

Patriarchy, Oppression and Illegal Migration in Leila Lalami's Collection of Short Stories “*Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*”

Messaoudi Walid

Ph.D.

Amman University

Amman, Jordan

waidmessaoudi@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper generally will discuss the concepts of patriarchy, oppression and illegal migration in Leila Lalami's collection of short stories *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. So basically, patriarchy is the dominance of male over female in which this relation of power over one gender towards the other results this kind of oppression. Thus, this paper, in a way, will theorize this concept and its relation to oppression within the Arab world. Also, illegal migration as a tool of oppression for those who illegally migrate in particular and then, for their parents and relatives in general. The discussion on this concept will be within the scope of Moroccan encounter with globalization or third world confrontation with the west.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Oppression, Illegal Migration, Arab Community.

In the context of colonizer-colonized relations that was in the nineteenth century till the mid twentieth century, Arab writers in Diaspora include this encounter. Thus, this discourse is a central point in the majority of marginalized authors. Edward said

shapes it in a binary opposition west-east discourse and indeed it is depicted in Leila Lalami's collection of short stories *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuit*, the protagonist Mourad wants to illegally migrate to Spain for better circumstances of living. Regardless the economic failure of Morocco in the national sphere, the Arab character is welcoming to some extent the western world. This pushiness to encounter the culture of the other were freedom exist unlike third world which is the center of constraints, of oppression and of patriarchy. Moreover, Mourad is capable of gathering a huge amount of money that he can buy a comfortable apartment next to the sea. This statement makes sure that is not a matter of economic failure of the government but it is a matter of neocolonialism and its consequences on the ex-colonies. This is the result of the ideology of the colonizer that is planted in the memory of the colonized one, in which the natives in a way want to be a part from the so-called Globalization or (Americanization). It is stated by the protagonist Mourad in the first short story *The Trip* "Only instead of a fleet, here we are in inflatable boat_ not just moors, but a motley mix of people from the ex-colonies, without guns or armor, without a charismatic leader" (p,3). Mourad here and to some extent compares his present situation to his past precursors in a sense of disillusionment. Instead of being in a fleet with a true leader they are in a boat from different origins that face the same enemy who is the first responsible for this tripe towards the west where supposedly is Globalization. Thus, within this miasma of political, economical and social atmosphere, the discussion will focus on social relations in term of patriarchy.

Patriarchy within the scope of Arab community is shaped by priority order of rights of males or elders. And basically, this rationalization that form the authority of ruling inside kinship is supported by religious facts (Joseph,15). It is a term that has relation with family in particular and society in general, to discuss patriarchy is meant to

go deeper in father-mother, father-children and father-son connections (ibid). Again, according to Peter Kraus" Arab patriarchy is a hierarchy of authority that is controlled and dominated by males"(ibid). In the majority of Leila Lalami's characters, though, she is a female, but she represents Mourad, Aziz and many others as dynamic and especially in terms of male dominance within the circumstances of poverty. Aziz who wants to migrate in a way is hegemonizing his wife Zohra and closing the door for a domestic conversation.

In addition, Arab authors in general whether in Diaspora or not are aware of the importance of kinship, it is the milieu of Arabic community. This kinship is based on Islamic items and it shapes the status of the individual's self and identity in society. The majority of politicians, religious leaders and professionals are males without reference to kinship. Furthermore, within the Arab context, woman stays under her father's control until her marriage ,and as a consequence of this patrilineage, the authority goes to males by mean if not the father who rules, the elder son who takes responsibility of ruling. Another point is that male figures have the advantage of owning more wealth than females. whether it is gained from the heritage of the family or from personal activity. This makes males responsible for women in term of security. Even though, the wok of the women is helpful for the contribution of the family construction but this is still classified secondary.

Patriarchy in the third world is the consequence of colonization by means of male abusiveness against women. Arab writers in Diaspora pose this concept and relate it to traditional roots, a traditional root that is supposedly shaken. Indeed, not only Arabs that related patriarch into traditional roots but also the westerner as well. So, Gerda Lerner traces it back to the stone era and basically to the history of pre-Christ.

The age of barbaric life where the law of survival for the strongest. She adds that males are superior to females by God's sake and this truth is not questionable.

