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BURNING WITNESSES IN LIMBO: MOROCCAN DIASPORIC LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article proposes a comparative reading of two works by Moroccan writers that explore migration and expands upon Ato Quayson and Yoon Sun Lee's research on diasporic cultural production. Ruth Knafo Setton's *The Road to Fez* (2001) and Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) raise questions of genre. Knafo Setton employs elements of the Gothic while Lalami utilizes travel writing to delve into Moroccan migrant and diasporic experiences. A contrapuntal examination of their texts from a genre-oriented perspective highlights the interplay between the author, text, and reader, shedding light on Moroccan literature in English and the distinct characteristics of diasporic writing and reading.

Keywords: Comparative reading, Moroccan literature, Diaspora, Migration, Genre

Like a black autumn, night drops
and the sea claims the salt and fire it promised me
and my narration ripped in the fracture of skies …

— Zahra Mansouri, "The Secrecy of Mirrors"

Introduction

How do authors use their literary works to engage with broader debates related to migration and diaspora? When Moroccan authors write in English, how do they engage with and contribute to broader literary traditions and movements? To what extent do Ruth Knafo Setton and Laila Lalami employ genre-driven mixing and reader engagement in their English texts, and how does this contribute to the exploration of innovative literary approaches? These questions invite an exploration of the ways in which literature intersects with migration and diaspora. This study examines how Moroccan authors engage with migration and diaspora in their literary

works, particularly when writing in English. It specifically focuses on Knafo Setton and Lalami, exploring their use of genre embedding and reader engagement. Through a comparative reading of two of their texts, this research aims to understand their artistic contributions to broader literary traditions and movements. Salim Jay, in a seminal anthology of Moroccan diasporic literature, emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the works produced by Moroccans living abroad. He describes them as “nervous,” “dreamy,” and “ferociously ironic” (Jay, 2010, p. 15, my trans.), highlighting their complexity and diversity. Jay’s anthology also underscores the historical context of Moroccan migration, situating contemporary experiences within a broader framework. The emergence of Moroccan writers expressing themselves in multiple European languages has diversified the country’s literary landscape and increased global accessibility to Moroccan literature. As Jay explains, “[t]he situation has evolved considerably in recent years with the appearance of authors who are very gifted in various European languages” (ibid., p. 16). However, there is a gap in the scholarship regarding a comparative analysis of seminal English texts written by Moroccan women. Portraying a young woman from a Moroccan-Jewish family, Knafo Setton’s first novel *The Road to Fez*, published in 2001, tells of Brit, who was born in Morocco but moved to Pennsylvania with her parents as a child. She returns to her ancestral homeland to visit her late mother’s family and fulfil her mother’s dying request: to make a pilgrimage to Fez and visit the tomb of a revered 19th-century Jewish woman named Suleika. During her visit, Brit falls in love with her uncle Gaby, a womanizing widower. Four years after Knafo Setton, Laila Lalami, in her collection of short stories *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, follows a group of young Moroccan immigrants who set out on a lifeboat to cross the Strait of Gibraltar in search of a better life in Spain. However, the passengers are left to fend for themselves after the boat capsizes near the shore. The text focuses on the lives of four of these passengers, exploring their motivations for undertaking the dangerous journey and their struggles before and after the incident.

1. *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* as Diasporic texts

In support of the claim that “[t]he key aspects of the diasporic imaginary highlighted in sociological and theoretical accounts can also be found in

the novels of diaspora," Yoon Sun Lee indicates that "[m]ost important is the dialectic of host nation and homeland, the recursive mutual structuring of memory and discovery, the myth of the homeland and the experience of the host nation" (Lee, 2015, p. 134). Lee is of the view that "the diasporic novel is more deeply marked by the recursive shaping of here and there, former selves and future selves" (Ibid., p. 134). If the diasporic novel "is driven by the discovery in the host nation of deeply embedded, highly consequential forms of difference, whether racial, gendered, or socioeconomic," what ensues from this realization is "far from the reassertion of fixed relations, identities, or locations" (Ibid., p. 134). Along similar lines, Ato Quayson offers a particularly insightful perspective on the diasporic imaginary, contending that "[w]ithin the diasporic imaginary, the question of identity – Who am I? – is necessarily entangled with that of place – What is this place, and how does it affect who I am?" (Quayson, 2013, p. 148). In view of this, the key features of the diasporic imaginary are the interconnectedness of identity and place, and the dialectical relationship between the individual's sense of self and the multiple places of co-ethnic identification. Lee also argues that the diasporic novel "questions the hierarchy of center and periphery, uncouples movement from space in an area of accelerating travel, and articulates a striking ambivalence toward identity, property, and even material embodiment" (Lee, 2015, p. 134). In contrast, Quayson explores the diasporic imaginary, suggesting that, "[t]he desire for a lost or even unknown landscape generates both constraints and possibilities for the imaginary" (Quayson, 2013, p. 149). Yet, arguing that "[t]he diasporic imaginary rests on space: space traversed, experienced, and registered as distance. As such, it constitutes a particularly rich and complex dimension of this genre," Lee adds that

> "[u]ncoupled from actual place, space is often oddly impervious to experience or knowledge. It is marked by internal divisions, invisible barriers as well as impossible contiguities. Labyrinths, a frequent figure in these novels, are as intensive as they are extensive, a matter of a private inability either to escape or to enter a place" (Lee, 2015, p. 135).

Considering this, my stand is that the coupling of Knafo Setton's and Lalami's focus on the representation of diasporic subjects as they navigate and negotiate diverse and often conflicting spaces advances the idea of *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuit*'s diasporic

configuration. Quayson further underscores that "[s]ubjectivity is no longer tied exclusively to the immediacy of present location but rather extends to encompass all the other places of co-ethnic identification" (Quayson, 2013, pp. 146-147). Parallel to this standpoint, Lee's assertion that "diasporic novels reflect serial displacement, entrapment, and dissolution" (Lee, 2015, p. 135) is of particular interest for the discussion on the literature of the Moroccan diaspora. Lee highlights the significance of state power and invisible barriers in relegating individuals and collectives to nonplaces, which are depicted in diasporic novels as selectively porous spaces for some and impenetrable for others, often marked by racial and class-based divisions, and adds that

> "[i]n many diasporic novels, movement figures a permanent state or relation rather than an event. Rather than simply going from one point to another, expressing intention or desire, bringing about change, or mapping out the lineaments of a world, such movements simply prolong a condition of dislocation and can even collapse a Cartesian sense of place" (Ibid., p. 139).

