



# Patriarchy and Its Impacts on Women in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*: A Feminist Perspective

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## Article Info

### Keywords:

*Patriarchy,  
Feminist Literary  
Criticism,  
Gender Injustice,  
Women's Resistance,  
Laila Lalami*

## Abstract

This study examines the representation of patriarchy and its impacts on women in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* from a feminist literary perspective. Patriarchy is understood as a social system that institutionalizes male dominance and produces various forms of gender injustice, including subordination, marginalization, violence, and restricted female agency. Using a qualitative textual analysis grounded in feminist literary criticism, this research analyzes selected narrative passages, characterizations, and dialogues to reveal how patriarchal structures operate within the novel and shape the lived experiences of female characters. The findings show that patriarchy manifests primarily through domestic control, male authority, and gender-based violence, particularly in the lives of characters such as Noura, Halima, and Faten. However, the novel also portrays women's resistance to patriarchal domination through everyday strategies of negotiation, endurance, and self-determination. These acts of resistance function as counter-narratives that challenge patriarchal norms and complicate representations of Muslim women as passive victims. This study contributes to feminist literary scholarship by demonstrating how *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* not only exposes the oppressive effects of patriarchy but also foregrounds women's agency within constraining sociocultural contexts.

**Kata kunci:**

Patriarki,  
Kritik Sastra Feminis,  
Ketidakadilan Gender,  
Perlawanan  
Perempuan,  
Laila Lalami

**Abstrak**

Studi ini meneliti representasi patriarki dan dampaknya terhadap perempuan dalam novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* karya Laila Lalami dari perspektif sastra feminis. Patriarki dipahami sebagai sistem sosial yang melembagakan dominasi laki-laki dan menghasilkan berbagai bentuk ketidakadilan gender, termasuk subordinasi, marginalisasi, kekerasan, dan pembatasan peran perempuan. Dengan menggunakan analisis tekstual kualitatif yang berlandaskan kritik sastra feminis, penelitian ini menganalisis bagian-bagian naratif, karakterisasi, dan dialog terpilih untuk mengungkap bagaimana struktur patriarki beroperasi dalam novel dan membentuk pengalaman hidup tokoh-tokoh perempuan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa patriarki terutama termanifestasi melalui kontrol domestik, otoritas laki-laki, dan kekerasan berbasis gender, khususnya dalam kehidupan tokoh-tokoh seperti Noura, Halima, dan Faten. Namun, novel ini juga menggambarkan perlawanan perempuan terhadap dominasi patriarki melalui strategi sehari-hari berupa negosiasi, ketahanan, dan penentuan diri. Tindakan perlawanan ini berfungsi sebagai narasi tandingan yang menantang norma-norma patriarki dan memperumit representasi perempuan Muslim sebagai korban pasif. Studi ini berkontribusi pada kajian sastra feminis dengan menunjukkan bagaimana *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* tidak hanya mengungkap dampak penindasan patriarki tetapi juga menyoroti peran perempuan dalam konteks sosial budaya yang membatasi.

**ملخص**

الكلمات الرئيسية:  
النظام الأبوي،  
النقد الأدبي النسوي،  
الظلم الجندي،  
مقاومة المرأة،  
ليلي العلمي.

تتناول هذه الدراسة تمثيل النظام الأبوي (البطيريركية) وتأثيراته على المرأة في رواية *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* للكاتبة ليلي العلمي، وذلك من منظور النقد الأدبي النسوي. ويُفهم النظام الأبوي بوصفه نظامًا اجتماعيًا يُؤسّس هيمنة الذكور ويُنتج أشكالًا متعددة من الظلم القائم على النوع الاجتماعي، من بينها التبعية، والتمييز، والعنف، وتقييد أدوار المرأة. وباستخدام التحليل النصي النوعي المستند إلى النقد الأدبي النسوي، تقوم هذه الدراسة بتحليل مقاطع سردية مختارة، وبناء الشخصيات، والحوار، للكشف عن كيفية اشتغال البنى الأبوية داخل الرواية، وكيف تسهم في تشكيل التجارب الحياتية للشخصيات النسائية. وتُظهر النتائج أن النظام الأبوي يتجلى بصورة أساسية من خلال السيطرة المنزلية، والسلطة الذكورية، والعنف القائم على النوع الاجتماعي، ولا سيما في حياة شخصيات مثل نورة، وحليمة، وفاطمة. ومع ذلك، تُبرز الرواية أيضًا أشكال مقاومة المرأة لهيمنة النظام الأبوي من خلال استراتيجيات يومية تتمثل في التفاوض، والقدرة على الصمود، وتأكيد الذات. وتعمل هذه الممارسات المقاومة بوصفها سرديات مضادة تتحدى الأعراف الأبوية السائدة، وتُعيد تعقيد تمثيل المرأة المسلمة بوصفها ضحية سلبية. وتسهم هذه الدراسة في مجال النقد الأدبي النسوي من خلال إظهار أن رواية *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* لا تكشف فقط عن آثار القمع الأبوي، بل تُسلط الضوء أيضًا على دور المرأة الفاعل داخل سياقات اجتماعية وثقافية معيّنة.

