



Hope & Other Dangerous Pursuits

Laila Lalami

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“A dream of a debut, by turns troubling and glorious, angry and wise.” —Junot Diaz

Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits evokes the grit and enduring grace that is modern Morocco. As four Moroccans illegally cross the Strait of Gibraltar in an inflatable boat headed for Spain, author Laila Lalami asks, What has driven them to risk their lives? And will the rewards prove to be worth the danger? There's Murad, a gentle, unemployed man who's been reduced to hustling tourists around Tangier; Halima, who's fleeing her drunken husband and the slums of Casablanca; Aziz, who must leave behind his devoted wife in hope of securing work in Spain; and Faten, a student and religious fanatic whose faith is at odds with an influential man determined to destroy her future. Sensitively written with beauty and boldness, this is a gripping book about what propels people to risk their lives in search of a better future.

Hope & Other Dangerous Pursuits Details

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Author : Laila Lalami

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From Reader Review *Hope & Other Dangerous Pursuits* for online ebook

Lucinda says

This is a novel that is pure storytelling - no real authorial artistic flair is added. Also, while the characters are real enough, their psychologies are not really presented with much development. Still, I recommend this short novel because its content is fascinating.

Lalami clearly wants to give her English speaking audience (I am sure this book would be quite different if it were written for a Moroccan or Maghrebian readership) some insight into what brings a person to risk the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean (so, so many that don't survive this journey - and these are the ones that we know of) to live a life in the margins of European society. Because of the diversity of her roster of characters (we first meet them in their rubber dinghy motorboat making their ill-fated 14 trek across the strait of gibraltar) we also gain some insight into the various segments of Moroccan society. Unemployment, corruption, and inequality are front and center in everyone's experience. As are some important character flaws and some heavy doses of bad luck. While not an entirely astonishing in what it describes, I always appreciate a writer's efforts to give people humanity - in this case the 'illegal migrant' from the Maghreb - who have been transformed by the media into symbolic elements of political discourse that often trigger unthinking responses.

Anita Pomerantz says

I'd love to give this one five stars as I think it is truly unique and well written. But it just doesn't give quite enough sense of resolution for me to be totally satisfied. A great book detailing the plight of several Moroccans and following their attempt to migrate to escape the lack of jobs and hopelessness of Morocco. Each chapter is the perspective of one of the characters - - either before or after they've tried to emigrate. The prose is spare and easy to read. A little treasure of a book.

GoldGato says

I have a dried cuttlefish habit. That is, I can open a bag and consume it within minutes. Love my tentacles.

What does that admission have to do with this book? I ate this book up the way I eat my squid. The words were inhaled and then it was over. Over! Too soon.

This is a slim volume but the stories have depth. On a zodiac boat speeding its way across the Strait of Gibraltar, we meet hopeful Moroccans who hope to land on the shores of Spain where they believe their fortune will be made. Their greedy captain has other plans, however, and by the time each passenger's fate is revealed, it's time for the backstories to unfold.

I loved the simple storytelling of the migrant experience. Not every migrant is poor, not every migrant is living a difficult life. Sometimes, it's just the idea of *hope* that pulls one away from home. Hope for a better life, hope for more freedom, hope for an iPhone. The high unyielding fanatical religiousness of one

character, for instance, gets a complete somersault and shows how easily money can overcome ideals.

Wasn't it Hope that was left in Pandora's box? Lovely book.

Book Season = Spring (Mediterranean spoils)

Amy says

This book opened my eyes to immigration in Europe. It seemed very similar to Mexican and especially Cuban immigration to the US. For some strange reason, it is comforting to know that other countries face some of the same issues and challenges as the US. I liked the the author's technique of introducing us to the characters in the midst of the trip, and then backtracking to tell us their history, and how they got to that point. This book read super fast, but I was left wanting to know more about each of the characters.

Carole says

This is the book that Rochester, NY reads for 2008. The subject is informative as it regards the lives of men and women struggling to survive in modern Morocco. The format of short stories describing one critical moment in the lives of four characters, then the past, and later the present is unique. The writing is stark and simple in a good way. I liked the book - I do not love it.

HomeInMyShoes says

The more I read from Northern Africa and in to some extent the Middle East the more complex the narrative is. This along with books like The Drum Tower or The Cry of the Dove give me a glimpse at how varied the stories are. How varied the choices the characters make are; how varied the reasons for those choices are. I've barely scratched the surface in these regions and I just want to read more.

Moushine Zahr says

This is the first novel I read from Moroccan author Laila Lalami, living in USA and writing in English, and this book was also her first novel. This novel stands out from other novels written by other Moroccan writers from both a different writing style and the originality of the topic.