Lee finds that "space has less to do with external coordinates than with the intensive experience of movement, relocation, recollection" (Ibid., p. 139) in diasporic novels. With this in mind, I put forth the argument that Knafo Setton and Lalami, while both exploring the characteristics of the Moroccan diaspora, adopt different approaches in their texts, resulting in nuanced and varied insights. In Lee's view,

> "[w]hat is striking is the absence of a part-whole dialectic (…) Rather than thinking of themselves as a part of something complete or absolute, characters find themselves more often than not confronting a possible double, a mirror figure whose performance seems to hold a clue to selfhood or belonging" (Ibid., p. 140).

While Lee considers that material existence in diasporic novels is complex and takes many forms, my contention is that it is the configuration of their relationship to space and the body that renders possible the positioning of Knafo Setton's and Lalami's texts on a spectrum that includes a range of texts that can be identified as part of the diasporic genre. Quayson underscores that "the domain of literature must be given privilege for the manner by which it binds affect to questions of ontology in both the content and form of narration" (Quayson, 2013, p. 148). Additionally, he

posits that "the struggle between integrity and discontinuity, attachment and disaffiliation may provide us handy windows for understanding the variegated world in which we live and how to live in it" (Ibid., p. 154). In contrast, Lee reaches the conclusion that

> "[t]he diasporic novel is capacious in its imagination and equally generous in its disavowals. The ideal of place, narratives of accomplished movement, collective forms of shared essence, and the material burdens and gains of history are disavowed but never completely denied or forgotten"

and that

> "[d]iasporic novels seem to represent a mature dialectical engagement with the formal horizons of the novel as a genre. They remind us of a longer history of novel writing about coerced and wilful travel of subjects to all corners of the globe" (Lee, 2015, p. 149).

In light of these perspectives, I advance the idea that the variations on the diasporic novel developed in *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* can be recognized as valid contributions to the comprehension of the ongoing dialogue between diasporic writers and readers beyond the boundaries of the Moroccan diaspora.

The Road to Fez explores the dialectic between the host nation and homeland, focusing on Brit's journey as her family moves from El Kajda in Morocco to the United States. A photograph inscribed with "Gabriel Afriat and Brites Suleika Lek, 1957" serves as a tangible reminder of their connection to El Kajda (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 42). Brit's return to Morocco later in the novel represents her renewed engagement with her homeland and the exploration of her sense of self within the context of the United States. The contrasting dynamics between Morocco and Horsens in Pennsylvania highlight the tension and interplay between belonging and the search for home. On the other hand, Gaby's introspective musings pose questions about cultural integration: "What were these people, a few generations down the line, what are they? Jews or Arabs, or a mixture of both: Arabs with Jewish memory? What are we but Arab Jews?" (Ibid., p. 143). The recollection of Brit's departure from El Kajda evokes nostalgia and emphasizes the significance of the family's journey. On this particular episode, Gaby reminisces: "Do you remember when you left El Kajda? … And just as they were about to leave, you disappeared …

Then I had an idea. I came back here, got down on my knees, and guess who I found under my bed?" (Ibid., p. 79). In fact, Gaby's visit to Horsens in 1965 enriches the narrative, offering temporal context and insights into Brit's perspective. Moreover, the inclusion of diverse Moroccan cities expands the scope of the narrative, providing glimpses into the cultural and regional nuances of the country. The text also explores the yearning for a place of true belonging through the characters' desires to leave El Kajda for Paris or Lucerne. Justine states, "At age twelve all the kids are shipped off to Paris or Lucerne. You're fools to stay" (Ibid., p. 99). This prompts reflection on the complexities surrounding the conditions of migration in Morocco during the 1960s. Brit's father move to Israel adds complexity to the interplay between the host nation and homeland. Her worldview is disrupted as she questions his motivations: "Has the world turned completely upside down? … I don't think I understand anyone or anything" (Ibid., pp. 165-166). The text explores the connection between memory and discovery, particularly in relation to historical temporality and the formation of diasporic narratives. Brit's connection with her grandfather, Papa Naphtali, and the retelling of Brites Henriques' fate during the Inquisition emphasize the influence of historical events on individual and collective narratives. Papa Naphtali reveals the significance of Brit's name and the tragic circumstances of her ancestor's death: "Ah Brita, did you know I named you?... Brites Henriques was one of your ancestors … She died in the Inquisition" (Ibid., p. 113). The exploration of memory also extends to the physical environment, as various Moroccan cities' spatial elements become catalysts for recollections. The locked gate of the Jewish quarter symbolizes both protection and isolation: "the mellah gate, locked every night until recently … closed in a world with no way out" (Ibid., pp. 4-5). Yet, the act of making a home transcends geographical boundaries: "Israel, Paris, New York, what does it matter? … Every home is borrowed anyway" (Ibid., p. 89). The oppressive space of the *mellah* in Azemmour shapes the characters' memories and perception: "Salt wind blows Gaby, Luc and me inside the old Kasbah to the mellah … The air is dingy, sour with the smell of piss, shit, garbage piled on the street … I grip my throat and lean against an abandoned fruit stall, flies drinking from bursting purple-black figs" (Ibid., p. 131). This confined and decaying environment leaves an indelible impression on Brit's senses. From religious festivals to family celebrations, the text highlights the connection between Brit's relatives and the homeland: "The discussion is still going strong from dinner: to leave Morocco, or to stay. Jews are not permitted to take their

money out of the country. Papa Naphtali cannot leave at his age and start anew, but he wants to plant the dream of Israel for the rest of the family … 'A prayer for Israel … Next year in Jerusalem!'" (Ibid., pp. 96-97). The myth of the homeland reflects the collective longing, while acknowledging the realities that shape individual and collective journeys. Brit's introspection sparks thought-provoking questions: "Maybe Dad was wrong to take me away from this – my grandfather, my family … Is that freedom?" (Ibid., p. 112). Her reflection delves into the profound implications of migration and the quest for belonging. The use of camouflage reflects the family's efforts to shield themselves: "We speak in slivers and fragments … I thought we were rootless. I forgot we'd ever had a home" (Ibid., pp. 12-13). Brit's father's playful act of spinning the globe and assuming new personas emphasizes the lengths they go to fit societal norms: "*No more Jews from Morocco. From now on, we're Christians from Paris. A good choice*" [1] (Ibid., p. 38). On Yom Kippur, their hopes for a welcoming experience at the synagogue are shattered: "Isn't Yom Kippur the Day of Forgiveness? … How can you give a Jew a ticket to pray? On this day of all days, does it make any sense?" (Ibid., p. 87). Knafo Setton portrays the challenges of assimilation and acceptance faced by Brit's family. While being appreciative of her father's determination, Brit is also critical of the incongruous welcome at a Christian Sunday school: "The courage it took for him to wrench himself from the only world he'd ever known … Welcome this little lost lamb to the fold! You have a friend in Jesus, Brit! … you're a Jew! Well, we all have our problems!" (Ibid., pp. 101-102). Their attempts at reconciling their heritage with the host nation meet hostility: "You're better off going back to the jungle in Africa. There's no place for you here" (Ibid., p. 102). Similarly, Gaby's experiences in Morocco and France highlight the complexities of acceptance: "In Paris, I never felt at home with the European Jews … all of us with our black African hearts and feet" (Ibid., p. 143).