## INTRODUCTION

Literature often reflects social dynamics, including systems of power that shape human relationships. One of these systems is patriarchy, a structure that positions men as dominant figures and grants them authority over women in social, economic, political, and domestic spheres. Patriarchy produces gender injustice manifested through marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, and violence against women (Sayyid, 2017). Thus, literary analysis becomes an important arena to examine how texts articulate, critique, or resist patriarchal domination.

In many literary works, women are portrayed through stereotypes that reinforce patriarchal assumptions as emotional being, weak, or subordinate to men (Hiplunudin, 2017; Yusuf, 2020). Opposed to the assumption of men as robust being, more intelligent and emotional, and more stable. These depictions do not merely function as narrative devices but mirror wider sociocultural systems in which gender inequality becomes normalized. It is therefore relevant to analyze how patriarchy forms the lived experiences of female characters and how they navigate, endure, or resist these constraints. This article focuses specifically on patriarchy, not only gender inequality in general. While acknowledging that gender injustice is one of the major consequences of patriarchal structures.

Laila Lalami, the author of three novels *"Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits"* (2005), *"Secret Son"* (2009), and *"The Moor's Account"* (2014) and several short stories, is considered the most critical Moroccan writer to write in English; his works have been translated into more than eleven languages (Mehta 117). Driven to write in a language that is not his native language, Lalami's narrative is a form of diaspora writing from within. She challenged not only the visual and cultural vilification of Muslims but also the general neo-orientalist concept of Muslim women's writing as an exclusively victim-or-flight narrative. Until now, the focus of most Moroccan migration stories "has been on individual male migrants, without reference to women, who currently make up around 50% of international migration. This causes women to be neglected in migration theory" (Ennaji and Sadiqui 8, 14). As a result of labor migration and family reunification (twenty percent of Moroccans now live in Europe), combined with the geographical proximity of Europe and North Africa, the notion of national or "native" literature is somewhat unstable about Morocco. Nation-state borders do not limit his literary production. Still, it spreads over the European continent, where the largest communities of Moroccan descent are in France (over one million), Spain (800,000), Netherlands (370,000) and Belgium (200,000).

Contemporary Moroccan literature does more than criticize and rebel against Makhzen, a term that originally referred to a warehouse where tribute and taxes were stored for the sultan; over the centuries, Makhzen has come to signify not only the holders of power in Morocco but how power has been exercised throughout society. While most people imagine Morocco as one of the more developed, moderate, and advanced countries in the Arab world, it falls below Egypt (a country it has long been compared to) regarding human development,

equality, and politics. Freedom. Instead of tying Moroccan writings to their "national" place of origin, critics must reconceptualize the idea of "Moroccan" literature based on, and informed by, the international and plurilingual experiences from which it emerged.

Furthermore, Lalami's portrayal of women demonstrates that patriarchy is not monolithic; women respond to oppression in multiple ways. Some resist through everyday acts of defiance, while others negotiate survival within gendered constraints. This offers an analytical space to explore not only oppression but also forms of resistance, which are essential in feminist theory as counter-narratives challenging patriarchal authority (Humm, 1986; Suyoufie, 2011).

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on the representation of patriarchy and its impact on female characters in the novel. To sharpen the direction of the research in accordance with reviewers' suggestions, the research problems are formulated explicitly as follows; What forms of patriarchy are depicted in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*? How does patriarchy affect the lives and experiences of the female characters in the novel? What forms of resistance do these female characters employ to challenge patriarchal domination? Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze the forms of patriarchy represented in the novel, the impacts of patriarchal practices on women, and the strategies of resistance portrayed through the female characters using a feminist literary perspective.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach grounded in feminist literary criticism. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting meanings, power relations, and social structures represented in literary texts, rather than measuring variables statistically (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Feminist literary criticism is used as the main theoretical framework to examine how patriarchal structures operate within the narrative and how these structures shape the experiences of female characters.

