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Women's Thoughts in Motion: between Home and Diaspora in El Hachmi's *the Last Patriarch* and Faqir's *the Cry of the Dove*

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Abstract

Representing home and diaspora spaces is very present in diasporic literature. Each writer has its own way of representing these two spaces. However, one of the tools used to direct critiques to these spaces is writing gender in diasporic literature. Hence, this paper investigates the representation of women's thoughts from a double critique prism. Focusing on Najat El Hachmi's *the Last Patriarch* and Fadia Faqir's *the Cry of the Dove*, the paper argues that these writings use the theme of gender to criticize the spaces of home and diaspora. As such, this paper has three main objectives: (i) to defy the underlying hierarchical relationships holding the spaces of home and diaspora. (ii) to show that Najat El Hachmi and Fadia Faqir use the theme of gender to criticize both spaces. (iii) to show that the ability to criticize could be done by only those who develop and exilic consciousness with regards to belonging. With these objectives in mind, this study is based on a textual analysis of the two novels from a postcolonial, postmodern and transnational perspectives. The significance of this paper lies in providing an analysis that shows the polyphonic nature of women's postcolonial writings.

Keywords: home-diaspora, space-double critique, identity, gender roles



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Introduction

Arab women diaspora writings have emerged as a method of self-representation to claim agency both within the home and the host country. Najat El Hachmi and Fadia Faqir, as diaspora writers, are influenced by their oscillation between home countries and the host ones. This oscillation has made them subjects who belong to a space of doubleness and deterritorialization. Their situation is entangled between the old home left behind and the novel chances of securing a new space in the host country. In other words, their writings exhibit a sense of fluctuating between two worlds. As a result, they provide a platform for requesting, reframing, and subverting questions regarding home and diaspora spaces.

What makes the diasporic experience possible to offer new images of home and diaspora spaces is their hybrid nature. This engenders new representations in the sense that " *[t]he process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation*" (Rutherford, 1990, p.211). This challenges the traditional notions that reduce home and diaspora into opposite entities. James Clifford (1994) explains that diaspora writers have taken up the idea of "diaspora consciousness" which is "*conceived as a specific awareness, supposedly a characteristic of people living 'here' and relating to 'there': diaspora consciousness is entirely a product of cultures and histories in collision and dialogue. Diaspora subjects are, thus, distinct versions of modern, transnational, intercultural experience*" (p. 312).

Hence, the fact of living in a "median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachment has allowed Arab women diasporic writers to develop an exilic consciousness" (Said, 1994, p. 34). The latter has enabled them to see home and diaspora spaces from the prism of double critique. Their writings offer a new space of representation that shatters previous ideological discourses that have tended to produce hierarchy between home and diaspora/ East and West/ Us and others.

In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to argue that Najat El Hachmi's *the Last Patriarch* and Fadia Faqir's *the Cry of the Dove* represent a double critique of both diaspora



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and home spaces. This double critique does not aim at valorizing one space over the other, but its main objective is the creation of a third space whereby Leila Lalami revisits the aforementioned spaces and creates a new space of representation.

This paper consists of four major sections. A review of the literature is provided in order to present the gap that this paper tries to fill. After that, the second part consists of a methodological framework that summarizes the number of approaches used to analyze the case studies. As for the analysis part, it is divided into two sections. The first one deals with how gender roles are represented in home spaces in *the Last Patriarch* and in *the Cry of the Dove* while the last one compares the representation of gender in diaspora and how gender roles undergo changes when people move. This paper ends with a conclusion that discusses how living between two places endows writers with an exilic perspective from which they approach gender.

Literature Review

A referential study undertaken by Nassima Kaid entitled *Hyphenated Selves: Arab American Women Identity: Negotiation in the Works of Contemporary Arab American Women Writers* (2003) investigates Arab American women identity negotiation. Her dissertation focuses on themes ranging from immigrant experiences, defying stereotypes, identity negotiation to cultural dialogue. She states that “*Arab women writers use different literary strategies to resist the stereotypes and misconceptions about [...] Arab women [who] struggle to find a place for themselves and [deconstruct American stereotypes about them]*” (pp.10-11). By focusing on answering back such discourse, Kaid Nassima is replicating the same postcolonial discursive reading that previous research focused on. She does not focus on the other side of representation that these authors might provide. The fact of writing about women’s experience in both worlds can be seen from a double critical angle where their representation can serve critiques.

Among other relevant references tackling the issue of Arab women diaspora writings is Abdullah Kheiro Shehabat’s *Contemporary Arab-American and Middle eastern Women ‘s Voices: New Visions of —Home* (2011) which examines how home is not specifically related to the country of origin. For him, diaspora space is what helps Arab women writers create “their



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imagined spiritual spaces” (p. 134). The flexibility of making a home anywhere is also covered in this paper although it is not just intended to demonstrate the mutability of the concept of home. Rather, the purpose of speaking about creating new homes wherever and at any moment, in my opinion, is to demonstrate the writers' lack of attachment to a certain location.

Simone Cristina's and Motta Reis' an Imaginary Home in Diana Abu Jaber's *the Arabian Jazz* (2015) is another significant work that brings a lot to the reader's apprehension of what home is. Simon and Reis argue that “the issue of home nowadays is less connected with belonging to a physical land but rather with how one feels when they are home” (p.28). Focusing on the characters' relationship with regards to the home space, these researchers find that there is a difference between the characters' relations to the space of home. Some express a return to the home country and others take advantage of having "a split vision" in Majjjaj's words to create home in the host-country.

Martha Bosch's the representation of Fatherhood by the Arab Diaspora in the United States (2008) focuses on the question of fatherhood that changes when men cross the borders. This concept has received little attention by scholars. In this article, Bosch focuses on this issue in relation to Halaby's *West of The Jordan* (2003), Alicia Erian's *Towelhead* (2005) and Diana Abu jabber 's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) arguing that there is “different existing models of Arab fatherhood [...] who move from traditionalism to liberalism, and that allows the possibility of “new fatherhood “to emerge” (p. 101). Fatherhood, in the three novels, is located in a "situational position" using Monterescu's words. That is to say, the father “has an ambivalent relationship with his daughters because his identity [...] is placed between traditionalism and more liberal ideas” (p.105).