On the other hand, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* explores the stories of individuals who leave their homeland, Morocco, and venture to Spain in search of a better life. Faten, an illegal immigrant in Spain, faces new challenges and eventually becomes a sex worker in Madrid. Halima, trapped in an abusive marriage, seeks a divorce but finds herself unable to escape her predicament: "Now that Maati had lost his job she knew he'd turn to her for beer money … Where was the man she'd married?" (Lalami, 2005, p. 67). Aziz, equipped with a diploma, and his friend Lahcen, lacking a university education, both face limited job opportunities

in Morocco. Aziz's decision to migrate clandestinely to Spain strains his relationship with Lahcen, who questions the risks involved: "How can you tell me to calm down? You could drown!" (Ibid., p. 79). Murad, a book-loving tourist guide, contemplates the value of his English degree compared to his successful siblings and decides to risk a perilous journey to Spain. He reflects on the distance that separates the two countries: "FOURTEEN KILOMETERS … Some days he told himself that the distance was nothing, a brief inconvenience … Other days … he wondered how fourteen kilometers could separate not just two countries but two universes" (Ibid., p. 1). Memory and discovery play crucial roles in the lives of Faten, Halima, Aziz, and Murad. Faten, troubled by her expulsion from university, seeks solace through medication, acknowledging the need to avoid excessive thinking: "The main thing to survive this life here was to not think too much" (Ibid., p. 145). Halima contemplates the choices her brothers made to leave for Europe and wonders about the possibilities she might have had: "Would she have an apartment, a washing machine, maybe even a car? Would she have Maati?" (Ibid., p. 76). Her reflections reveal the intricate nature of memory and the alternate paths that can be imagined. Aziz attempts to preserve his sensory memories before leaving home, recognizing their importance in helping him cope: "He knew that in the months that would follow, he would need each one to help him survive" (Ibid., p. 98). His story explores the disparities between memory and reality upon his return, particularly in relation to the changes in his surroundings and the evolving religious landscape. Upon visiting his sister-in-law Samira, his astonishment is evident: "Aziz was shocked to see her hair fully covered in one of those Islamic scarves that had seemed to multiply since he left" (Ibid., p. 168). The absence of women and the prevalence of male unemployment in the downtown Café Saâda reveal societal changes and complex dynamics: "Something struck him as odd … there were no women at all" (Ibid., p. 173). This observation prompts Aziz to reflect on the interplay between memory and discovery and their influence on his community. For Murad, memory, discovery, and storytelling are intertwined, shaping his journey of self-exploration and emotional connection: "Childhood images of ogres and jinns flickered in his mind's eye … finally one story slowly unravelled for him, the tale of Aisha Qandisha" (Ibid., p. 183). Murad's contemplation of the past and future leads him to question the sacrifices made and the relationship between memory and the imagined future: "He wondered if one always had to sacrifice the past for the future" (Ibid., p. 186). Faten challenges

the idealized myth of the homeland through her memories of religious festivals: "The Eid holiday was coming up … there was not much to be nostalgic about … She pushed the memories out of her mind" (Ibid., p. 145). Faten's deliberate avoidance of these memories highlights the dissonance between her longing for meaningful celebrations and the disillusioning truth. Halima's conversation with her employer Hanan, a translator "specialized in immigration documents" (Ibid., p. 74) reveals the limitations of legal systems and challenges the perception that the local institutions hold the key to resolution: "Isn't there some way to get a visa?" (Ibid., p. 77). Her realization that a legal solution to her situation does not exist leads her to consider an alternative, illegal path. Aziz's long-awaited homecoming exposes the stark contrast between his idealized vision of the homeland and the challenging circumstances he encounters: "The apartment was darker than he remembered. The paint on the walls was flaking" (Ibid., p. 159). His experience leaves him disillusioned and uncertain, challenging his previously idealized vision. As he reads through a novel set in Tangier, Murad is unsatisfied with the literary depictions of his hometown, thereby reflecting the dissonance between idealized depictions and accurate portrayals. He seeks a deeper understanding that aligns with his personal experiences, including the nostalgia and connection evoked by his father's storytelling: "The deep baritone of his father's voice echoed in his ears, strong and reassuring" (Ibid., p. 183). With regards to the experience of the host nation, Faten's journey is marred by challenges and trauma, as she survives a perilous sea crossing and endures sexual abuse by a Spanish guard: "The guard had taken her to one of the private exam rooms, away from everyone else. He lifted her skirt and thrust into her with savage abandon" (Ibid., p. 147). Her experience in Spain primarily revolves around navigating sex work. Halima's expedition with her children is abruptly halted when she is detained and deported back to Morocco. Her ten-year-old son Farid's bravery during the boat capsizing elevates him to a revered figure, seen as both a hero and a saint: "Halima didn't know how to swim. Yet Farid pulled her to safety somehow … They had *all* survived" (Ibid., pp. 117-118). However, owing to the improbability of the rescue, some regard Halima as a "Crazy woman" (Ibid., p. 117). Aziz's experiences in Spain reveal the obstacles faced by immigrants. He recounts his previous failed border crossing attempt: "He had left the country on an inflatable boat … He had been caught right on the beach … and sent back to Morocco" (Ibid., p. 154). Aziz's encounters with the Spanish authorities,

his search for work, and his deliberate omissions when discussing Spain with his family shed light on the challenges of integration: “Aziz talked about Madrid … mentioned his neighbor … and his boss at the restaurant. But he didn’t talk about … constant identity checks that the police had performed these last two years” (Ibid., pp. 161-162). Murad’s perilous journey ends in his capture by Spanish law enforcement that shatters his chance of escape: “A light shines on him... long enough to see the dog, a German shepherd, and the infinitely more menacing form holding the leash” (Ibid., p. 14). The oppressive environment of the holding station emphasizes his sense of helplessness: “The guard takes him to a moldy cell … Seagulls flutter from the side of the building … and for a moment he envies them their freedom” (Ibid., p. 17). Ultimately, Murad finds solace in becoming a storyteller, realizing the importance of preserving his own narrative: “There was no use reading stories like this anymore; he needed to write his own … he was already lost in the story he would start writing tonight” (Ibid., p. 195). While *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* differ in the way they approach the dialectic of host nation and homeland, the recursive mutual structuring of memory and discovery, the myth of the homeland and the experience of the host nation, I would put forward that both texts defy strict categorization within a single literary genre.