Behind the sad statistics of casualties among the "boat people", whether those trying to reach to Miami from Cuba, or to Spain from Morocco, and/or to Italy from Syria/turkey, there are real people with real faces and real lives left behind. In this book, the author described clearly and concisely in the first chapter such a trip by a group of people leaving Tangiers to Tarifa on a Zodiac boat, fleeing a known past to reach an uncertain future. In the following chapters, the author selected 4 of those people, 2 men and 2 women, to describe their respective lives in 3 different cities before the trip. She showed well, the general uncertainty of their future,

the desperate state of their current lives, their lack of choices and their only remaining chance for hope of a future is to immigrate illegally the country. After the illegal immigration attempt, 2 of those characters returned home to a different life than before slightly better than before and 2 continued to Spain, immigrated illegally for a future different from their dreams, but still better than what they had.

In this clear, short, and easy to read book, the author depicted through the 4 different characters the various social and economic problems Moroccans face on a daily basis still of actuality today and offered readers with a general and detailed realistic pictures of how Moroccans live today.

Candice says

Although this book was written 10 years ago, it remains timely in that it illustrates the problems that are still being faced by people trying to cross the Mediterranean in sub-standard boats in order to leave their home countries in Africa and get to what they hope is a better life in Europe. The immigrants in this particular book are fleeing Morocco for Spain. Cleverly structured, the book takes us on that journey in part 1 and we meet some of the people making that dangerous crossing. Part 2 gives us the backstory of four of the people and we learn why they have taken this desperate measure; part 3 meets up with those same people a few years after the crossing. The characters are varied - an abused wife, an educated man who cannot find employment commensurate with his skills, a husband who leaves his wife behind, and a young religious woman whose only crime was to discuss her religious beliefs with the daughter of a powerful man. A short work, but nicely done and beautifully written.

Amina says

Somehow, this book touched me.. Maybe because of the similarities between the Moroccan and Algerian societies.. Same struggles, same pains, same insecurities..

In this book, the author tells about everyday struggles of ordinary people, Nora, a spoiled girl with an influent father, driven to islamic extremism by her friend Faten who left Morocco to Spain as a "Harraga" because she took the freedom to criticize the royal system and ended up as a prostitute.. Murad, a university graduate who studied english and its literature to be unemployed once his diploma in his pocket.. Halima, a strong woman, married to a drunk bastard, mother of three, beaten almost everyday for hiding the money she needs for her children.. Aziz, another unemployed man, married to Zohra who was obliged to find a job in a soda factory, Zohra who has stood by his side in every situation he faced, but he decided to return to Spain and leave her and his mother behind..

These stories, about people living a daily misery, dreaming of better new world behind the seas, taking huge loans and huge risks, defying the mediterranean, just to get out of their smothering countries, leaving loved ones, memories and lives behind..

These are the sad events some of us are facing every single day, trying to deal with in their own way..

Erin Glover says

Lalami takes us aboard a crammed inflatable boat as several immigrants from Tangiers try to cross the Gibraltar straight into Spain. But the person they paid to take them to shore, stops short of the shore and drops them off, when some of the passengers cannot swim. Some drown.

The novel is the interwoven stories of four of the survivors, some who made it to Spain and some who did not. It reads very much like a fable and reminds me of the Alchemist. Each character undergoes a transformation, including the ones who never make it to Spain. While it is clear each of them needed to take the journey, it is not clear that each of them needed to leave Tangiers. It is a beautiful book by a talented writer.

Michael-Ann Cerniglia says

I loved the way in which this story was told. The recurring event--immigration to Spain from Morocco-- is represented by one group of immigrants. Four of them then frame the event with the before and after, which inevitably shake preconceptions and judgments made at the outset by the narrator (and, ostensibly, the reader). The story tells a lot about the complexity of modern Moroccan society and also raises many of the difficult questions in the immigration debate. Highly recommended.

Jennifer Joukhadar says

Incredible book with a very unique structure that serves to tell the stories of its multiple protagonists in all their messy, striving humanity. Brutal, gorgeous, heartrending. One of my all-time favorites. A fairly quick read & a must read, too.

Suzy says

For a debut, this book was pretty good. I would probably pick up something by Lalami again. The writing seemed a little stiff, but not so bad as to get in the way, and in some places it was good.

I liked the way the story was told: It begins with a clandestine trip from Morocco to Spain, and we get to know a bit about each of the characters on the boat. From there it goes to the back story of each of the characters on the boat, one by one, each very different, and each having a different reason for being in the boat. Then the book shifts and tells the story of what happened to each of them after the boat trip. Though I have gotten to know many people--mostly in their 20's--from Morocco through my job, I never had any idea that life there was as depicted in this book. The class and gender divisions and the low prospects for employment were disheartening.

Suzanne says

Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits by Laila Lalami

Posted on January 29, 2012 by Suzanne

“FOURTEEN KILOMETERS. Murad has pondered that number hundreds of times in the last year, trying to decide whether the risk was worth it. Some days he told himself that the distance was nothing, a brief inconvenience, that the crossing would take as little as thirty minutes if the weather was good.”

For many Muslims living in Morocco, the idea of escape to the West is the promise of a better life: a job, the

ability to feed one's family, security. But the crossing of 14 Kilometers across the Strait of Gibraltar in a small boat or inflatable raft is dangerous. *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* is a deftly written novel about the lives of four Moroccan immigrants and what drove them to seek a better life in Spain.