As it is apparent, this article focuses on the concept of the emergence of “new fatherhood” that without men's movement across the borders would not have known light. Yet, there is a problem of homogenization of fatherhood within this analysis. Do all men experience the emergence of a liberated fatherhood? What about those who suffer from masculinity crisis when they migrate? This article fails to draw attention to the experiences of men whose masculinity is reinforced in the host country by exposing patriarchal attitudes toward women.



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On the other hand, masculinity is seen from a dissimilar view as that of Bosch's *The representation of Fatherhood by the Arab Diaspora in the United States* (2011). While fatherhood is argued to be invented in diaspora according to Bosch, the question of masculinity is reinforced by diaspora in Chad Montuori's *Gendering Migration from Africa to Spain: Literary Representations of Masculinities and Femininities*. With the use of postcolonial and gender studies approaches, it is argued that "the migratory journey from Africa to Spain becomes a space where normative notions of gender and sexuality are contested (p. IV). The analysis reveals how each author constructs subversive gendered identities, which emerge from the migratory experiences that contradict the normative discourse in Spain surrounding the phenomena (p. V).

This article tries to uncover the intersection that exists between migration and gender in a way that the researcher manages to show how masculinities and femininities are not pre-given attributes but rather constructed ones which render them fluid and open to transformation. What is not discussed is the difference that exists between gender relations at home and those in the host country. Besides, when we talk about identity transformation, hybridity must be mentioned. In other words, traditional cultures in these narratives still affect the migrants even if they have attempted to transform themselves according to the cultural norms of the host countries. It is worth mentioning here that identity transformation is looked at, in this manuscript, as an empowering strategy for migrants to claim existence. Can't it be a state of loss as well? It is also worth noting that another issue is overlooked in this manuscript which is the double dimension of transformation. It is homogenized as being a virtue for migrants without taking into consideration the heterogeneity of their experiences. Migration cannot be homogenized into a favorable transformative process for all people. This heterogeneity encouraged the author to look at how the writers under study use the theme of gender to provide different representation to the spaces of home and diaspora.

Research Methodology

This study addresses the following key question: How do *the Last Patriarch* and *the Cry of the Dove* use gender to represent home and diaspora spaces? To answer this question, this paper adopts a textual analysis to analyze the study cases. The reason behind using this method is that



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it will help in understanding the thoughts and ideologies of these writers to dismantle power relations in representing home and diaspora spaces. Also, what motivates the choice of these two writers is the desire to compare their representations of gender issues in an attempt to enrich the discussion of the findings.

The perspectives from which the study cases would be analyzed is a postcolonial, feminist and transnational perspective. Given the fact that Najat El Hachmi and Fadia Faqir discuss feminist issues in their writings, a feminist perspective will be essential to see how gender issues are used to criticize the spaces of home and diaspora. Moreover, being a postcolonial transnational writer means that Najat El Hachmi and Fadia Faqir would strive to dismantle essentialist identities, homes and cultures. They are aware of more than one space which enabled them to write both spaces from an exilic perspective. By using these three approaches, the author will be able to show how they decolonize literature from answering back to the west and privileging ones' nation over the other.

Findings and Discussion

Representing Gender Roles at Home in Najat El Hachmi's the Last Patriarch and Fadia Faqir's the Cry of the Dove

Identity is a flexible notion that undergoes changes due to both time and place transformation. If identity is mobile, so are gender relations. Since both notions are social constructs and not innate, it is impossible to claim neither homogeneity nor stability while discussing them. Heterogeneity does not only mark diasporic identities, but it also characterizes diasporic and local gender relations and roles. The binary opposition that is claimed to exist between women and men is always open to negotiation, and it becomes either shuttered or reinforced when they move.

The heterogeneity of the characters' experiences transforms diasporic texts into a "rambling house"¹ as Salman Rushdie puts it. In his conclusion to *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie

¹ Salman Rushdie invites his readers to imagine that they are residing in 'a rambling house' which is an incoherent room that has multiple voices. The incoherence of diasporic texts is metaphorically perceived as a "rambling house" because they are not only shaped through fragmentation in space and time but also characters' experiences



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(1991) calls for perceiving literature as one place in any society where, within the secrecy of our heads, we can hear voices talking about everything in every possible way” (p. 429). Arab women diasporic writings are inhabited by these voices that intervene in the process of narration and transform its linearity, which compels authors and readers to go beyond dogmas.

Needless to say, that gender relations and roles are sometimes different and similar within the same narrative let alone between two narratives. To begin first with the similarities of representing gender roles and relations in the aforementioned narratives, home space is located in a village in both of them. While *the Last Patriarch* takes place in a Moroccan Amazigh village, *the Cry of the Dove* is represented in a Jordanian village called Hima. Choosing these settings instead of big cities is evocative in that these writers are not producing generalizations while talking about Morocco and Jordan. Rather, they emphasize the settings in which the events take place.