2. Gothic Echoes and Revival of Travelogue in Moroccan Diasporic Literature

The Gothic genre has evolved to encompass a wide range of elements. David Punter identifies claustrophobia, grotesque characterizations, and the lack of escape as Gothic features in literature (Punter, 2015, p. 1). Punter also suggests a relation between the ghost story and the older Gothic (Ibid., p. 2), whereas Wester and Aldana Reyes highlight the Gothic’s inclusion of horror, science fiction, and speculative fiction (Wester and Aldana Reyes, 2019, pp. 1-2). They note its revival during technological progress, akin to its birth in the eighteenth century (Ibid., p. 7). In their view, Gothic tropes intersect with racial and ethnic discourses, critiquing Western-centric perspectives (Ibid., p. 10). In this regard, my view is that Knafo Setton’s text utilizes Gothic elements such as mystery, supernatural imagery, and oppressive settings to create an unsettling narrative. In *The Road to Fez*, mystery and uncertainty are

interwoven into the narrative: "As we say a word, its meaning shifts: no becomes yes, and yes is usually no" (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 12). Haunting and supernatural imagery also contribute to the disquieting atmosphere: "I pretended to know nothing of djnoun, martyred Jews, ghosts and spirits" (Ibid., p. 127). Suffocating and oppressive settings add tension: "I saw how easy it would be for a man, for anyone, to enter the tiny room, no larger than a closet" (Ibid., p. 14). A certain psychological tension also arises from fear and suspicions: "Is this what the converso existence is like?" (Ibid., p. 13). In addition, Brit's identification with a ferocious force hints at repressed desires: "The Beast waits for the moment to attack" (Ibid., p. 32), and primal desires and an underlying sense of immediate danger evoke Gothic horror: "My teeth are sharpening … To slash and kill" (Ibid., p. 31). This prompts me to argue that postcolonial Gothic, a critical mode used by authors to criticize colonial violence and discourse, holds relevance for the study of Knafo's text as it is set against the background of the decade immediately following Moroccan independence. *The Road to Fez* not only challenges and appropriates the language of the colonizers to express the experiences of the colonized, resisting the influence of the empire (Ilott, 2019, p. 19), but it also complicates the language question by resorting to the use of English instead of French. And if the subgenre "border Gothic" responds to the changing sociopolitical landscape (Ibid., p. 23), settlers and indigenous writers use the Gothic to recount untold stories of colonial life and the conflict between imperial power and former colonies (Rudd, 2019, p. 72). Building upon this, I contend that Setton's text invites exploration of the uncanny, aligning with Ruth Gilbert's perspective on the disruptive nature of the Wandering Jew, *dybbuk*, and golem, that challenge the "border between self and other" (Gilbert, 2012, p. 4). These figures contribute a distinctive and thought-provoking element to the narrative, creating a world of ambiguity and intrigue. In her 2010 review of *The Road to Fez*, Agnieszka Legutko explores the theme of possession, highlighting the presence of *djnoun* and the dynamics between the characters. Legutko quotes Setton, who writes, "Djnoun hover everywhere, grasp secrets, and use them against us" (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 20), emphasizing their pervasive nature. The review also discusses Gaby's ability to deal with these entities, demonstrated when he neutralizes the power of Mrs. Kopf, a trouble-making neighbor referred to as a *djinn*. Interestingly, Legutko suggests that Gaby's relationship with his wife, Estrella, can be interpreted as a revolutionary type of "possession," challenging patriarchal norms of arranged marriages

and domestic violence. It is noted that even though the word "possession" is never mentioned in the novel, "it features a man possessed by a woman, who herself acts as if she were possessed" (Legutko, 2010, p. 21). According to Legutko, Estrella is depicted as tormented and traumatized, displaying signs of possession, as indicated by her plea to Gaby: "Punish me! … Show me you love me! Prove you're a man! … Beat me! I'm so bad!" (Knafo Setton, 2001, pp. 54-55). Estrella's aggressive actions, including screaming, scratching, beating, cursing, and demanding to be beaten (Ibid., p. 49), evoke behaviours associated with possession. To my surprise, Legutko does not delve into Estrella's masochistic tendencies.[2] Gaby speculates about Estrella's past, acknowledging that "something had happened to her and was instantly hushed. By the time she came to me, it was already too buried and inert. There was no way for me to reach her" (Ibid., p.65). In the same vein, Mama Ledicia, Gaby's mother, has "centuries of demons dancing behind" her eyes (Ibid., p. 3) and recognizes Estrella's inner turmoil, stating that she "needs some powerful healing" (Ibid., p. 66). The novel takes a tragic turn when Estrella sets herself on fire, witnessed by Gaby, who attempts to rescue her unsuccessfully. This tragic event deeply affects Gaby, as Legutko remarks, "Estrella's suicidal death possesses Gaby's soul forever" (Legutko, 2010, p. 22). Legutko commends Knafo Setton's portrayal of possession, considering it the most contemporary and innovative construction of spirit possession in post-second wave of Jewish women's fiction. The narrative simultaneously critiques the patriarchal order by juxtaposing Estrella, a victim embodying a subversive projection of male violence, with Gaby, a man who refuses to participate in the oppression of women. Taking this into consideration, my standpoint is that *The Road to Fez* offers a distinct viewpoint on possession while challenging societal norms. Through the relationship between Brit and her uncle Gaby, Knafo Setton explores the complexities of desire and blurred boundaries, while also challenging cultural standards. Tatjana Hörnle's article "Consensual Adult Incest. A Sex Offense?" sheds light on the dynamics of a such relationship, highlighting the complexities of consent and power imbalances and argues that power imbalances and dominance can undermine true consent, reflecting the potential challenges in Brit and Gaby's relationship (Hörnle, 2014, p. 87). The validity of consent is further discussed and Hörnle raises the issue of public interests overriding consent, connecting to the concerns expressed by Brit and Gaby's family (Ibid., p. 92). Additionally, the divergent legal approaches to adult incest across different countries further complicates the relationship