In this research, patriarchy is positioned as the central analytical concept, while gender injustice is examined as a consequence of patriarchal domination. This theoretical positioning ensures consistency between the research focus, analytical framework, and findings, as suggested by the reviewers.

The primary data of this study consists of the novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) by Laila Lalami. The analysis focuses on selected narrative passages, character descriptions, dialogues, and events that depict patriarchal practices, gendered oppression, and women's responses to these conditions. The secondary data include scholarly books, journal articles, and previous studies related to feminist theory, patriarchy, Moroccan gender relations, and Laila Lalami's works. These sources function as theoretical and contextual support, not as the main method of analysis. Therefore, contrary to the original version of the article, the

literature review is positioned as a supporting strategy, not the primary research method.

The primary method employed in this study is textual analysis. This method involves a careful, detailed reading of the literary text to examine how language, narrative structure, characterization, and symbolism convey meanings related to patriarchy and gender relations (Barry, 2017). The novel was read repeatedly to identify textual patterns that reveal: Forms of patriarchy depicted in domestic and social settings, The impacts of patriarchy on female characters' lives and identities, Strategies of resistance employed by women to challenge patriarchal domination.

After identifying relevant textual evidence, feminist theory was applied to interpret how these representations function ideologically within the narrative. This analytical process allows the researcher to connect the fictional experiences of the characters with broader social realities, particularly patriarchal structures in Moroccan society.

The analytical process followed these steps: First, Close reading of the novel to identify passages related to patriarchy, gender inequality, and resistance; Categorization of data based on thematic relevance; Interpretation of data using feminist theoretical concepts; Synthesis of findings to answer the research questions and articulate how the novel constructs a critique of patriarchy.

Through this method, the study maintains methodological consistency and analytical depth, ensuring that the findings are firmly grounded in textual evidence and feminist theoretical discourse.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### **Patriarchy in Arab World and Patriarchy Forms in "*Hope and Othe Dangerous Pursuits*"**

The issue of gender has not been discussed by scientists and feminists until now in this country. Gender issues are widely studied by scientists from various fields of science; among which the main ones are sociology, demography, economics, politics, socio-culture, and religion. Gender issues are also questioned in language and literary works. In literary works, it appears that gender issues are raised by writers in their works, both in novels, short stories, poetry, and other types of works. In literature, the theory of feminist literary criticism was born, which focuses on the issue of gender in literature. The main manifestations of gender issues based on contemporary feminist theory are gender differences, gender inequality, gender oppression, and structural oppression (Langerman and J Neibrugge, 2008).

Patriarchy is seen as a social system that places men as the main power holders and dominates in the roles of political leadership, moral authority, social rights, and property control. Patriarchal culture is considered not only as a leader or other traditional figure but deeper than that. Patriarchy itself has an impact on violence against women due to the social

position of men which is higher than women. So, people tend to think that it is normal to have harass behavior against women in the slightest form.

Regarding the issue of gender in this literary work, the researcher examines the novel "Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits" written by Laila Lalami, a native writer from Morocco. This novel contains 9 stories involving 4 main characters. They have the same vision and mission, namely, to fight to immigrate illegally from Morocco to Spain hoping to get a better life. The selection of this novel is interesting and significant in the study of feminist literature because it reveals gender struggles in the face of patriarchal "walls".

In the context of literature, there are feminist literary criticism and ecofeminist literary criticism. Feminist literary criticism is a practice of understanding literary phenomena, both those oriented towards literary works and the authors by focusing on issues of gender inequality. The birth of feminist literary criticism cannot be separated from the feminist movement that originally emerged in the United States in the 1700s (Madsen, 2000:1). In the paradigm of the development of literary criticism, feminist literary criticism is considered as revolutionary criticism that wants to subvert the dominant discourse formed by traditional patriarchal voices (Ruthven, 1985:6). The main objective of feminist literary criticism is to analyze gender relations, especially when women are dominated by men (Flax, in Nicholson, 1990:40). Through feminist literary criticism, women's oppression will be described in literary works (Humm, 1986:22). Humm (1986:14-15) also stated that the writing of literary history before the emergence of feminist literary criticism was constructed by male fiction. Therefore, feminist literary criticism reconstructs and re-reads these works with a focus on women, their sociolinguistic nature, describing women's writing with special attention to the use of words in their writing.