As far as El Hachmi’s novel is concerned, the narrative starts with an illuminating title of a chapter which is “a Long- Awaited Son”. Before reading the chapter, one is astonished by the adjective “long-awaited”. This adjective stands for the intensity of waiting for the birth of a son. After reading this chapter, we find that there is a massive segregation between boys and girls. From the start, El Hachmi informs her readers that this novel is mainly about the representation of gender roles and relations. When the mother gives birth to a girl, the narrator

are concerned. The heterogeneous experiences of characters compel readers to read out the multiple voices in the narrative which sometimes go beyond the dogmas that are related to the purity of cultures and stability of gender roles and relations. It is through the different characters' experiences that dogmas are shattered and given new meanings. For instance, it is highly believed that Arab women are empowered through displacement because gender roles undergo transformation. However, while considering the minor voices that distract dominant ideologies from perpetuation, we can show that it is not the case for all Arab women. Displacement is both empowering and disempowering for Arab women. Sharing an Arab origin as well as the same gender does not necessitate sharing sufferance or emancipation. In this case, readers cannot build generalization while reducing their analysis to interpreting major voices' experiences. In terms of distracting boundaries of ethnicity, Elmaz Abinader cites Majaj while saying that

"We need not stronger and more definitive boundaries of identity, but rather an expansion and a transformation of these boundaries. In broadening and deepening our understanding of ethnicity, we are not abandoning our Arabness, but making room for the complexity of our experiences". As it is mentioned, humans' experiences are marked by complexity and contradictions which deems it necessary to overcome the boundaries of identity, ethnicity, nationality and gender. These axes do not determine the homogeneity of diasporic experiences. Elmaz Abinader, *Children of Al- Mahjar: Arab American Literature Spans a Century*, 16 Dec 2017.



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represents her according to what people of the village say about her claiming that, “*her neighbor and sister-in-law had already given birth to two sons. So far, she'd failed as a wife; she hadn't achieved her main goal in life. the Driouch's project wasn't going according to plan*” (El Hachmi, 2008, p.4). El Hachmi represents the beliefs of the villagers that denigrate the birth of girls and not boys. Women are represented as having one duty which is giving birth to boys; otherwise, their existence is worthless. This internalized inferiority is the result of taking gender segregation for granted as it is a natural law that everyone should abide by. Giving birth to boys is represented as an accomplishment to draw a line at how women and men are represented in the village where specific norms of femininity and masculinity are overwhelming gender roles and relations.

The same representation is foregrounded in Faqir’s *The Cry of the Dove* (2007) in which women are seen as “a burden” in men’s eyes. The following extract shows how girls are conceived in Hima village

I closed my eyes and imagined my mother's chipped hand running on my face and erasing my anger and fear like a rubber. ‘It's a girl' announced the dayah and spat on the floor. She did not expect a large tip delivering a baby girl. "The Burden of girls is from cot to coffin," said my father. My mother told me that she had forgotten all the pain of labour when they told her it was a girl. She said that when she looked at my swollen closed eyes open for the first time her heart had never been the same (p. 118).

This meaningful passage exemplifies how girls are perceived in Hima village. On the one hand, it shows the perception of girls from a male perspective which is that of the father. Girls are seen as a burden that starts from the day of their birth and ends only when they are dead. The inhumane perception that Salma’s father endorses is similar to how girls are treated in *The Last Patriarch*. If in El Hachmi’s novel, women should have no existence if they are incapable to give birth to sons, in Faqir’s *The Cry of the Dove*, death is the ultimate solution to the birth of girls. On the other hand, gender-based discrimination is not only practiced by males, but it is



also internalized by females. For example, when, the dayah² helps the mother in childbearing, she spats on the floor once she discovers she is a girl. Disrespect, submissiveness and psychological violence are practiced by women themselves against their gender. This shows that patriarchy is not only a male construct but women also contribute to it with a great deal.

Women's contribution to their "inferiorization"³ is also a matter that takes place in El Hachmi's *the Last Patriarch*. Whenever Mimoun hits his sisters or shows disrespect to his parents, his mother justifies his deeds. The narrator says "*grandmother always told this story again, my poor child [...] you know your father's basically good-hearted and would never hurt anyone. The fact is those frights never completely left his body and turned him into someone different*" (El Hachmi, p.10). Looking for justifications to account for Mimoun's deeds is a sign of contributing to the patriarchal system that is based on discrimination against women. This act shows that it is high time to stop blaming men for the subordination of women as the latter share a great part in this process of servitude.

Most often, women are thought to be the only victims of patriarchy neglecting that men as well can be a victim of a patriarchal system. El Hachmi has paid attention to this issue when she represents unimportant details in a feminist narrative which shows this neglected aspect of patriarchy. In so many passages, Mimoun is represented as the victim of his father's oppressive behaviours. When he was still a baby and was crying, his father slaps him. This shows that women are not the only victims of oppression, men also face it. In another instance, his father addresses Mimoun and asks him to dominate the space of the house. The narrator says in this connection "*his father said, look, your brother's much less of a cry-baby than you, and doesn't wake anyone up early in the morning. And what will happen when you fall out with him, who will win, you or him? You or him, who's much smaller? If you want him to learn to respect you and call you Azizi, you should start showing who's boss now*" (El Hachmi, p.13). Apparently, this passage shows how patriarchy is transmitted from one generation to another. Authority, bossing and domination are firstly taught then practiced to serve one's needs. After this

² Dayah is referred to the woman who helps women give birth to their children at home.

³ It stands for the process through which women participate in inferiorizing themselves. That is to say, they contribute to their own submissiveness.



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conversation, Mimoun kills his baby brother to maintain his dominance over the household. This incident shows that Mimoun and his brother are victims of patriarchy as well. The father symbolizes the great patriarchal system that dominates both men and women. Providing him with such instructions shows how patriarchal behaviors become internalized and taken for granted as time goes by. To reach a powerful stage in society, patriarchal behaviors gain credibility due to the repetitive ideas and behaviors that become normalized in society.