between Brit and Gaby (Ibid., p. 93). Elizabeth Barnes' insights on incest and the literary imagination parallel Knafo Setton's text. The cultural and contextual factors influencing Brit and Gaby's attraction align with Barnes' argument that the incest taboo is relative to time and culture (Barnes, 2002, p. 1). Knafo Setton captures the power dynamics and political control in incestuous relationships as Brit states, "THERE IS CONFUSION IN OUR DARK DANCE" (Knafo Setton, 2005, p. 190), reflecting the interconnectedness of desire, control, and dominance (Barnes, 2002, p. 3). Furthermore, Brit's use of a love potion to manipulate her uncle's emotions addresses the societal taboo surrounding incestuous relationships (Knafo Setton, 2005, p. 82-83). In this regard, it is my contention that Ruth Perry's elaboration on incest and the Gothic novel aligns with the themes of forbidden desires and taboo relationships in *The Road to Fez*. Perry states that Gothic novels often explore such relationships to create a sense of suspense and transgression arguing that "[t]he sexuality is terrifyingly omnipresent" (Perry, 1998, p. 272). Brit and Gaby defy conventional boundaries, and the sensual imagery conveys the intensity of their desire, aligning with the Gothic tradition. In addition, Jenny DiPlacidi's analysis of uncles and nieces in Gothic fiction provides valuable insights into the portrayal of incestuous relationships. Setton challenges the portrayal of the uncle as "representative of patriarchal dangers" and "a physical, sexual, and financial threat to the heroine" (DiPlacidi, 2018, p. 140). Instead, in my assessment Brit's desire for her uncle Gaby is depicted as a "natural desire" and "an extension" of familial love, defying the taboo associated with incest (Ibid., p. 146).

Daniel Newman's elaboration on travel writing is particularly relevant for the study of *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* as Lalami delves into the multifaceted nature of travel and journeys, echoing the intertwining themes of piety, education, and personal growth associated with travel in Islamic tradition. In light of Lalami's affiliation with Morocco, further interpretive hypotheses can be considered, particularly when examining the "Qu'ranic term for travel or journey, *rihla*, which early on also came to denote a travelogue" (Newman, 2019, p. 143). Rihla refers to the tradition of travel undertaken by learned individuals in the Western part of dar al-Islam, particularly associated with the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. This travel resulted in *rihla* literature, written records serving as guides for future pilgrims. In Morocco, from the sixteenth century onwards, *rihla* literature flourished, encompassing *rihla* within Morocco, *rihla*

hijaziyya (travel to the Hijaz), and *rihla sifariyya*, involving embassies and missions (El Moudden, 1990, pp. 143-145). With regard to the *rihla*'s various subgenres Lalami's text does not appear to fully share the features of the quest for instruction (*talab al–'ilm*), the pilgrimage (*rihla hijaziyya*), the official embassies (*rihla sifariyya*), or the tourist travelogue (*rihla siyahiyya*) (Newman 2008, p. 85). Yet, I posit that Lalami's collection can be corelated with *rihla* literature given its in-depth exploration of the transformative aspects of journeys to a "(semi-) mythical Europe of progress" (Ibid., p. 86). As Newman observes, "In the Qu'ran, travel often appears as a duty, whether in respect of the pilgrimage or, simply, to 'see how God originated creation' (Qur. 29:20)" (Newman, 2019, p. 143). This religious aspect of travel is reflected in Lalami's text as the characters are faced with the decision of whether the risk of their journey is worth taking. Murad ponders, "trying to decide whether the risk was worth it" (Lalami, 2005, p. 1), aligning with the concept of travel as a duty and a means to seek knowledge. Lalami also explores the aspirations and dreams associated with travel, which Newman notes as vital in "conquering knowledge" (Newman, 2019, p. 143). Characters imagine a better future beyond the journey, envisioning "the job, the car, the house" (Lalami, 2005, p. 1) which resonates with the idea of travel as a quest for personal and collective improvement. Although there are no direct references to Newman's exploration of travel as a means of collecting physical relics in the text, in my interpretation *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* captures the complexities and challenges of travel, emphasizing the transformative nature of the characters' journeys. Additionally, Lalami's portrayal of the characters' encounter with the Spanish coast guard during illegal immigration attempts highlights the complexities inherent in such travels. As Lalami writes, "when the Spanish coast guard caught her and the other illegal immigrants" (Ibid., p. 135), the narrative underscores the unlawfulness and dangerousness of the journey. Lalami explores the transformative nature of journeys which aligns with Newman's observation that travel was integral to the scholar's formal training and personal growth (Newman, 2019, p. 143). Murad is a long-term unemployed graduate student; Faten is caught cheating during an exam and excluded from university and Aziz is described as "unable to get into a university … was given a degree in automation – which basically meant he could work as a repairman" (Lalami, 2005, pp. 82-83). And if they all seek better life in Spain, the dreamlike dimension of Aziz's returning journey is marked by a mixture of emotions and uncertainties: "FOR FIVE YEARS Aziz had

imagined the scene of his homecoming. In his carefully rehearsed fantasies, he would come home on a sunny day … But as the date of his return to Morocco approached, Aziz found that he had to alter the details of his daydreams" (Ibid., pp. 152-153). Hakim Abderrezak draws a parallel between historical and modern migrations, stating that "[j]ust like the followers of Prophet Muhammad who emigrated in secret in order to escape persecution back in Mecca, harragas leave in secret" (Abderrezak, 2016, p. 70). He further explains that modern-day migrants resort to secret ways of leaving due to the severe consequences they face if caught, including deportation, trial, imprisonment, and police brutality in their home countries (Ibid., p. 71). Abderrezak emphasizes the secrecy of harragas' projects, as families often try to prevent them from leaving the beach. He argues that the term "clandestine migration" or "secret emigration" (*hijra sirriya*) is a more fitting descriptor than "illegal migration" (Ibid., p. 71). My assertion is that this choice of words highlights the dire living conditions and plight faced by Moroccan migrants who must hide, rather than stigmatizing them for seeking a better life. In the first chapter, "The Trip," the treacherous nature of the journey is introduced, depicting the dark waves, foul odor of the boat, and a sense of curse. The need for secrecy is clear as Rahal, the boat's captain, emphatically urges everyone to disembark (Lalami, 2005, p. 10). Faten's story, presented in the chapters "The Fanatic" and "The Odalisque," unveils a journey filled with constant fear of authorities and the risk of deportation, trial, imprisonment, and brutality (Ibid., p. 135). Faten's clandestine migration reveals the hidden nature of her escape from Morocco due to her religious and political affiliations. Halima's story unfolds in the chapters "Bus Rides" and "The Saint," portraying her life in the Zenata slum and her crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar with her three young children. Her husband Maati is unaware of her departure (Ibid., p. 118). A pivotal moment in her narrative is the miraculous rescue from drowning, which holds significant meaning in her journey. Aziz's journey is documented in the chapters "Acceptance" and "Homecoming," encompassing his dreams, departure, and eventual return home after five years abroad. While his parents are not aware of his plans (Ibid., p. 97), the family reunion and exploration of his transformed neighbourhood shed light on the complexities of his journey and diasporic return. The chapters "Better Luck Tomorrow" and "The Storyteller," revolve around Murad. He becomes a bookseller in Tangier and reflects on his failed attempt to cross to Spain and the gradual loss of his connection to his past and storytelling traditions as he overhears two

