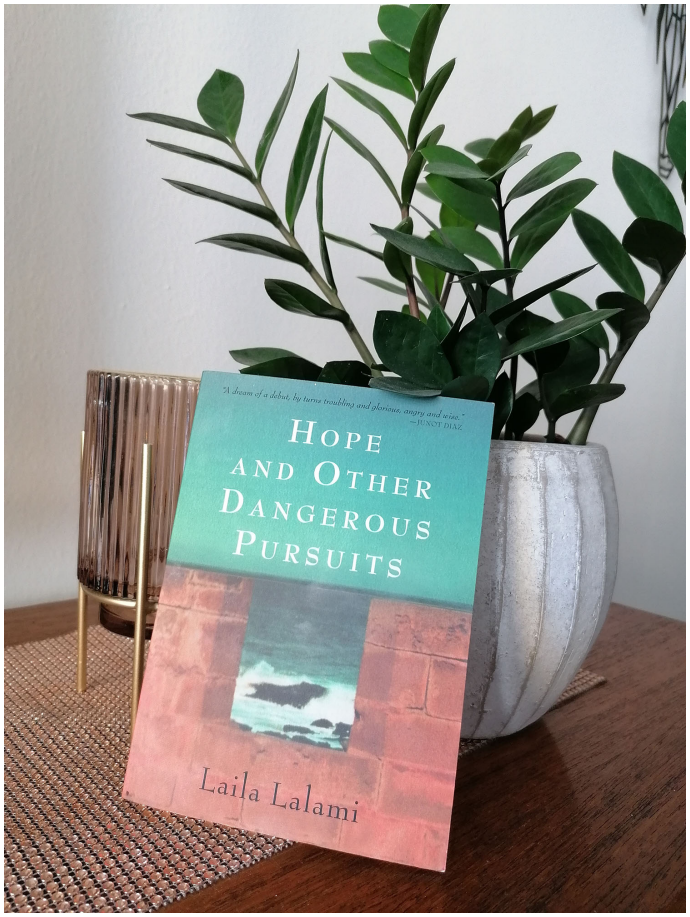
REVIEW

"Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits" by Laila Lalami — A Review

by Christina Egger



"Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits" by Laila Lalami

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Hope and other dangerous pursuits by Laila Lalami, is a collection of short stories that explore the different paths of a group of Moroccan immigrants who cross the strait of Gibraltar between Africa and Europe on a lifeboat. It was first published in 2005 and displays the struggles, conflicts, and sufferings of individuals hoping for a better life.

ESL writer Laila Lalami was born and initially educated in Rabat, Morocco. Growing up in a working-class household full of books, she spoke Moroccan Arabic at home and learned Standard Arabic and French in elementary school. At the age of nine she began writing stories, first in French, then in English, which resulted in a Licence ès Lettres in English from Université Mohammed-V. She then moved to Great Britain and the United States for her higher education, where she graduated with a Master of Arts and a Ph.D. in Linguistics. Currently, she is a full-time professor of creative writing at the University of California at Riverside.



Author Laila Lalami © Jesse Dittmar

While working in L.A., Lalami stumbled across articles about illegal immigrants searching for a better life in Europe. As accidents of failed attempts seemed to multiply, she began investigating the situation in Morocco and the Mediterranean. Even though the stories she explored were so different from her own, comparing them to her personal story of movement she was able to find something familiar in each one of them. Looking around her former environment in Morocco, she collected similar incidents of misfortune in her own neighborhood that drove friends and loved ones to view migration as their magical solution.

Based on her research she created four characters, whose stories she would tell: Murad, an unemployed young man, who struggles to provide for his family and feels emasculated by his sister's ability to fill his place; Faten, a profoundly religious young woman on the run from legal consequences; Halima, a mother and battered wife; and Aziz, a mechanic who leaves his wife for a chance of better employment.

Lalami structured her short story collection in three main parts: first, with the moment on the lifeboat where all characters meet, second, the prevailing incidents that led to each immigration story, and third, the outcome and aftermath of the characters' attempt to cross the strait of Gibraltar. Following each storyline, the reader is confronted with a myriad of reasons for immigration. Meanwhile, each character relies on a distinctive motivation, that derives from the collective feeling of hope for a better life, no matter how little the chance of making it might actually be.

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"Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits" Paperback

The collection of short stories touches upon the circumstances that the characters find themselves in right before and after they attempt to cross. Their surroundings are mostly characterized by a low socio-economic status, poor or non-existent working conditions, and serious personal reasons. Even though immigration is almost unaffordable for all of them and highly dangerous, Europe bears the sentiment of hope and a fresh start. In the attempt to tell their stories, Lalami subtly criticizes her country of origin for unconsciously driving their own inhabitants to turn to such hazardous solution for their desperate situations. She also highlights the dangers and consequences immigrants have to face in these situations when crossing the Mediterranean.

Reading *Hope and other dangerous pursuits* and having the opportunity to follow the paths of four protagonists gives a glimpse into the extraordinary circumstances that bring them together on one lifeboat. This gripping work allows the reader to wonder about the reasons of the four adults for leaving their country behind and risking their lives, and whether the rewards of immigration are worth the danger. Lalami creates a space for the exploration of the emotional complexities the characters have to endure in their culture, complexities that force them to consider possible death for a minimal chance of escape.

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