Feminism is a school of thought in the social sciences and humanities that tries to understand why gender inequality occurs in society, what causes it, and what consequences it causes. As a school of thought and social movement, feminism originated from the birth of the Enlightenment era in Europe pioneered by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Marquis de Condorcet. The scientific society association for women was first established in Middelburg, a city in the south of the Netherlands in 1785. Towards the 19th century feminism was born into a movement that received sufficient attention from white women in Europe. Women in European colonial countries fought for what they called universal sisterhood (Abrams, 1999:88; Arivia, 2006:18-19; Wiyatmi, 2013:45). Various meetings of scientists and activists who developed later feminism included (1) the Convention on the Rights of Women held at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. The meeting was initiated by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and was attended by 300 women and men ( Madsen, 2000:3-7; Tong, 2006:31). The meeting resulted in a declaration of sentiments and twelve resolutions. The declaration of position statement emphasizes issues that have previously been raised by Mill and Taylor in England, which are mainly related to the need to reform marriage, divorce, property rights, and child rearing laws (Madsen, 2000:6; Tong, 2006:31) . (2) In 1869 Susan B. Antony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton



founded the National Woman's Suffrage Association, followed by Lucy Stone who founded the American Woman's Suffrage Association to develop amendments right to vote for the constitution (Madsen, 2000:6; Tong, 2006:33). Literature has played a role in understanding and explaining to the reading public regarding issues of justice and gender equality in the field of education and the role of women in the domestic and public spheres which are represented in novels written by writers.

A fictional book titled *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* was written by Laila Lalami, an ethnic Maroko, and released in 2005. This narration is composed of two short stories that each focus on the lives of one main character and who all attempt to immigrate illegally from Japan to Spain to live happier lives. Despite the author's assertion that the stories in this book are not all related to one another, the book does not contain a collection of related stories in classical literature; instead, it has just one passage that summarizes all of the stories in this book: the journey that the characters took when they traveled together to Selat Gibraltar, which is discussed in the first chapter.

As a result of preferring a more communal aspect of narration, The narrative may not have followed the convention of the novel Classic western. Even though Murad is only one of the characters written explicitly for three stories, the author continues to use Murad as a tool to describe the inner workings of this particular community. With this approach, attention is not required to be directed towards Murad personally but rather at Perny as the storyteller of the current narrative communal. All stories, including Murad's, are told by third-class citizens and contain some meta-narrative in communal storytelling.

The narrative was divided into three parts, and the journey began with a climb up the Stairs of Gibraltar, as described by Murad. Penonton is mentioned in "The Trip" by every main character, as well as in Murad's observations about them and themselves. The boat motor is broken in the middle of the road, causing panic among the more clumsy passengers, especially Faten, but Aziz can fix it. Faten essentially drowned as the captain refused to take the passengers to shore, instead ordering them to swim to shore. Until they reached the floor, everyone but Aziz was captured by a Spanish-speaking translator and taken to a waiting vehicle. Aziz and Halima returned to Morocco with a similar warning that upheld the law, although Faten successfully broke the sexual taboo following the incident.

The final chapter, "Before," focuses on several characters' lives before their journey as pilgrims. Continue with a story based on the experiences of a wealthy young bureaucrat named Larbi's daughter who made love to Faten. Larby blamed Faten because it made her daughter more religiously conservative, and later, she discovered a way to remove Faten from her daughter's daily life by removing him from school and making him blend in with the police. The final chapter discusses the turbulent relationship with Halima and the methods she chose to eliminate the abuse at her wedding. First, she attempted to create love for the person using a love potion, and then she attempted to use an hakim to sever it; neither attempt was

successful. In the next part of the story, Aziz's statement reveals how negatively everyone in the group has reacted to the idea that they should immigrate illegally. Aziz has concerns related to receiving employment in Morocco as well as a sense of urgency to stay in the area. The third item in this section is a story by Murad that depicts one day when he decides to make money as a tour guide. Murad reveals how negatively her teacher and friends treated her because of her erratic work schedule. As a result of this persecution, she frequently feels like she is invisible and eventually feels pressured to immigrate illegally.

The third chapter, "After," begins with Halima's remark about the son that has been discovered and which protects it from sinking throughout the boat journey. She returned to Morocco and discovered the holding clutch during the husband's farewell, which ultimately led to its severing. Faten is the final topic in the story, which involves sex work and focuses on an estimation by the Spanish-speaking principal. Even if Faten successfully put his name in Spanish, the tragedy of the situation was only made worse by his indignant thoughts about his past. In the second story, from the bottom, Aziz demonstrates how determined she is to maintain her traditional way of life to succeed in Spanish. After returning to Morocco for a few days, he noticed that she wasn't quite right and declared that she lacked room for her late-night activities in her newly constructed home.