women conversing in English in his shop. I advance the argument that through the weaving of these chapters with Abderrezak's perspective, further layers of interpretation emerge, revealing the multifaceted nature of clandestine migration. Abderrezak's exploration of *hrig*, or "burning," provides valuable insight into the phenomenon of clandestine migration and the desire to cross the sea. For Abderrezak, *hrig* encompasses the burning desire to leave, the burning of kilometers to reach the final destination, and the symbolic act of burning identification papers to complicate repatriation efforts. He states, "Hrig covers the clandestine migrant's (1) burning desire to leave, (2) burning of kilometers to the final destination, and (3) burning identification papers in hope to make repatriation more difficult for authorities" (Abderrezak, 2016, pp. 7-9). Abderrezak also highlights the need to differentiate between leavism and the actual act of clandestine migration. Leavism refers to the insatiable desire to cross the sea, which precedes the act of migration. He explains, "I call leavism the insatiable desire to cross the sea, which precedes an actual instance of clandestine migration" (Ibid., p. 9). This prompts me to assert that Lalami's characters embody this leavism, constantly yearning for a better life beyond their current condition. Furthermore, the burning of identification papers aligns with the characters' attempts to erase their identities and complicate repatriation efforts. Although Lalami does not explicitly mention the burning of documents, the characters' illegal immigration attempts and encounters with the Spanish coast guard emphasize the risks and challenges they face. Regarding Faten's arrest, Lalami writes, "the Spanish coast guard caught her and the other illegal immigrants" (Lalami, 2005, p. 135), highlighting the collective dimension of the obstacles they encounter and the sense of urgency they experience during their journeys. The beachscape in Lalami's novel represents a liminal space where the characters navigate their hopes, fears, and uncertainties in coherence with Abderrezak's assertion that "[i]n illiterature, the liminal space of the beachscape often replaces airports and seaports as expected exits in this new age of increasingly select emigration to Europe" (Abderrezak, 2016, pp. 67). Consistent with this argument, the sea, symbolizing both the physical obstacle and the figurative act of burning the road, serves as a defining element in Lalami's text.

3. Interpretive Perspectives

In terms of interpretive hypotheses, it could be argued that the central characters in Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts offer testimonies of their experiences, which are characterized by fragmented memories. According to Soshana Felman, testimonies consist of "bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference" (Felman, 1992, p. 5). In keeping with this line of thought, Strejilevich highlights that "[s]ome testimonial writers—in the belief that fictionalization diminishes the impact of horror—insist that their accounts are genuine reflections of reality. The desire for verisimilitude imposes itself in para-textual devices where the testimonial quality of the material is enhanced" (Strejilevich, 2006, p. 709). Considering this, more than in Lalami's text the para-textual devices in *The Road to Fez* support the idea that the narrative presented is not merely fictional construct but rather grounded in the reality of lived experiences. For Marassa,

> "it is easy to observe a peculiar *usus scribendi* operating on a graphic architecture that privileges a marked alternation and a varied use of avant-texts and epigraphs – in which the narrating subject becomes plural, a section of other lives and stories. These paratextual elements give prominence, in *The Road to Fez*, to a structure that visually and semantically reinforces a temporal expression that oscillates" (Marassa, 2012, p. 98, my trans.).

This enhances the testimonial quality of Knafo Setton's work, providing readers with a heightened sense of authenticity. However, Strejilevich cautions that "testimony should stress just truthfulness, not objectivity" (Strejilevich, 2006, p. 709). Following this line of thought, I maintain that the emphasis on truthfulness in Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts surpasses the pursuit of an objective account. Grounded in realism, the texts acknowledge the subjective nature of memory and individual perspectives, prioritizing the portrayal of emotional and personal journeys over a single, definitive truth. This nuanced approach explores the complexities of migrant and diasporan experiences, recognizing the diverse perspectives and subjective interpretations of the characters' paths. On another note, Strejilevich's assertion that "a literary approach to testimony allows for a distancing in relation to the intimate memories … the witness/writer

searches for understanding" (Ibid., p. 710) aligns with the approach taken by Knafo Setton and Lalami, as seen through the numerous episodes that depict characters engaging in reflection, introspection, and a quest for deeper understanding and meaning. Both texts exemplify the transformative potential of testimony in literature by elevating marginalized voices and providing intimate access to their thoughts and emotions.

Another recurring motif that intertwines *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* is the representation of fire, offering readers insight into the texts' perspectives on violence, death, and hope. *The Road to Fez* delves into the depiction of fire imagery by including several religious celebrations in which candles are lit and prayers are offered (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 220). Yet, Isso, Suleika's "broke and mad" (Ibid., p. 134) older brother is depicted retelling his sister a tale in which "people were burning a mountain of books" (Ibid., p. 214). Moreover, Brit's grandfather Papa Naphtali draws a parallel between their ancestor Brites Henriques and Suleika when he describes the fate of their family during the Inquisition: "The torturers begin and continue until the whole family is burned alive. Everyone, except Brites … But they don't burn her like the others. They bring her before the court … and demand more names, a confession, words to erase the smell of fire and burned flesh" (Ibid., p. 114). The recurring fire imagery in the narrative points at the family's tragic history of persecution. Besides, the scene in which Gaby attempts to rescue his wife Estrella from the flames is particularly telling: "In the kitchen. I ran and stopped in the doorway. She stood naked by the sink, pouring a can of kerosene over herself. "Estrella!" I screamed. She struck a match, and flames engulfed her. In an instant, she seemed to explode" (Ibid., p. 71). Considering this, Alfonso and Chandra's explanation of self-immolation as a prevalent practice in ancient cultures, where fire holds significant "iconographic and mythological prominence with transformational qualities" (Alfonso and Chandra, 2021, p. 7) underscores Estrella's self-immolation as a potent message for societal recognition and a call for transformative action. Extending beyond the historical context of the Inquisition and Estrella's suicide, the motif of fire also embodies Gaby's intense longing for Brit and his feelings of jealousy: "THANK GOD FOR THE LIMITS OF PERCEPTION. That she can't see the pounding of my heart. The fire inside that threatens to burn me alive" (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 185). Multifaceted and evocative, the fire imagery permeates the text's emotional landscape, adding a layer of interpretation to the narrative.

Similarly, fire imagery is interwoven into Lalami's text, and Abderrezak's analysis further explores the significance of burning as a figurative act:

> "Ben Jelloun's title *Partir*, which means 'to leave' and has been published in English under the title *Leaving Tangier*, is the closest French equivalent of the Moroccan Arabic *hrig*, although *brûler* (to burn) translates more accurately the common practice of burning identification documents before undertaking the sea crossing, in order to render repatriation challenging for European authorities" (Abderrezak, 2016, pp. 67-68).