From the first pages, the author had me hooked. This is a can't-put-down book that left you cheering for the characters, and weeping for them when things didn't quite turn out as they'd hoped. For anyone who has the privilege of living in a prosperous country, this book should make you grateful and compassionate towards those who desire to live the life you are blessed with.

Jes says

I love the way the stories interweave in this book. It's fantastic read, especially if you like seeing things from a different point of view. You have to be able to keep up with stories that start up, leave off, and start up again. Being an avid Stephen King reader, I can do this. Simple, yet powerful and amazing.

Joe says

Lalani's first novel reads like a free flowing expose of the lives of four desperate people who attempt to leave their plight in the cities of Morocco to illegally cross the Straits of Gibraltar to Spain for a better way of living. In truth they simply trade one way of living for another, but Lalani takes us through the process with beautifully written prose and creative flashbacks and flash forwards that impact our lives with those of her main characters. The common thread of human need for a better life is seen amidst the obvious Moroccan/Spanish cultural differences and it's eye opening. While it ends somewhat abruptly, it's a satisfying quick read -- well worth the effort.

Aura says

I was hooked with the first chapter. A group of people set off in a small boat to cross the strait of Gibraltar away from Morocco towards Europe and towards hope. Some made it some did not. What happened to get them to this point where they are willing to risk it all and what happened afterwards? Was it worth it? Wonderful short novel that truly explores the idea of hope and the impetus to change your circumstance.

Sandy says

Heartbreaking and heart-lifting stories about humans who take huge risks to emigrate from Morocco to Spain across the Strait of Gibraltar - fourteen kilometers to what they hope will be a better life. They do this to save themselves economically, spiritually and physically. They risk death or capture or exploitation in desperate attempt to escape harm they and their families have suffered. Some of them find their lives turned completely upside down and some of them find themselves. If you want to gain a truer understanding of why people cross borders, this book will give it to you.

Jamila says

In substance there is a lot to work with. The multiplicity of narratives makes this a very rich story, in characters and in themes. But the writing is very simplistic. The lack of style makes it difficult to convey the kind of depth this novel really does have.

Milan/zzz says

First I'm very pleasantly surprised with the structure of the novel ("novel" in some lovely weird way). Namely it starts from the middle of the story, somewhere in the middle of the road between survival and life (or should I say 'hope'?), in the middle of the night, between two continents: Africa and Europe; in the middle of the path which separates "not just two countries but two universes."; in the boat made for eight people but which bears thirty passengers right now.

All those passengers have in common hope, their dream about life they couldn't have in their motherland - Morocco.

They are approaching Spanish coast with fear in their stomach and hope in their eyes and ... (I'll avoid spoilers)... after page or two we are reaching the spot where story starts to branch (it's like a reverse delta). Or maybe it's even better to say that we are reaching narrowest spot on the sandglass.

Sandglass is turned over and now we are following lives of the main characters prior their journey and here the novel becomes sort of collection of short stories. And these stories are very detailed and very personal portraits of persons with different characters, professions, education, etc. which are living in the same (mainly) political/economical pot which will transform them in immigrants.

It is a very colorful picture of nowadays Morocco and clash of its traditional and modern faces. Land filled with tourists seeking for roots of Paul Bowles's inspiration, or hashish, or some other sort of exotic adventure while muezzins are calling for prayer from minarets, with streets with girls covered with scarves and gay couples fearless sitting in the bars. We are introduced with some Islamic customs, especially in the marriage; with two completely different ways of interpretation of Qur'an: traditional as if there are no changes from the time of the Prophet and the modern one which is adapted with the current civilization level. And of course cuisine: you could feel the smell while passing through the pages mouth-watering.

However accent is on the horrifying economic situation with huge unemployment population (sometime regardless their education), extremely (and quite openly) corrupted system, from university via any sort of bureaucracy 'till the judicial system. Indeed you have a sensation of hermetic-incurable-never-ending-no-way-out, sensation so strong that you can feel it in your throat. Sensation that is boosted with descriptions of their homes, streets, furniture, etc so that you are wondering "How on Earth they're surviving at all?" and naturally when you're looking with their eyes immigrate in Spain is best (if not only) solution.

Then again sandglass is turned over and now we can see how immigrants live in their new country. Of course those kinds of dreams are often nightmares but it is incredible how people can find consolation and be satisfied. I guess when you manage to leave enormous misery behind, new misery doesn't look so unbearable. You just have to remember the ones who weren't that lucky and who would instantly exchange

their place with yours.

Naturally new life will change them but while some changes are expectable (no one would gladly accept to leave horse and ride donkey again) some changes are so drastic that I had to double check if that is the same person.

I should say that “sandglass” will be turned over more than once: to let us know why would anyone leave its own people, family, friends, customs and go in unknown land among strangers, become stranger himself (even among compatriots); to let us know how the ones who survived the trip but have not succeed in their intention are reestablish their lives in the country they wanted to leave; and to let us know about the ones whose lives have torn from the roots and are thrown on the other soil.

This is a story about their hope which helps them to stay alive.