Put differently, the supposedly convenient gender behaviors are profoundly implanted in people's actions, beliefs and desires to the point that they become inevitable and any deviation from what society and culture have formally prescribed would result in repulse. This internalization of gender roles and relations is also prevalent in Faqir's *the Cry of the Dove*. The conduct of the right women over-dominates this narrative as well as that of El Hachmi. To begin with the former, Salma is harassed by her mother whenever she chooses clothes for her own. Her mother says to her "tzu" you look like a slut'. To convince the mother that respectable women here wore clothes that made them like sluts would be impossible" (Faqir, p. 200). This internalization of patriarchal orders of conduct shows how women take these rules for granted. Associating clothes with the appropriate conduct of women worsens the mother's submissiveness. The same instance happens in the *Last Patriarch* in which rules are only imposed on women. The narrator says: "*Mimoun's older sisters were honorable women, women who'd never created problems, prudent, hardworking, honest, girls who'd never been known to flirt or allow themselves a single daring glance before their wedding*" (Faqir, p. 200). In another passage, the grandfather lists the behaviors that constitute the right woman and says "we've heard so much about your third daughter, her housekeeping skills, her obedient attitude, her excellent attitude, that my son and I think she is the right woman for him" (Faqir, p. 53). In another event, the mother instructs her daughter before marriage claiming "while she'd learned to cook, bake bread, grind flour and cut grass for the rabbit, second grandmother had always repeated it would help her prepare properly for her husband's house. Just think how a bride is always the center of attention, and how you're judged by what you do and say" (Faqir, p. 95). In these different passages, both men and women supply and promote gender roles. This shows that both of them are to blame for incarnating gendered-conducts. Within the whole novel, there is no instance in which men are provided with rules to follow. Are men not required to be



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trained before marriage? Are appropriate manners a matter that concerns no one but women? The right woman is represented as docile, submissive and dependent as her duty in life is to please men's ego.

What proves that gender roles and relations are not innate but socially constructed is when the narrator talks about her mother expressing that “but mother had been taught to be a good wife and be a good daughter-in-law to the mistress of what was now her new home” (Faqr, p. 93). This citation highlights that gender conducts are not pre-given natural attributes but people learn them through a system that is governed by authorities and repetition. It is through repetition and transmission of gender beliefs from one generation to another that they become engraved in one's mind.

Another belief that subdues women while it grants men's forgiveness is honor. The concept of honor is highly linked to women. As we have seen previously women are taught manners that preserve their honor while the honor of men is not mentioned at all. In both narratives, virginity is highly discussed. For instance, in Faqr's *the Cry of the Dove*, Salma utters an illuminating statement that summarizes how virginity and honor are perceived in the village. Salma claims that “*Miss in Hima was reserved for virgins, Mrs for married women or widows, but there was no title for those who had sex out of wedlock for they simply got shot*” (Faqr, p. 181). This segregation of titles implies the invisibility of the girls who lost their virginity. Sex out of wedlock and honor are the responsibility of both men and women but only the latter are endangered by honor-killing. This notion of honor reminds one of Elif Shafak's *Honor (2003)* that discusses the notions of virginity and honor in a Kurdish village asserting that “‘*honour*’ was more than a word. It was also a name. You could call your child ‘Honor’, as long as it was a boy. Men had honor. Old men, middle-aged men, even schoolboys so young that they still smelled of their mothers’ milk. Women did not have honor. Instead, they have shame...” (p. 16). Elif Shafak expounds the inequalities women are condemned to because of their gender. By connecting a female gender with shame, the androcentric society disposes women of the existential privilege of men. Moreover, there is the notion that men's and women's mode of operation in society are governed by biology. As long as the child's gender is female, she is marked as an outsider. Using Delphy Christine's conception of gender, patriarchal society manages to take certain features of male and female biology and turn them into a set of gendered



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characteristics that serve to empower men and disempower women, and which are then presented as natural attributes of males and females (Delphy and Leonard, 1992, p.135). The notions of honor and virginity are quite related to women rather than men. They are constructed as rescuing women from loss whereas they engrave them in it.

The same applies to El Hachmi's *the Last Patriarch* where the discourse of virginity is frequently discussed. There are so many events that show the patriarchal mindsets that require the woman to be a virgin while not caring about the purity of their male counterparts. For example, Mimoun has many sexual relationships out of wedlock and is not blamed for such behavior. Neither his parents nor the parents of the woman he marries question this problem while his wife is scrutinized to ensure that she is the "right"⁴ wife for him. In his first night, everybody was "outside waiting expectantly to see the outcome of his performance. [...] how could he show the world he was man enough and his wife decent enough to have kept her hymen intact? It must feel strange that sex that was usually so private and taboo in such domestic situations was now open to public scrutiny" (El Hachmi, p. 90). This passage explicitly shows the binary roles attributed to men and women. For a man to gain credibility, he must be named "a man" while for a woman to be accepted, the word "wife" is not enough, but it should be accompanied with positive adjectives such as "decent". This segregation between men and women, when it comes to honor, is identical to what Elif Shafak previously said. However, this passage is followed by an implicit critique of the patriarchal agenda. El Hachmi interferes in the narration process and comments on the binary opposition that is thought to exist between public and private spaces. This binary opposition aims at producing a hierarchical relationship between men and women which is always in favor of men. However, by saying "it must feel strange that sex that was usually so private and taboo in such domestic situations was now open to public scrutiny", El Hachmi reveals the schizophrenic binary segregation of public and private spaces. Choosing a taboo and an intimate context to be publicly revealed shows the bias patriarchal mindset is built on. This attempt to subdue women by revealing her honour or

⁴ "Right" is an adjective used in this narrative to signify the proper conduct of a woman. I do not believe that there is a right or wrong woman as perfection is divine. To use binaries of right/wrong woman is an attempt to subordinate women and produce hierarchies between them.



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dishonour is at the same time an ignored pathway toward liberation in which the public sphere and the private one show intimacy and not binaries. This typifies that the private and the public spheres are not separate but interrelated.

Eventually, space is conceptualized as hierarchical in the sense that there is no neutral difference between private and public space but rather an asymmetrical and unequal relationship. Feminists attempt to blur the boundaries that space is constructed of. In other terms, they try to subvert the traditional public/private dichotomy since this dichotomy is, in Nancy Duncan's words (1999), "*frequently employed to construct, control, discipline, confine, exclude and suppress gender and sexual difference preserving traditional patriarchal and heterosexist power structures*" (p. 128).