Similarly, Murad's last story illustrates how crucial it is for someone to understand who they are. Despite not having succeeded in his attempt to immigrate to Spain, Murad is currently working in a shop and getting to know residents in the community where he now resides. Murad explained his status as a storyteller through his interactions with two other women of white skin and observed the hope that, in his opinion, had already ended.

According to what is clear from the title, the narration emphasizes the connection between each character and the goal. Even though this character is based on a highly stressful and rarely violent situation, everyone still hopes to improve their lives. A pair of figures eager to make the journey to Spain, Halima and Murad, are capable of overcoming the obstacles above. Halima and Murad appear more trustworthy than Faten and Aziz because they can exercise their right to choose, even within their communities. Using this method, the author asserts that the danger lies not in environmental cleanup but in observing a call of people in the relevant situation.

### **The Impact of Patriarchy on the Lives and Experiences of Female Characters in Laila Lalami's Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits**

There are many themes and issues contained in Laila Lalami's Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits. There are many themes alluded to within the novel such as the search for hope and identity, immigration, religion and belief, family problems and so on. All of that is slipped into the life stories of the characters in the novel. Among the many issues contained in this novel, the one the writer decides to take and discuss in this section is the oppression of several female characters in the novel such as as a result of the patriarchal system in the Middle East



and Native Africa (MENA) region.

Most of the female characters in this novel are typical Muslim women who are members of families whose patriarchal principles are deeply rooted and ingrained in their minds and hearts. They may have different personalities and backgrounds but these women have two things in common. First, they both lived and grew up in the Middle East-North Africa region where the patriarchal system was most dominant. Second, they are both victims of women's oppression by men who are the result of the patriarchal system.

In the first part of the story titled "The Fanatic", we are shown the first case of oppression of women through the eyes of Noura, the rebellious daughter of a senior official at the Moroccan Ministry of Education named Larbi Amrani. In the story, Noura is depicted as a smart and talented young woman who is very easy to get swept by new interests that she finds interesting or fascinating. Even though most of those interests are quick to be dropped just as fast as she picked them up, she actually took them quite seriously when she was still invested in them. In fact, the white-and-pink cushion that decorates the leather sofa in her living room is proof of the skill and dedication that she has for her hobbies. Her father, Larbi, knows this and that is why he is quite lenient and spoils Noura by letting her do as she wishes as long as it doesn't affect her academic performance too much. However, while it is true that Out of all female characters, Noura can be considered as the most privileged among them, she still suffers from oppression at the hand of her strict and controlling father.

In a traditional Middle Eastern patriarchal family, a male figure such as the father or the husband is considered as the head of the family and the one who holds the highest authority in the household. The father or the husband is given the authority to control all aspects within the household and makes all decisions for his family members. Female family members, on the other hand, are expected to be submissive and passive, obeying whatever the patriarch instructed them to do. Noura's family is not an exception. Even though she may look like she's living freely, as a daughter and female member of a male-dominated Middle Eastern Muslim family, her life is spent constantly under the scrutiny of her father Larbi. As the head of the family, Larbi dictates things for his family members and has the final say on everything in the family. As a result of that dictatorship complemented with patriarchal values that Larbi implemented, the women in the family experienced oppression because of gender differences and had no choice but to go along with the patriarch's orders.

In Noura's case, the oppression that she had to experience is the lack of control over her life caused by her father's absolute authority on everything she does. Her father, Larbi, may indeed often spoil and pamper her by letting her pick and do whatever hobby she fancied, he still has full control over every single aspect of her life from how she dresses, what career choice she should choose in the future and who she should be friends with.