Specifically referring to *hrig*, Abderrezak explains that "[t]his word also conveys the figurative act of 'burning the road' (in this case, the sea), and of illegally 'burning up' kilometers in one fell swoop … it dates back to 711CE … the arrival of Berber general Tariq Ibn Ziyad in present-day Spain and his decision to burn his ships" (Ibid., p. 68). Pursuing this line of argumentation, Lalami's satirical portrayal of migrants "without guns or armor, without a charismatic leader" (Lalami, 2005, p. 3) contrasts the romanticized historical ship burnings with contemporary migration. For Abderrezak, "*harragas* (burners) … is the neologism used … to refer to individuals who emigrate clandestinely in search of more promising opportunities" (Abderrezak, 2015, p. 68). However, it is worth mentioning that Lalami's characters do not engage in the explicit act of burning their identification documents before embarking on their journey. Nonetheless, the act of discarding IDs illustrates the determination of the burners as they embark on a risky journey: "TARIFA IS ABOUT 250 meters away now. It'll only take another few minutes. The Guinean woman throws a piece of paper overboard. Murad figures it's her ID. She'll probably pretend she's from Sierra Leone so she can get political asylum" (Lalami, 2005, p. 9).

It is particularly telling that Abderrezak indicates that "fictional accounts help their readers better understand hrig. Like harragas waiting to cross the strait, more of these narratives are on their way" (Abderrezak, 2016, p. 88). This assertion invites consideration of the notion of waithood[3] in relation to Setton and Lalami's texts. For Inhorn and Smith-Henfer, "In the twenty-first century, waithood is a growing global phenomenon, with young people waiting to marry and have children, and, in the process, extending their period of young adulthood" (Inhorn and Smith-Hefner, 2021, p.391). They argue that "two broad forms of waithood, both of which pivot around the notion of intentionality … might best be described as unintentional waithood and intentional waithood" (Ibid., p. 391). My

reading of the texts leads me to believe that the central characters in both texts experience unintentional waithood as they find themselves waiting to marry without actively choosing to prolong their young adulthood. In *The Road to Fez*, eighteen-year-old Brit grapples with uncertainty about her future and questions her relationship with Gaby, reflecting a sense of anticipation or delay in her personal life. Gaby's connection with Brit also exemplifies waithood as they engage in a romantic affair and embark on travels to different cities, expressing a longing for adventure and a departure from societal expectations. They are in a state of transition, postponing settling down to pursue meaningful experiences. Brit seeks solace by visiting a cemetery and relying on external forces, but she desires empowerment and purpose beyond waiting. Through her encounters, she undergoes personal growth and self-discovery, exemplified by her spiritual explorations and the pursuit of Suleika's legacy. In Lalami's text, Faten, Halima, Aziz, and Murad are presented with situations where they are awaiting enhanced prospects for their lives. Before attempting to cross borders, Halima is depicted as waiting for papers in view of a divorce from her husband, and the opportunity to migrate. Aziz is unemployed and Murad, a graduate student who works as a tourist guide, is desperately waiting for better employment opportunities. Halima, Aziz, and Murad find themselves caught in a state of stuckedness[4], where they are unable to move forward. After successfully crossing the border, Faten becomes stuck in a life of prostitution, waiting for legal papers. Aziz oscillates between Spain and Morocco, where his wife waits for him. Following his deportation back to Morocco, Murad is portrayed as a shopkeeper and a storyteller, and appears as living in a state of serene stasis, reflecting a sense of stillness and stability that he has found after risking his life on an inflatable boat. Furthermore, the concept of liminality provides additional interpretive hypotheses when analysing both texts, as seen through Brit's visit to Morocco and the crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar by the four central characters, events that align with Ashcroft et al.'s depiction of liminality as an "interstitial or in-between space, a threshold area" (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 145). On limbo situations Capps and Carlin write:

> "during much of our life on this earth we experience some aspects of our lives as intermediate or indeterminate, so in this sense limbo is a sort of chronic condition from which we are never completely free. We wait in lines, we wait for a letter or e-mail, we wait for the light to turn green, we wait for a response after we have told a joke. On the other hand, there are

> times in our lives when our sense of being in limbo is especially acute due to certain circumstances" (Capps and Carlin, 2010, p. 3).

This more intense form of limbo is broken down into five different classifications, which include youth, relationships, work, illness, and immigration, as instances of acute Limbo-experiences. Arguably, as her acute limbo situation involves "experiences of dislocation" (Ibid., p. 4) Brit is stuck and unable to fully embrace adulthood until she reaches Suleika's tomb. Similarly, Lalami's text invites the reader to accompany Faten, Halima, Aziz and Murad during their limbo experience. With respect to this, Abunasser explains that,

> "Barzakh literally translates to 'veil' or 'barrier'. In Islamic eschatology, it generally refers to the liminal space between the physical and spiritual worlds. Similar to the concept of limbo, barzakh is where the soul must wait between death and resurrection. While here, the soul can neither go back to the physical realm nor forward to the afterlife. Prominent Sufi philosopher Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240) compares barzakh to 'the time the embryo spends in its mother's womb'" (Abunasser, 2016, p. 196).

Hence, one can argue that throughout the narrative, Faten, Halima, Aziz and Murad are trapped in a state of limbo to the extent that their lives have become suspended in an indeterminate state. Equally significant is that Lalami leads the reader into exploring the characters' degrees and types of distress, the duration of their limbo situations, as well as the benefits and liabilities of living in limbo (Capps and Carlin, 2010, pp. 6-7). Elaborating further on this viewpoint, Capps and Carlin argue that,

> "hope plays a very important role in sustaining us when we are in acute limbo situations … it helps if we have a conscious awareness of what hope is, what the experience of hope involves, what may threaten hope, and what may help to sustain hope. This very awareness can play a critical role in our ability to respond to the love of God when we are in a dark place and beginning to lose our usual spirit of hopefulness – if indeed we have a spirit of hopefulness" (Ibid., pp. 7-8).

This insight sheds light on the intertwining of hope and limbo imagery, leading the reader to explore the struggles faced by the burners and the influence that hope exerts.

A further layer of interpretation can be uncovered by examining how both texts relate to genre-specific classifications. According to Alastair Fowler,

> "Far from inhibiting the author, genres are a positive support … The writer is invited to match experience and form in a specific yet undetermined way. Accepting the invitation does not solve his problems of expression … But it gives him access to formal ideas as to how a variety of constituents might suitably be combined. Genre also offers a challenge by provoking a free spirit to transcend the limitations of previous examples" (Fowler, 1982, p. 31).