Nevertheless, male and female relations are context-based. That is to say, they are not equally dimorphic everywhere. Even though there is a quite similarity between how gender roles and relations are represented in both *the Cry of the Dove* and *the Last Patriarch*, there is an excessive difference in terms of the transformation they undergo in movement. Thus, moving from one space to another does not only affect identity but also gender roles. Since both identity and gender are social constructs, their negotiation and transformation are both implicitly and explicitly exhibited. As postcolonial feminist writers, both El Hachmi and Faqir attempt to foreground the inequalities women undergo and how they become either reshuffled or reinforced in diaspora. In this regard, we can refer to what Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose recommend while thinking of gendered space. They claim that we need to think of gendered space as "less as a geography imposed by patriarchal structures, and more as a social process of symbolic encoding and decoding" (Blunt and Gillain, 1994, p.3). that potentially redefines spatial and social orders. This simply means that the inequalities women face can undergo changes when space is changed. This aspect of change would be tackled in the next section.

Negotiating gender roles in Najat El Hachmi's the Last Patriarch and Fadia Faqir's the Cry of the Dove

Movements from one space to another can be either liberating or restrictive. If diasporic experiences resist homogenization so is their construction of gender. Gender is not monotonous, but it differs from one context to another. Gender is not the determinate factor of human roles



because it is relational in the sense that it is dictated by race, nationality, class as well as movement. In connection to this Friedman (1998) says: “*the self is not singular, it is multiple. The location it occupies contains many positions within it, each of which may well depend on its interaction with the others for its particular inflection . . . The constituents of identity emerge from a succession of categories*” (p. 21).⁵ While talking about situating the self in its relation to other constituents, she means that interaction is quite important for positioning identities. Thus, identities cannot be analyzed without taking into consideration the discourse of positionality. Analyzing gender relations, in this paper, is meant to spot its interaction with other constituents such as identity, class and space (home and diaspora space) as we shall see later.

In the same vein, Ella Shohat (2002) focuses on the notion of interaction and relationality while discussing feminism. She calls for heterogeneity while analyzing certain groups that are seen as identical and takes into consideration the different interaction patterns everyone is engaged in. She points out the relations that take a transnational framework and insists on analyzing them “as part of a permeable interwoven relationality” (p. 68).

Therefore, the analysis developed in this paper takes into consideration the relation of gender relations to place, time and cross-cultural contact to avoid a reductionist framework. Within the same line of research, going beyond homogenizing gender experiences should be taken into account because sometimes movement is not always liberating as Clifford (1994) points out when he questions the reinforcement and loosening of gender subordination in diaspora. He says that:

On the one hand, maintaining connections with homelands, with kinship networks, and with religious and cultural traditions may renew patriarchal structures. On the other, new roles and demands, new

⁵ Friedman argues that we need to move beyond gender approach while discussing gender relations because gender in itself is situated in relationality. To explain this in details, she reassesses human relationship by stating that “the characters who move through narrative space and time occupy multiple and shifting positions in relation to each other and to different systems of power relations”(p,28). She encourages an interactional analysis of identity and gender because these two concepts are ambivalent and sometimes, they locate the subjects in a shifting process of powerlessness and power which highly necessitates examining them “relationally and situationally”.



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political spaces, are opened by diaspora interactions . . . they [women] may find their new diaspora predicaments conducive to a positive renegotiation of gender relations. (p. 227)

Undoubtedly, the present paper does not only stress how women's subordination is reshuffled or reinforced in diaspora, but it also takes into consideration their male counterpart as we cannot separate women from men. Hence, they exist in a social constituent relation that necessitates accounting for both of them while analyzing diasporic representation of gender.

Transgressing gender attributes and reshuffling public /private space dichotomy are the conditions that Salma has realized in Exeter. Space proves to be a higher factor that reshapes people's practices and beliefs. Above all, both time and place contribute to the transformation of identities and gender and Salma is not an exception of this rule. Taking into account the displacement Salma has undergone throughout her "diasporic journeys," the novel clearly sheds light on the transformation she has gone through as she navigates between different locations (Brah, 2003, p. 626). If we pay heed to the social space, she used to live in in Hima, apparently, we will find that she has travelled from a totally private and excluded space to a public and a heterogeneous space. Diaspora space has allowed her to move from the private to the public space which is clearly manifested in the novel through many aspects.

As Salma has just arrived in Exeter, she goes with Parvin to look for a job to improve their livings. Facing the miserable conditions of poverty in the host country, the two of them start looking for whatever jobs that may help them survive. First, Salma has worked as a tailor with an English man named Max. What is normative in Hima is that women are reduced to housewives, but in Exeter Salma is able to go beyond the private space and becomes an independent woman. Similarly, Parvin who is a Muslim Indian and who has fled from an arranged marriage her father proposed, decides to be an independent woman. After failing in ten interviews, she does not lose hope in looking for a job that helps her. Moreover, Parvin also gets married to a Christian man though this goes against the norms in India. Rebelling against social standards is also an act of thinking beyond the social, cultural and religious conducts. Similarly, when Parvin is granted a job, she accompanies Salma to celebrate the event in the cafe. As a discursive space, cafés are reserved only for men in Hima and India in the novel.



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Through normalizing their frequent visits to the cafés, both Salma and Parvin disrupt their cultural norms.

Another incident that shows the blurring of the public and the private space is when Salma gets rid of her veil which her father imposed on her. When removing the veil, Salma states: “it felt as if my head was covered with raw sores and I had taken off the bandages” (Faqr, p.108). Comparing the veil to the “raw sores” is significant; it stands for the pain Salma suffers from when her body is monitored by the male patriarch of her family. In Exeter, Salma is eager to remove it without being afraid of being killed because she regains her agency that she was once deprived of in her homeland.

Going beyond normative dichotomies is also shown when Salma frequently goes to bars to have fun. In Hima, bars are public spaces that are designed only for men. This dichotomization in Nancy Duncan’s words (1999) is “*frequently employed to construct, control, discipline, confine, exclude and suppress gender and sexual difference preserving traditional patriarchal and heterosexist power structures*” (p. 128). However, through regaining power over herself, Salma does not only transgress private spaces, but she also shows a great willingness to transgress traditional manners. When she was working as a waiter in a bar, she accepts without objection to change her traditional clothes to accommodate the needs of the new job’s requirement. The new space, in which she is living, allows her to rebel against what once was considered a fixed, immutable and constant attributes. In diaspora, Salma has proved that space in Nancy Duncan’s words: “is thus subject to various territorializing and deterritorializing processes” whereby Salma decenters what once was considered a male based space (p. 129).