Larbi is depicted as an ambitious man who would do anything to secure control and authority over his own life. He is also someone who is not above resorting to dirty methods in order to

achieve what he wants, such as taking bribes and making secret deals (p.16 & p.26). Although not clearly described in the novel, in my opinion, Larbi is someone who practices patriarchal teachings and principles and is a product of that system. This can be seen from his reaction when Salma, his wife as well as the mother of Noura, reassured him by saying that Noura will be fine befriending with Faten whom he never saw before. However what I referred to specifically is not Salma's dialogue, but the choice of words that Larbi used to describe how Salma reassured him. Larbi described the way Salma reassured him as "giving him that woman-of-the-people look she affected from time to time" which somehow "irritated him supremely" and that he thought Salma acted as though she is way too arrogant and smarter than him "just because she took on several cases every year for free and was active in the Moroccan Association of Human Rights" (Lalami 18). From his choice of words and thoughts, it is subtly implied that he feels like being insulted and if not also a little bit threatened by Salma's confidence. And that is an example of male chauvinism, a belief in which men are and should be superior to women in terms of strength and intellect.

Another example of his chauvinistic personality is when he caught Noura and Faten talking about politics inside Noura's room and when he found a book on Political Islam and *Ma'alim fi Thariq* by Sayyid Qutb as well as tapes on jurisprudence. Immediately after finding that out, Larbi anxiously reported to Salma and told her that Noura cannot be allowed to see Faten anymore. And this is the start of him exerting more control and authority over Noura's life by forbidding her anything that revolved around Fundamentalist or Political Islam which Faten taught her on, such as wearing a headscarf and reading or watching anything related to political or fundamentalist Islam.

When his control and authority is being challenged or heeded, Larbi also tends to respond aggressively and use brute force thoughtlessly due to being driven by his fear of losing his daughter. This instance can be seen when he saw Noura wearing a hijab/headscarf. As if possessed by something, Larbi "lunged at" Noura, her own daughter, and took off the scarf of her head by force to the point of making her "let out a cry" and made Salma stand up at the dining table in alarm (P.24). Patriarchal beliefs play an important role here in this case of assault by creating a culture in which gender norms perpetuate expectations of male dominance and female subordination. It socializes women to be passive and respectful to men, while men are given the right to express anger violently and sometimes without consequence (*Traditions, Patriarchy, and Home Life | Domestic Abuse and the Arab Community*, n.d.).

As a result of those patriarchal beliefs many male figures within a family, especially those who still hold harmful patriarchal teachings and are not taught about its negative effects, are prone to get physical and violent towards their partners or family members. According to the statistics from National Domestic Violence Hotline, Intimate partner violence (IPV) has affected more than 12 million people every year (*Domestic Violence Statistics*, 2022). Approximately, 37% of women in Arab countries have experienced domestic violence in their

life (Chelala, 2022). A depiction of domestic abuse and IPV in the novel can be seen through the eyes of Halima in “Bus Rides”.

Halima is a Moroccan woman with three children who is married to a drunkard named Maati who can do nothing but beat up her wife and spend her money on alcohol. Maati worked as cab driver for a businessman uptown, however, there was little of it left by the time his bar tab was paid. And so to help her husband, Halima had taken janitorial jobs two days a week and made extra money by selling

embroidery to neighbors and friends. But, because of those bad habits of his, Halima is living her married life under terror and hopelessness wondering everyday how long she can last and gather enough money to divorce her husband. Though not everyday, she is still very often subjected to domestic violence by his husband. There is one time Maati would beat her with an extension cord until it “left bubbly welts on her arms and face”, so much that she couldn’t hide them under her house dress (p.33). It doesn’t just stop there. Maati also would steal Halima’s hard earned money if she didn’t give him herself and beat her for several weeks. The constant abuse and extortion Maati inflicted on Halima exhausted her physically and mentally badly to the point of being described as looking much older thanks to “the dark patches on her face” and “the stoop in her shoulders” (p.33).

Not only physical abuse, Maati also inflicted psychological abuse on Halima. The next day after beating Halima for several days, Maati would sulk. When that happens, Halima would wait for him for hours patiently until he has calmed down and talk to her again. Halima did that in hope that Maati would finally be the bigger person and apologize for what he had done to her. Unfortunately for her, Maati never did any of that. Never mind apologizing, Maati never makes the effort to be the first one to approach Halima and talk to her after sulking. It always has to be Halima who makes the first move and tries to console him like a mother consoling her sulking child. It is as though he were the one who’d been beaten, not Halima (p.36).