Traditionalist, whether working in a religious or a "scientific" framework, have regarded women's subordination as a universal, God-given, or natural, hence immutable. Thus, it need not be questioned. What has survived, survived because it was best; it follows that it should stay that way. (Lerner,15)

The act of survival that classifies females under males is shown when Mourad starts swimming towards the coast, but he hears someone call out. He turns and holds his hand out to Faten but she cannot swim. However, Aziz immediately rolls out of the boat and he starts swimming. (p,10) Another example is when Farid the young boy when he saves his mother Halima from drowning though he is only ten years and too young for this task.(p,113) Again, within the colonial or postcolonial context the phallogentric community changes in a way, but when it comes to the position of women there still this kind of hierarchy. This image still exist in the majority of Arab writers fictional works. For instance, Leila Lalami in her collection of short stories *hope and other dangerous pursuit* represents the Moroccan way of dealing with patriarchy within the scope of the country's economic failure which results illegal migration. However, patriarchy exists no matter what are the circumstances and really is depicted in this fictional work. It appears from the very beginning of this collection when during the trip across the Strait of Gibraltar the chief of the voyage in a way humiliates Faten the young girl who is with them on the boat (p,3)

In this context, how males are superior in term of social constructs and biological appearances. For instance, the position of male figures in the inflatable boat in their road to the Spanish shores it is quite strong, first, in a way of courage to

encounter the Mediterranean sea and high water streams and the ability to swim. Moreover, what strikes the mind is that since male dominance exists there should be a female revolt, but there is something we have to bear in mind as an Arab Islamic society that women cannot revolt. Yet, the united nation assembly stated:

Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women' (Salhi,2).

This statement by the united nation assembly traces back the historical relation of the subjugation of women. Two patterns that give birth to such political discourse are Islam and patriarchy. And this political discourse is reflected on social laws, by which males practice violence against women. In this sense, a society which is the construct of individuals and the individual is the construct of the family. In other word, male dominance can be from a brother towards sister or even from brother towards mother. So, according to Zahia Ismail Salhi, the Arab Muslim community fails to fully understand and appreciate the females' rights that Islamic religion guaranteed, and as a result, this human legalities are suppressed. She adds that the middle eastern and north African countries by adopting or maintaining the image of patriarchy, even though, they stick to "Sharia laws" are keeping the stereotypical vision of the patriarchal Arab community and in away classifies it as an extremist religion. Furthermore, patriarchy is violence if it is not physically, so it is psychologically and it effects the weak or the victim. Yet, Zahia Ismail Salhi points out the variations of patriarchy practices and the different spaces of the women submissiveness; it can be publicly or privately, within family or within community layers at work places and even in a state foundations. So, the united nation in this context declares that:

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' (1994,18)

In this sense, through a close reading of Leila Lalami's collection of short stories, Faten, who is a female character, encounters with such kind of public and private patriarchy. She is the youngest girl on the zodiac sitting aside as a kind of self protection and fear from the voyage itself, from the captain Rahal and from the unnamed guy the Scarface. " *Faten sat alone, away from everyone else, as though she were sulking. She was the last one to climb into the boat*" (p,4). Not only, Faten who faces this kind of males dominance, but also Noura in the second short story. Noura 's father Larbi Amrani forbids her from seeing her best friend Faten and not only that, but he forces her to wear clothes the way he wants. Noteworthy that, to wear headscarf or "Hijab" in Arab Muslim community is a connotation of true belief but the case here is completely opposite with Noura. (p,27)

In addition, Frederick Engels argues from a Marxist point of view that gender relations are structured and defined by social, cultural and economic forces. Claude Lévi-Strauss, his view, as well, is juxtaposed to Fredrick Engel in terms of economic power for shaping the subordination of women. He relates it to historical events where women become a merchandise to be exchanged in market place, and thus she is suppressed. (Lerner,24) Thus, in the collection of short stories we noticed that the owners of money are males; Rahal owns the zodiac, Lahcen phone card seller and Mourad Idrissi the tourist guide.

Consequently, Allan. G. Johnson in his article theorizes the concept of Patriarchy and molds it in a specific framework. According to him Patriarchy is a

system of life instead of an ideological notion. He said: *"when you say patriarchy," a man complained from the rear of the audience, "I know what you really mean –me!"* in this sense, he deconstructs the concept of Patriarchy and its relation to male figure; by saying not every man is a persecutor. He adds that even the female figure takes the advantages to reprimand men under the notion of Patriarchy. However, he argues that there are two hypotheses that discompose people, one is the patriarchal society as a kind and the second is the act of contribution inside this kind. In other word, we cannot generalize the notion of patriarchy. (Johnson,25) He links the concept to the individual himself and his first responsibility in society is to position himself whether he is persecutor or not. And according to him the lack of understanding man/woman as only an individual results this kind of gross injustice. Therefore, his clue is that we should question why this supposedly androcentric happens and linking it directly to dominance. For example male dominance over females, why is this superiority by means of social structure instead of connecting it to ideological structure. Thinking of the problem as individual constructs rather than gender constructs of the society. Because individuals are participating in larger scale, within society in which it is not created by them but they have the power to affect throw their choices and participation. Noteworthy that, the patriarchal society as a kind is an aggregation of individual men and individual women that cannot be understood unless by understanding those individuals. Also, according to him that we cannot classify the man as always the victimizer and woman as the victim in this discourse of oppressor and the oppressed one, but instead, woman is a part of her oppression. (Johnson, 26).