In the same vein, Salma also trespasses the space of university that is considered in her country as a male-space. Deciding to study English literature is not a choice that should be neglected. Salma herself admits that studying English will help her internalize western manners. The following dialogue between Salma and Parvin explains this.

She looked me in the eye and said: ‘why literature?’

‘Because I need to know English. The English language.’

‘You can study language without reading literature’



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‘No stories good. Teach you language and how to act like English Miss’

(Faqir, p. 153).

It goes without saying that reading literature does not only help in learning languages, but it also teaches the culture of the language that is adopted in writings. Choosing to read literature instead of relying on English grammar or pronunciation is an implicit endeavor for Salma to learn English culture. Embracing open-mindedness toward English culture should not be simplistically read as being a tolerance developed toward other cultures. Rather, the open-mindedness Salma reveals must be linked to the pressures that she encountered in Hima. It is the pressures she faced that contribute to creating a need for knowledge to empower her agency. Back in Hima, she was denied education due to her low social class. Put it differently, Salma's act of reading and studying is not done for fun, but it is a political act that is implemented so as to be able to get rid of the implanted manners the androcentric authority tends to impose on women, especially lower-class women. This shows that the oppression Salma faces is not particularly linked to her gender, but it is also related to the issue of class. Better said, women's oppression or liberation “could not be understood solely in terms of gender” because they face multiple jeopardies or what Friedman calls (1998), “multiple oppressions” that can be linked to problems of class, religion, race and nationality (p.70). The new atmosphere Salma resides in enables her to psychologically and financially empower herself since she works and can afford money for her studies. Her liberation does not only manifest itself in transgressing her gender but also in overcoming racial and class problems that diasporic people most often face in movement.

In a continuous quest for achieving her independence in spite of the various hardships she encounters, Salma does not only consume books, but she also develops an active personality that takes advantage from education to write on Shakespeare's sister. Apparently, this is done deliberately to re-historicize women's history that is always muffled by men. Moreover, she does not only talk about Shakespeare's sister, but she also invokes her own story in the conclusion. Writing oneself is a redefinition of one's agency which used to be considered a male-business. However, while talking about women who are ignored in history, Salma says: “*he [Shakespeare] must have had friends and women to help him. Nobody talks about the women [...] the conclusion was about my own experience as an alien in their land. They and I*



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think I don't live here, but I do, just like all the women who were ignored in these tales" (Faqir, p. 187). Writing is an act of subscribing oneself in a space that is deemed as male property in so far as through writing, women shift from the margin to the center by shedding light on their lives that have been totally ignored by history. Salma successfully publicizes what is meant to be privatized.

Her voice is recaptured when encountering schizophrenic incidents that use to hunt her in Hima but used to utter no word to resist them. The distance she has been granted allows her to re-analyze a lot of things that she used to take for granted such as drinking alcohol by her father yet praying at the same time and calling for the chastity of the women of his house. In Exeter, when Salma is attacked by Sadiq who comments on her English style of life, she does not keep silent. The conversation stated below shows how Salma answers back patriarchal mindset which restricts the behaviors of women while forgiving that of their male counterpart.

He appointed his finger at me, jerked his chin sideways and said,
'Salma, Salma, you are becoming a memsahib. Soon you will be
English also.'

'Stop being so sarcastic,' I said, holding my shopping bags tight.

'Well, you have even forgotten how to pray to Allah,' he said.

'What about you? Praying all the time and selling alcohol to infidels!'

(Faqir, 104).

Notably, this conversation exemplifies a counter-discourse to the discourses that only restrict women's behaviors. Instead of keeping still, Salma comments on the double standards that Sadiq's behaviors portray. Selecting religious aspects such as decent clothes while neglecting the forbidden alcohol and prayers he must practice is very significant and serves what suits patriarchal mindsets. In this passage, critiques are shared by both Salma and Sadiq. It is not only directed to Salma's attitudes but also to Sadiq's behaviors.

Resisting male dominance and thoughts is fragmented throughout the novel as it oscillates between Hima and Exeter. Salma's experience navigates between empowerment and disempowerment. In *The Cry of the Dove*, Falah and Nagel (2005) underscores, "[Faqir claims



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that] Muslim Women's experiences...are, like all woman's experiences, ambiguous and highly variable, marked by subordination and opportunity, mobility and immobility, security and insecurity" (p. 4). What Caroline Nagel forgets to mention are the conditions that govern Muslim women's experiences abroad in general and Salma's experiences in particular. Salma's oscillation between opposite modes of being "subordination and opportunity, security and insecurity" is a result of the movements that shatter the fixity of experiences as well. Back in Hima, Salma has never shown resistance or empowerment. She was reduced to a fixed state of being because she was not in motion which clarifies that movement reshuffles positions.

After being totally submissive to male authority in Exeter, Salma gains authority over her body and stops being relegated to male power. When a man asked her to go out with him, she internally speaks "but Salma and Sally refused to budge, to run after him, to seek refuge" (Faqir, p. 213). This utterance is significant as it shows the double personality of Salma that resists men's orders. Being English or Arab, Salma reaches reconciliation between her two selves which both gain voice, authority and independence. Faqir's choice of reconciliation between English and Arab identity stems from an implied awareness of how "Arab woman" is perceived particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 which is the context in which the novel is published. By rewriting Arab female identity, Faqir adheres to reconciliation between Arab and English identity to answer back orientalist stereotypes and civilizational discourses of power that from time to time negate Arab identity and call for assimilation.

