients. Said states that “the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West” (1976, p. 5). Simply put, Said contends that stereotypes and biased ideas about the Orient have helped define European identity as superior and spread certain formulations about Muslims, which justify their oppression. Unlike

European prostitutes, Faten is favored by most clients, who believe in a stereotypical image of the Arab woman as “the odalisque,” capable of pleasing men. Martin, a wealthy, Spanish guy, is “Faten’s favorite client” (p. 127). Despite his intentions to get her “immigration papers,” “a real job,” and “a new life” (p. 132), his colonial mindset dictates on her to comply with his Eurocentric views. For Martin, Faten’s body is more of a territory to be invaded because he considers her as “a dish” to be consumed with a skin that is “salty like black olives” and breasts which are “ripe like mangoes” (p. 131). In *Orientalism*, Said establishes that “the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (1976, p. 5). This is particularly true in Faten’s plight, for Martin resorts to imagined cultural conceptions and ethnocentric hierarchies to affirm his superiority and to exercise his masculine power over her. In a moving conversation, Martin unfolds his never-ending obsession with oriental conceptions of Arab women as *hareem*:

Where did you grow up?’ Martin asked.

‘In a Moorish house.’

‘With your parents?’

‘I didn’t see much of my father. I spent all my days in the harem’ (p. 142).

Although Martin tells Faten that he “*knew* things about her and her people,” Faten concludes that “he didn’t know anything” (p. 142). He is, in short, “no different after all” (p. 134). Having learnt about the harem mythology, Martin views Faten’s body as a site of fantasies that will quench his sexual desires. In another moving declaration, he tells Faten that he is moved by “the duties of the [Arab] woman to the man and all that. It’s a fascinating subject” (p. 142). This, in fact, showcases the perpetuated, propagated and exotic images that are associated with Muslim women in the West. On this basis, Faten could understand that he is “pleased with game” of treating the female Muslim body as a cultural artifact. Faten’s painful story with prostitution ends with her firm refusal to get along with Martin’s daydreaming of odalisque and fantasies, for she informs him to “to find yourself someone else next time,” while exiting his car (p. 143).

From a religious revivalist to a sex slave, Faten’s story is a salient prototype of identity deformation at the crossroads of conflicting ideologies. It is in this sense that one should stress corruption, class inequality, and oppressive political regimes are the driving force for her migration. Hence, under the overlapping forces of corruption and neo-colonialism, Faten faces



oppression which leads her to occupy marginal positions in Morocco and Spain alike.

### **5. Journeys of Transformation: a Comparative Investigation of Migration Motives and its Effects on Identities in *POS* and *HOPE***

Both *POS* and *HOPE* chronicle the arduous crossings of two female hope seekers, Lauren and Faten, as they flee the abject misery of their respective communities. In this regard, their motivations and experiences with bodily displacements are worthy of comparison.

As the plot unearths in *POS*, a number of motivating factors propel Lauren's migration sentiments. As previously stated, Lauren lives in a world that is falling apart, with no signs of a decent existence. As an African-American inhabiting the derelict area of Robledo, she faces classism, sexism, racism, and even eco-disasters. Constantly feeling apprehensive, she travels north, where life is allegedly better. While going north, she decides to follow her dream and build a community that celebrates interconnectedness and harmony among all races, classes, and genders. As a result, one could contend that the multiple identities ascribed to her, such as woman, black, and poor, have influenced her migration significantly. Nonetheless, such a journey is strongly stimulated by her strong belief in the foundation of a community which celebrates diversity and deems interracial feuds.

In *HOPE*, Lalami exposes the different mechanisms that compel Moroccans to leave. Faten, like Lauren, is trapped in a world with limited opportunities, which manifest as economic stagnation, unemployment, and a corrupt political regime. Unlike Lauren, who plans to travel north to build a community, Faten chooses to undertake such a fatal journey across the Mediterranean in order to secure a decent life. Hence, her decision to flee to Spain is driven by her desire to surmount all the obstacles encountered at home, including poverty, corruption, and political pressures.