Considering this perspective, my assertion is that *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* can be read as texts that combine constituents of diasporic novels with elements from other genres. Specifically, Knafo Setton's novel incorporates elements of the Gothic genre, while Lalami's collection of short stories draws on the Rihla genre, and through the integration of these diverse constituents, the texts establish a distinct literary landscape. Explaining that an embedded genre is "a genre that is included within the framework of another genre", Sune Auken puts forwards a distinction between "three kinds of embedding, 'recontextualized embedding (from Bakhtin)', 'contextualized embedding' (from Orlikowksi & Yates), and 'element genre' (from Swales and Martin)" (Auken, 2021, p. 163). Auken further argues that,

> "interpreting a complex genre necessitates a coherent understanding of the many simpler genres that constitute it. Thus, there is a dialectic relationship between the two levels. The embedded genres are transformed by their new generic context, but features are carried over from the original genre specifically to influence this new context. Thus, a genre will be defined by the genres it embeds, and will in turn define those genres" (Ibid., p. 166).

Whether by identifying Gothic features or Rihla elements in Knafo Setton's and Lalami's respective texts, these interpretive hypotheses illustrate the embedded nature of genres. Within a larger framework, these genres carry distinctive characteristics and meaning, shaping the new context and influencing the overall interpretation. Expanding on this, it is my assertion that further interpretive hypotheses can be formulated to explore the dialectic relationship between *The Road to Fez*

and pilgrimage literature, on one hand, and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*' affiliation with katabasis, on the other. *The Road to Fez* resonates with pilgrimage narratives' "curiosity – the interest of travellers in strange things, magnificent sights, other men's customs and beliefs" (Howard, 1980, p. 53), and the "religious purpose of the journey" (Davidson and Gitlitz, 2008, p. 17). On the other hand, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* exhibits resonances with "tale[s] of the journey to the subterranean world of the dead led by an extraordinary character while alive who has a determined purpose and is keen on returning" (Bernabé, 2015, p. 17), or "a Journey of the Dead made by a living person in the flesh who returns to our world to tell the tale" (Fletcher, 2019, p. 2). This additional layer of meaning, which offers valuable insight into Moroccan literature in English, invites analysis of the diptych formed by Brit and Gaby's storyline and the quadriptych formed by Faten, Halima, Aziz, and Murad, as they relate to road narratives whose formulaic patterns "emphasize protest, the search for a national identity, self-discovery, and experimentation or parody" (Brigham, 2013, p. 20). Both texts provide insights into the question of literary genre in relation to diasporic writing. Echoing this viewpoint, Zuzanna Olszewska asserts that,

> "the forms and themes of diasporic writing have varied more widely than is often acknowledged, according to the socio-political conditions in which they arose, the nature of the relationship between the host and diasporic communities, the cultural traditions on which they draw or seek to innovate, and the individual creative ambition of the author in question" (Olszewska, 2019, p. 91).

In accordance with this line of argumentation, Setton Knafo and Lalami exemplify the literary variety of diasporic writing. Moreover, building upon the exiles' "plurality of vision" and "awareness of simultaneous dimensions" proposed by Edward Said, a "contrapuntal" reading of *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* not only challenges classificatory generalizations but also emphasizes the unique and innovative features of each diasporic text (Said, 2000, p. 186). Another relevant perspective is presented by Sune Auken who argues that "there is always individuality at work in genre use. Therefore, the relationship between the embedded and the embedding genre is bound to be as complex and variable, as the actual users make it" (Auken, 2021, p. 169). In light of this, Knafo Setton and Lalami manipulate genres, challenge conventions, and explore new

possibilities in their texts, while also sparking thoughts on the question of reader engagement. This interplay between author, reader, and genre fosters categorial instability, enabling innovative literary approaches and reflecting the fluid nature of literary expression.

Conclusion

The reader discovers patterns of similarity in Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts due to their shared focus on the complex dynamics of diaspora. However, the distinct approaches to diasporic novels in *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* offer distinct insights into the Moroccan diaspora. Both texts explore the diasporic experience through a dialectic of the host nation and homeland, yet, in *The Road to Fez*, Brit's journey from El Kajda in Morocco to the United States highlights the tension between Morocco and Horsens, Pennsylvania. Similarly, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* follows four Moroccans venturing to Spain, challenging the prevailing myth of the homeland. Memory and discovery play a recursive mutual structuring role in both texts which also portray the experiences of the host nations and highlight the struggles of assimilation, adjustment, and the harsh realities faced by Moroccans in their new environments. Comparing Knafo Setton and Lalami's literary works allows for an exploration of several parallels and contrasts, particularly in relation to questions of genre. Interestingly, Knafo Setton blends elements of the Gothic, possession and incest narrative, while Lalami employs travel writing, secret emigration, leavism and *hrig* to delve into diasporic experiences. The defamiliarizing juxtaposition of Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts opens up a range of interpretive hypotheses and provides insight into the singularity of their literary contributions within the broader discourse on migration and diaspora. Both texts present distinct and individual literary articulations that incorporate elements of testimonies, waithood, and fire imagery, while also combining elements of diasporic novels with other genres such as pilgrimage narrative and katabasis. A contrapuntal examination of Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts from a genre-oriented perspective raises questions about the interplay between the author, text, and reader. This approach sheds light on Moroccan literature in English and the distinct characteristics of diasporic writing and reading.

NOTES

1 Original spelling, capitalization, punctuation and use of italics are retained.

2 On the semantic instability of "female masochism" cf. Rita Felski's "Redescriptions of Female Masochism" (2005).

3 Diane Singerman coined the term "waithood" to describe the prevalent trend of educated young people in Egypt and other economically disadvantaged countries in the region delaying marriage (Singerman, 2007, p. 6). Singerman emphasizes that following the turbulent Arab uprisings in 2011, involuntary waithood has become increasingly common throughout the Middle East, particularly among youth residing in resource-poor societies like Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia.

4 I have retained the term "stuckedness" as coined by Ghassan Hage to convey "a sense of existential immobility" (Hage, 2009, p. 98). In my view, this term holds particular relevance as "stuckedness is by definition a situation where a person suffers from both the absence of choices or alternatives to the situation they are in and an inability to grab such alternatives even if they present themselves" (Ibid., p. 100). Besides, the term "stuckness" as a "politically charged term [that] emerged through reflections on how infrastructure failures can generate a feeling of being stranded" also resonates with the experiences of Halima, Aziz and Murad indicating "a specific form of waiting that emphasises a limit to future-oriented actions" (Straughan et al., 2020, p. 639).

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