Aside from domestic abuse, women also had to suffer from sexual abuse as well. According to the research conducted by World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 1 in 3 (30%) of the female population all around the world has experienced intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime according to (*Violence Against Women*, 2021). The perpetrators of sexual abuse or sexual violence on women are mostly and commonly strangers. In “The Odalisque”, Faten, the best friend of Noura is the victim of sexual violence at the hand of a Spanish Guardia Civil who captured her. When she was captured, Faten saw one of the guards staring at her with impure intention. The guard knows that Faten doesn’t want to be thrown into a prison cell for how long and Faten knows the guard wants her body from how he stared at her. Seeing that she has no other choices in that situation, Faten agreed to have a deal with the guard; she will let him do whatever he wants with her body and in exchange, he will help her escape. Even though the sexual intercourse was done with the agreement of both sides, I think it can still be considered as

sexual violence from how the guard “thrust into her with savage abandon” and not caring about Faten’s comfort or discomfort in the private exam room where the sexual favour was carried out (P.83).

The patriarchal mindset that relegates women's roles and contributions only at home creates a vicious circle of dependency and deprivation for women. This oppression affected women socially, economically, and not only politically, but also psychologically (Meera and Yekta, 2021). In “The Fanatic”, the psychological effect is shown when Salma saw his husband Larbi forcefully take off his daughter Noura’s headscarf/hijab. She saw it happen before her eyes, however, she didn’t come to her daughter's rescue and only stood up watching it happen as if her feet were rooted on the spot because she was too scared of his husband. Meanwhile in “Bus Rides”, the psychological effects caused by the oppression and exploitation that Halima endured makes her become untrusting and prone to making reckless actions such as buying a powder from a local sorceress and bribing the court’s judge for her divorce trial.

### **Resistance and Challenging Patriarchal System by Female Characters in Laila Lalami's Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits**

The author reclaims the art of storytelling by rearranging the role of women in traditions which are primarily the prerogative of "men". Her appropriation of tradition is intended as a subversion of the existing order which limits women's freedom (Suyoufie 247). In Lalami's portrayal of Faten, she transcends feelings of nostalgia for the distant past that haunt many diaspora subjectivities. What is even more striking in Lalami's text is the willingness to overcome obstacles that Moroccan women's literature still faces, such as raising issues of gender and sexuality more openly and boldly.

The protagonist of "Bus Rides" and "The Saint" is Halima. She is shown as a modest and reasonable woman who lives close to Casablanca's Old Medina. Halima, a victim of domestic abuse, fights for independence in a manner akin to Jenara. But rather than enacting justice herself, she first tries to do so legally. When she realized that her husband, Maati, would not allow her to keep the children after the divorce, her initial reaction was to “bribe the judge” (P.55). After being accused by her mother of misbehavior and “talking back” with her husband (P.54), Halima found a sorceress who gave her powder to “soften” her husband's attitude and thereby stop the beatings. However, the beatings continued, and Halima began to think about choosing a different paradigm for herself and her three children by joining her brother in Europe (P.71). "Patera" turned upside down, and he returned to Casablanca. According to de la Cruz-Guzmán, the trip failed because Halima had to “confront the misogyny of her husband in the context of a supportive community” (P.143). Empowerment of Maghribiya and healing of Halimah's trauma can only happen in her home country. Maati reconsiders her initial request for money in exchange for a divorce, and Halima joins the “the hordes of day workers at the market” (114-15), renting a room in Sidi-Moumen Slum in Casablanca, doing laundry, and cooking baghrir (bread) for others.

In my view, two parts of Halima's story coincide with Mouadawana's earlier, Morocco's Family Code which hindered women's equality with men before the law by limiting their rights to divorce, property ownership, inheritance and by refusing the publication of the 2004 Mohamed VI define the family as a unit consisting of two partners who are equal before the law, husband and wife. However, after the 2004 Reformasi, Moha Ennaji, Guita El Khayat and Khadija Ryadi agreed that family members perpetrate most violence against women and that violence pervades all social groups. As long as this system of domination persists, and legal and social inequality persists, men and the State will feel legitimized to pursue violence against women. While Arab women may have achieved varying degrees of equality with men in different Arab countries, due to clear male intellectual modernist thinking and Arab feminist fighting forces, Arab social structures have remained. Always patriarchal (Ennaji, 209, El Khayat, *La Mujer* 31, Ryadi n/p). This gender-based typecasting is reinforced by a culture of silencing questions around domestic and sexual violence, where these violations, according to Ennaji, "continue to be considered a private matter" and "do not represent a human rights violation or a crime that needs serious investigation and analysis." (209). Ennaji continues: "Violence against women continues to be surrounded by silence. As a consequence, violence against women is underestimated" (209, and in Mehta 127).<sup>3</sup> When the narrative begins to judge Halima's "good luck" after her return to Casablanca and the possible innocence of her son Farid, Halima not only curses Satan for such a belief but also continues to work hard and earn a decent living for him and his children. Alami and de la Cruz-Guzmán argue that her ex-husband's defeat demonstrated the community's rejection of the unjust practices of 'mad men' like those of Jenara (de la Cruz-Guzmán 143, Alami 152-53). Murad's deployment of artistic designs in his narratives provides a posture contrary to the essential conceptual principles of Western art, which hold that the essential values of material culture lie outside the context of their meaning and usage (de la Cruz-Guzmán 143, Alami 152-53, McCloskey 8). At the end of the story, when Halima becomes a role model in her community and earns money to support her mother seeing doctors to cure her arthritis, she builds her women-centered communities, such as Jenara's harem (de la Cruz-Guzmán 143).