By the end of *the Cry of the Dove*, Salma gets married to an English man as her friend Parvin does it. Being caught in an in-between space is also an act of blurring the prescribed spaces. All in all, throughout the novel, Salma has shown many transgressions of rules expected from a traditional female conduct. Through the hybridity that characterizes her identity, Salma is able to oscillate between her Arab and English identity by getting rid of some of her convictions that are totally imposed on her by the androcentric society in which she used to live. The movement from the private to the public space contributes to several critiques of the homeland that was once glorified. In whatever way, do Mimoun's daughter and wife, in *the Last Patriarch*, share the same empowerment Salma experiences in *the Cry of the Dove*?



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Conversely, Mimoun's wife's subordination is perpetuated in Spain and becomes more reinforced. Alienation from her country does not provide her with the liberation Salma establishes. By contrast, patriarchal attitudes prove to be travelling as movement is not only about the displacement of people but also the replacement of beliefs, attitudes and practices. The internalization of inferiority and patriarchy is not overcome when she migrates. Instead of being empowered and empowering her daughter, the mother takes the role of a patriarch and keeps reminding her daughter of the "right" conduct she has to abide by. The daughter says: *“mother said you go out too much and launched into one of her lectures, at your age I was already...At her age, I wouldn't have had a clue what to do because she only cleaned and cleaned and didn't know how to go to the doctor without father, how to go shopping without father or how to live without father”* (El Hachmi, p. 168). This passage shows the transmission of orders that pass on from one generation to another. In the very beginning, the mother receives instructions from her parents on how to behave like a decent woman. Later on, she gives teachings to her daughter to monitor her behaviors. This shows that the mother has not benefited from movement since the same mentality her parents were trying to maintain is also transmitted to future generations.

Although Mimoun's wife is submitted to the rules her Moroccan society reinforces on her, she is represented as a caring and responsible wife, unlike her husband who is represented as careless. If we take the notion of femininity and masculinity, we can state that Mimoun's masculinity is situated in an in-between space. At times, he is open to accept his daughter's education while at other times he is so restrictive. This shows the threat that diasporic experience proclaims to his masculinity. The more this threat increases, the more Mimoun becomes aggressive toward his daughter and wife. He used to take his daughter with him to any space but once she had her menstruation, he enclosed her. The daughter represents this incident with hatred accompanied by her self-awareness of the yet to come restriction that her society imposes on her. She articulates these constraints by an insightful comment in which she declares that: *“blood had spoiled everything. The blood that makes you a woman puts everyone on your back, you must do this, not that, you can't jump too high, ride on horseback or sit with your legs too far apart, who knows what might happen”* (El Hachmi, p. 244).



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The daughter is represented as a self-conscious agent in El Hachmi's narrative. Unlike her mother, the daughter is aware of the constraints that are put on women and their purposes. Her father's behaviors are transformed from a caring father to a violent one because his masculinity is threatened especially after she has decided to pursue education. However, the daughter is transgressive in her attitude. Her revolutionary acts precede that of Salma in *the Cry of the Dove*. The daughter, in *the Last Patriarch*, shows indifference toward the social order that segregates men and women. To illustrate, whenever her mother instructs her to abandon reading and do what women are supposed to do, the girl rebels and sticks more to her books and dictionary. As Foucault puts it whenever there is power, there is resistance (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95-96). What Foucault means by power entails also the symbolic as well as the physical power that is exercised over women in both contexts. Women experience physical as well as psychological violence due to men's behaviors. However, the power that is exercised on them can be looked at from a positive perspective because without it their resistance to cultural norms would never see light. For example, an event that reveals the daughter's shattering of gender roles is when she informs her lover about the rules they should abide by once they get married. As far as rules are concerned, she says: "*I'm studying and would like to go to university. That's all right. And I won't be a wife who stays at home cleaning and cooking, I want to work, I want to go out, we'll have to share the housework*". (El Hachmi, p. 273). Evidently, the daughter represents the opposite personality of that of her mother. Coming from the same place of origin, they share different views with regards to social orders. Thus, the daughter does not reverse the social order that manipulates men and women relations but she goes beyond the binary opposition that segregates public and private space. By fusing these two spaces, the daughter attempts to provide a platform that does not locate women in opposition to men but rather she creates a space in which these two figures coexist without denigrating one another.

Similarly, Aunt Soumisha's and her husband Driss' relation is quite different. Gender-bias, patriarchal behaviors and conflict do not take place between them. The daughter represents them by saying "Driss wasn't Mimoun" and "Soumisha was different" (El Hachmi, p. 173) That is to say, El Hachmi is not homogenizing gender relations, but she is providing heterogeneous experiences to elucidate that patriarchy is not everywhere. This also helps me, as a researcher; go beyond the reductionist view of reading gender relations and take into consideration the



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different social and gender interactions that exist between men and women. To reiterate, choosing Soumisha's and Driss' relation to pinpoint the heterogeneity that characterizes the gender relations of people coming from the same setting as that of Morocco is intentionally done by the author to demonstrate the heterogeneous experiences of diasporic people.

In other words, the author revisits the notion of space and pulls it out of essentialism and homogeneity while calling for the plurality of experiences that exist within the same space. This plurality of experiences must not be neglected by readers in order not to assume generalization based on major voices' experiences. For instance, Zerriouh (2016) argues that “throughout the entire book [El Hachmi talks] about the traumas of conservative life in the homeland as opposed to the more liberal life in Spain” (p. 268) As has been mentioned before, gender relations are not entirely liberal in Spain. A suggestive example is Mimoun's wife who faced the same conservative, restricting and prisoning life as the one she underwent in the homeland. This elucidates how gender roles that govern Mimoun and his wife's relationship have been reinforced in diasporic space, which means that Spain is not absolutely liberating for women.