It goes without saying that migration has inevitable yet profound effects on the identities of those attempting to experience it. Lauren, on the one hand, experiences migration differently. As she ventures northward, life outside the walls coerces her to hone her survival skills in the hopes of coping with the crumbling world. On her journey north, she undergoes gender passing and adopts a totally new identity as a man to defend herself. Moreover, migration has aided in her process of becoming a wise, charismatic leader of her mixed-race group and sharpened her philosophy for the new community, which will celebrate diversity. Indeed, migration has contributed to Lauren's personal

growth and taught her how to mobilize people around the laudable goal of the common good.

On the other hand, migration has unexpected effects on Faten's identity and life; she has no idea of what lies on the other side of the ocean. As the events in *HOPE* transpire, Lalami shows in dramatic details that migration has caused Faten's loss of identity and belonging. Once in Spain, Faten undergoes a complete detachment from her cultural origins and native identity, assimilating fully into the host culture. In other words, upon arrival in Spain, she develops a new identity, as a prostitute, which will help her survive the brutal realities across the ocean.

Both Lauren and Faten exhibit genuine optimism for a better future, despite their differing motives for migration and its effects on their identities. Their stories offer fertile ground to investigate the complexity of migration, shedding light on its transformative power as well as the forces that lead individuals to opt for it.

## 6. Conclusion

Octavia Butler and Laila Lalami are two established female authors who thought of literature as an essential outlet to mirror the general misery of marginalized individuals in near-future America and modern-day Morocco, respectively.

Overall, *POS* and *HOPE* feature compelling stories of two resilient female protagonists who decide to flee the perilous and wretched conditions of their excluded communities in the hope of securing a decent life. It is thus unsurprising that both books address the topic of coerced migration and its sound effects on individuals' lives and identities. Notable is the present paper's attempt to explore the various factors that lead female protagonists to abandon their communities. This investigation has revealed that there are a variety of mechanisms that are liable to push individuals to opt for migration. In *POS*, it can be highlighted that Lauren's migration is the outcome of her being racially, economically, and socially excluded, as well as her authentic intention to build a new community that hails diversity and interconnectedness. In doing so, Butler identifies and condemns all the institutions and supremacist ideologies which deem some groups meaningless and, hence, deserving of marginalization. *HOPE*, on the other hand, illustrates differing motives for migration. With limited prospects in Morocco, one cannot neglect the fact that Faten opted for *harga* in the hope of finding new opportunities abroad. This, however, is by no means the driving force, for she was forced to migrate in order to survive the exploitative and corrupt regime

of King Hassan II, especially after publicly making derogatory comments about him. In doing so, Lalami shows that women lack agency and voice and are likely to experience silencing under severe political regimes. This research endeavor has also demonstrated the effects of migration on the identities and lives of Lauren and Faten. For Lauren, migration honed her survival skills and bolstered her leadership qualities. Indeed, traveling in a lawless world assisted in her process of becoming a charismatic leader and, more importantly, instilled in her the value of harmony and interconnectedness among all species. Similarly, this lethal venture northward had a transformative power, which was manifested in her gender passing to survive the deteriorating world. Conversely, *harga* had some negative impacts on Faten's identity and character. This experience prompted her to develop a new identity as a prostitute, which is fundamentally distinct from her previous identity as a devout Muslim woman. On this basis, it is evident that *harga* compelled her to culturally assimilate in order to earn sufficient capital to survive the harsh realities of the host culture. As a result of this dreadful experience, it could be argued that the body has become a site for identity negotiation and is therefore torn between the indigenous identity and the newly acquired one.

The issue of lethal border crossings is, in a nutshell, one of the alarming challenges that imperil the international community worldwide. It is on this ground that this study attempted to spotlight the primary causes that push marginalized women to abandon their communities, as well as the effects of migration on their identities and lives. We hope that this paper will be a contribution to the existing body of literature on migration and marginalized women.

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