The female characters in the stories "Acceptance," "Better Luck Tomorrow," "Homecoming," and "Storytelling" by Aziz Ammor and Murad Idrissi are deeply entwined with them but ultimately alienate them as a result of the difficulties of their class economy. Also, gender Lalami used this male figure to tell the story of women's emancipation, defying Shahnaz Kahn's claim that Muslim women may only be members of a religious community and not free thinkers (xii). Aziz Amor takes a raft to Spain in search of work since he is desperate to make a living and support his young wife. He spent some time in Tangier after being turned away during his initial attempt at emigration and then made another effort. She was successful in her second effort, and over five years, she could find enough jobs to pay for an apartment in Madrid and send some money home to her family. Aziz discovers Casablanca as a depressing city rife with unemployment, poverty, and underdevelopment. He hopes to bring his wife Zohra back to Spain when he finally returns to Morocco for a visit. Aziz portrays a positive

picture of Spain for family and friends during an emotional reunion with Zohra and his mother, forgetting to disclose his invisibility to native Spaniards. After failing to persuade Zohra to accompany him back to Madrid, Aziz once more travels to Spain alone. De la Cruz-Guzmán notes that Zohra is the story's more powerful character. While Aziz is in Spain, Zohra outperforms him by being firmly rooted in her neighborhood and finding economic and personal fulfillment in her womanly role. Zohra feels safe in her neighborhood, is well-supported by her family, and is close to her sister. She is grounded like Jenara and the daughter of a wealthy family who believed Aziz's unemployment made their union beneath her. Although she is formally left behind, she knows her husband's departure will not significantly alter her material or social circumstances because "she has always been the practical one" (P.90). Aziz anticipates being the hero who brings signs of advancement and financial security to his parents' Casablanca flat upon his return. Still, he is taken aback by his wife's lack of enthusiasm for overseas achievements. She expresses her independence by declining to travel to Spain and telling him, "I don't know if that's the life for me" (P.170). When he leaves for the second time, Zohra sobs, not out of sadness but happiness at staying behind with her family and community and knowing that her marriage to Aziz is finished.

The one constant that unites all of the characters is their ability to persevere despite facing challenges and obstacles, which is known as toughness and ability. They continued to work to improve their precarious situation, realizing there was no other route to take first when they resolved to defeat Morocco, then later when they were about to succeed but were still on the verge of failure.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted, this study demonstrates that patriarchy functions as a dominant social system that significantly shapes the lives and experiences of female characters in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. Patriarchal authority is manifested through domestic control, gender-based violence, and the restriction of women's autonomy, as illustrated in the characters of Noura, Halima, and Salma. These forms of oppression are not incidental but are structurally embedded within familial and social relations, positioning women as subordinate to male authority.

The findings further reveal that patriarchy exerts a profound influence on women's psychological and social development. Experiences of control, violence, and marginalization produce long-term effects, including trauma, fear, and limited self-determination. However, the novel does not portray women merely as passive victims. Through Halima's pursuit of legal separation, Noura's ideological resistance, and Salma's silent negotiation within domestic space, Lalami presents various strategies of resistance that challenge patriarchal domination in subtle yet meaningful ways.

Importantly, the novel distinguishes between patriarchal practices and religious values, suggesting that women's oppression stems from cultural and social structures rather than



from religion itself. By foregrounding women's agency within a restrictive environment, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* offers a counter-narrative to stereotypical representations of Muslim women as powerless and voiceless.

This study contributes to feminist literary criticism by highlighting how patriarchy operates within diasporic Moroccan narratives and how women negotiate power within constrained sociocultural contexts. The novel thus serves as a valuable literary text for further feminist studies on gender, patriarchy, and women's resistance in contemporary Muslim societies.

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