Furthermore, Faten faces this kind of patriarchy from the captain of the trip and from Scarface. If we take this scene and relates it the notion of patriarchy so that we can generalize that patriarchy is male dominance. Nevertheless, at the same scene Mourad

who is male in which he is supposedly a patriarch defends Faten from the Scarface and he said " *I am her protector.*"(p,8). Thus, based on Allan Johnson's ideas of looking at the individuals as individuals rather than the individuals genders. Another point is that woman herself participated in her oppression just like the case of Faten in the boat when she decides or even thinking to take this vague tripe towards Spain. Moreover, if we consider that women are always inferior to men what can we say of a wife-husband relationship. For instance, Aziz and Zohra as well as Larbi Amrani and Selma their relation is quite good within the scope of poverty. There is no kind of patriarchy among the couples, everything is smooth and far away from this notion of male hegemony.

In addition, the theme of migration in Leila Lalami is strongly appeared in the majority of the short stories in this collection. However, this kind of migration differs in terms of law standards. So, according to the International Organization for Migration simply mean:

"any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is." (IOM.com)

Nonetheless, the case here is the miasma for illegal migration. Catherine Dauvergne said: *with the legalization of migration that took place at the outset of the previous century, we are currently witnessing the "illegalization" of migration.*(p,16). Merriam dictionary defines it as the process of crossing borders without any legal documents and official permission. (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Noteworthy that, Leila Lalami to some point depicts this miasma for illegally escaping or instead illegally migrating from universe to another universe. It is stated by Mourad at the very

beginning of the story *"he wondered how fourteen kilometers could separate not just two countries but two universes"*(p,1). Also, there is the captain of the trip Rahal in which his name is equal to word Peregrinations in English that mean moving from place of living to another place in which is different in term of comfortability. Consequently, the focus now on this illegal migration as a tool of oppression towards this diversity of characters not only for the person who migrate but also for his relatives that left behind. In this sense, the idea of illegal migration is oppressive for Zohra at first ground. It reveals how Aziz suppresses her in term of neglecting her opinion about the trip and her rejection, also of her position after he leaves her alone and at the same time forgetting his duties as her husband. *"Aziz set the table on its legs, stealing a glance at his wife, Zohra, who set on the divan opposite to him. She tried many times to dissuade Aziz"*(p,75). She advises him only but he plays the role of dominance over her. Paradoxically, it is oppression for Aziz himself at first ground on the boat and the sea wavelengths, he does not know whether he will make it or not, or he will be up for grabs for sharks. Moreover, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo in her article *Gender and Migration A Retrospective and Introduction* tackles the issue of immigration and she said that females are not permeated to migrate, but for the sake of breaking the patriarchal constraints they do migrate.(p,8). Noteworthy that, Faten and Halima as well face this kind of oppressive patriarch and illegal migration. Halima wants divorce from her husband Maati who used to persecute her. She said *"if I do not give him money for drinking, he still it from me"*(p,53). Thus, in order to violate androcentric the only possible way is to illegally escape.

Furthermore, the other side of oppression is after survival and reaching the shore when feeling the sense of being other. So, Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* argues that the ideal west patronizing and dominating the other east and benefiting from what

so called the "exotic"(Said,12). In this sense, Leila Lalami tries to depict in a clever way what would have happened if Faten could cross the borders. This relation of superior-inferior appears through Martin's speech with Faten when he tells her about his father's hatred towards migrants. He said, *"his father hated the immigrants"*(p,132) and not only that but he hides his oppressive intentions towards her for sexual desire. Thus, Stuart Hall claims that the west has the ability to make us see ourselves in a marginalized position.(Hall,225) and this what really happens between Martin and Faten when he tells her that he is going to help her get her immigration paper.(p,132). Moreover, Faten faces different oppressive problems at any place she goes, she cannot walk freely in streets and she cannot sleep.(p,133) Thus, Leila Lalami in way she wants to draw attention for male abusiveness albeit the different circumstances and Martin's behavior is the best example of this, even Faten said that *"maybe Martin was no different at all"*(p,134).

In conclusion, Leila Lalami in this collection of short stories focuses on one central theme of migration and the miasma of the native Moroccans to illegally migrate. She depicts how those "Harraga" think of their homeland and at the same time how they see Spain as a glimmer of hope to put an end to what so called oppressive Morocco. She portrays the oppression of her characters from the first glance of thinking in illegal migration as a platform until the last result of this migration in which by facing the oppression of being other. Also, the relation of male-female that Leila Lalami sheds light on within the scope of poverty, oppression and supposedly patriarchy. However, this kind of patriarchy is not based, I think, on feminist perspective but patriarchy as a system of Muslim society. It is quite clear in the relation of Aziz and Zohra, Larbi and Selma. Both families help for the construction of the family within the economic failure of the country.

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