It must be also noted that the two authors make use of intertextuality as postmodern literary style for the sake of empowering their female characters. Starting from Faqir's *the Cry of the Dove*, the author frequently refers to other works written by different writers and theorists. Among those works, we can refer to Mary Eagleton's *Feminist Literary Theory* which is mentioned when Salma borrowed it from a library. When she took the book, she said “Thank you very, very much, “I said to the smiling librarian, hugged my first borrowed books and rushed back to work” (Faqir, 45). The fact of choosing a book that deals with feminism instead of another book is significant in that the first book chosen by Salma during her first visit to Exeter is the mentioned one. Mary Eagleton's *Feminist Literary Theory* draws attention to the female literary writings that have not been part of the traditional “canon” of literary works, and it also shows how patriarchal assumptions impact female characters in works produced by both men and women. Her work aims at challenging and reducing women's oppression. The act of introducing the book in this novel is meaningful in that it means that Faqir implicitly aims at challenging the oppression exercised on women in Jordan by using Salma's story in an English context. The act of writing in English about the sufferings of Arab women signifies the writer's



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attempt to let the voices of the helpless ones reach the world. Another intertextual feature in *the Cry of the Dove* is when Salma starts reading one of Liz's diaries in which a story from *One Thousand and One Night* is written. In this event, Salma recounts:

I climbed the wooden ladder and picked out one of my grandfather's forbidden books, which were normally kept on the top shelf. I put the book on the desk and it split open to this page: `One day, while Shahriyar was out hunting, Shahzaman stayed in the palace feeling very depressed about his dead wife. He looked out at the garden and saw his brother's wife enter the garden with twenty slave girls, ten white and ten black. They undressed and turned out to be ten men and ten women, who proceeded to have sex together, while another slave, Masud, jumped down from a tree when the Queen called out, "Come, Master. " He pushed her against the tree, smothered her with embraces and kisses, then mounted her. The Negroes and the slave girls followed suit, reveling together till the approach of night. Then they all got dressed as slave girls, except for Mas'ud who jumped back over the wall and was gone (Faqir, p.62).

Adapting the story that was translated by N.J. Dawood to the stream of narration serves Faqir's objective which consists in giving voice to her female character, Salma. In *One Thousand and One Nights*, the author grants women especially Shahrazad an equitable position in that she is the only woman whose voice is heard and respected in that she monitors her destiny and protects her life and other women from death. The act of using this story in a fragmented narrative in which Salma suffers from various forms of displacement means that the author uses Salma as a dominant voice so as to voice other women's agonies. It is through her voice that Shahrazad was still alive in *One Thousand and One Nights*. Similarly, it is through ventilating her fragmented memories that Salma divulges the stories of the women who were sharing prison with her.

More significantly, in *the Last Patriarch*, we discover that the narrative refers instantly to other works produced by Moroccan migrants, namely Spanish, Libyan and Irish writers. While talking about her inability to be integrated into her family, Mimoun's daughter says that "you



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feeling vaguely certain that that wasn't your destiny though you didn't know what it ought to be and were like the character who belonged nowhere in Zeida de Nulle Part” (p. 255). The novel El Hachmi refers to is a Moroccan migrant one in which the exiled writer Laila Houari talks about an Arab exiled woman whose coming home does not end her sense of exile. Mimoun's daughter in *the Last Patriarch* and Zeida in *Zeida de Nulle Part* share the experience of exile. While the former suffers from a psychological exile in that she cannot feel at home while being with her family, the latter seems to undergo two types of exile: a physical exile in France and a psychological one in Morocco. Here, El Hachmi is using intertextuality for the sake of comparison. Another reference to other books is when El Hachmi introduces *Curial and Guelfa* which is a chivalrous novel. This story is about a well-educated woman named Guelfa who makes efforts to help her husband Curial become a well-known man during medieval ages. Once Curial becomes an important man, driven by jealousy, Guelfa denies him financial support. The Catalan novel is referred to when Mimoun's wife was talking about love to Soumisha. The narrator mentions “and she explained that business of the love potion in the tradition of *Curial and Guelfa*” which indicates that Guelfa's type of love is a poisonous one that seeks to possess and at the same time undermines her lover. (El Hachmi, p.194) It is this type of love that Mimoun offers his wife even if she is depicted as always suffering from his possessive love which brings but chaos to her life. Thus, El Hachmi consciously chooses to use intertextuality to focus on the connectivity of texts to other texts. She essentially resorts to intertextuality to compare the characters in *The Last Patriarch* to other characters in other novels. Another event in which El Hachmi compares Mimoun's daughter to an actress in *The Color Purple* is when her father sees her kissing a friend and she feels scared of him. In this regard, the narrator maintains that “He just said that's the last time you see her, and I felt like Whoopi Goldberg in *The Color Purple*.” (El Hachmi, p.249) Whoopi Goldberg is the actress who played the role of Celie in the movie. Celie is a girl who suffered from her father's abuse and rape during her infancy. However, when a group of people offered her help, she became an independent, powerful and audacious woman. Hence, El Hachmi is comparing Mimoun's daughter to Celie in terms of the audacity she performs in front of her father who becomes unable to exercise physical abuse on her. It is like she is claiming that Mimoun's power over



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his daughter is no longer possible because she becomes aware of her independence and she will soon bring his patriarchy to an end.

Conclusion

All in all, this paper has attempted to discuss how the representation of gender roles and relations is narratively and demographically different in the novels under scrutiny. As social constructs, they undergo change whenever the subjects' spaces change. Movements can alter personalities and transform what is thought to be fixed and immobile. However, movement is not always a contribution to the liberation of characters but it sometimes proves to be a restrictive process, especially when patriarchal practices move.

The view that the writers hold with regards to gender representation emanates from both their refusal to produce hierarchical comparison between home and diaspora spaces and from focusing on heterogeneous characters instead of relying on only one major voice. Thus, it is the transnational perspective that defies essentializing home and identity, replicating dualities and providing one-sided representation of home and diaspora spaces. It is oscillating between such spaces that grants them with the ability to present gender at home and in diaspora. Additionally, this transnational navigation between home and diaspora spaces explains the exilic vision that they are endowed with. Having an exilic vision is about seeing home and diaspora spaces from an outsider/ insider view point without belonging to one of them.

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