

# Lalami's Anomic World: (Dis)Engagement with Normlessness and Attempts at Recovery

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## Abstract

This article exposes the multi-faceted dimensions of anomie, Emile Durkheim's highly controversial theory, and the way it applies to Laila Lalami's novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005). This paper draws on Durkheim's theory and aims at exploring the anomic world Lalami creates in her representation of Morocco during the postcolonial period and the impact of a state of normlessness on her characters' experiences. Social norms have been blurred and common values and meanings have lost their significance and power to unite individuals due to economic difficulties, globalization, and colonization. The resulting instability and breakdown of ideals has left Lalami's characters psychologically paralyzed and unsettled by emergent feelings of alienation, confusion, and an inability to deal with a period of cultural and social upheavals and a debilitated community. Eventually, they are forced to face a fractured society that lacks a sense of direction, a purpose in life, and the social cohesion that previously reinforced a collective conscience. The discussion mainly focuses on the disintegration of family and loss of a moral system that regulates society, and various attempts at recovery from such anomic conditions infiltrating Moroccan culture in Lalami's novel.

**Keywords:** Emile Durkheim, anomie, normlessness, Morocco, colonial, religion

## 1. Introduction

The concept of anomie is derived from the Greek term "anomia" (and its root term "nomos") that means a "a lack of law... deregulation and/ or normlessness..." But "anomia" was not used to just describe a state of affairs, it also implied "an ethical judgment of the undesirability of that condition" (Deflem, 2015, p. 718). The concept was further developed and introduced to the discipline of sociology by the French theorist Emile Durkheim who believed that "morality is equated with social order, and any profound disturbance of the social order is captured under the head of anomie" (Deflem, 2015, p. 719). He argued that anomie is caused by rapid serious societal changes such as the spread of capitalism, modernization, ideals of democratic government, and the fall of communism. Such dramatic changes, according to Durkheim, left people with a shaken faith and a tradition and collective judgment that lost their significance and dominance. The new disorganized lifestyle that emerged did not satisfy the need for stability and justice (Durkheim, 1984, p. 342). All aspects of life were changing so quickly and in an unclear direction that people feel lost, confused, anxious, depressed, and looking for an "answer" that no one has. However, they make attempts to adjust to emerging circumstances and their negative implications.

There is evidence of the impact of anomie within neoliberal organizations. Courpasson et al. (2021) contend that there has been a deterioration in organizations which are now more "fragmented, individualistic and hypercompetitive" (p. 7). Such organizational changes have had a negative impact on individuals and have engendered anomie (that is defined here as "a state of loss of common morality and goals regulating social relationships and personal expectations") (Meštrović, 2010, as cited in Courpasson, p.7). This anomic experience has escalated middle managerial crisis and suicide rates at the workplace as noted by Harris (2016). Suicide results from excessive work pressure, unfavorable working conditions whereby people depend solely on themselves rather than seek the support of others, and the lack of solidarity at the contemporary workplace (Courpasson et al., 2021, p. 7). Courpasson et al. (2021) further explains that:

The failures, betrayals, absurdities, and inadequacies that people experience in their everyday working relationships often lead them to withdraw into themselves rather than undertaking projects to pursue collective action. In short, neoliberal workplaces seem to have no interest in community; they do not place high value on collective action over the longer term. Instead, action is presented and promoted in terms of individual agency with value placed on a worker's individual efforts and rewards (p. 7)

A separate study applied the concept of anomie to the field of sports. Carter (2006) indicated that NFL players strongly connected to certain social groups did not easily give in to anomie and were more disciplined. Therefore, social support was proven effective in combating anomie in the lives of NFL players. Teymoori et al. (2016) analyzed anomie from a political point of view and addressed its impact on nations and world politics. They looked at sociologists' approach to anomie in terms of "contexts characterized by instability ... deregulation and erosion of moral values" (p.1-2). Teymoori et al. (2016) described countries whose systems had crumbled and were in a state of anomie. Nepal, for instance, had witnessed rapid political changes, frequent riots, societal unrest, and the absence of a legitimate

justice system (p.2). Greece had suffered from economic problems, an ineffective government, and rise of extremist political parties following a failed society. Other countries including Iran and South Africa had experienced war and dramatic political change, and Eastern European nations underwent many political transformations after the fall of the Soviet Union. Societies of these nations all suffered from anomie, instability, and the loss of meaning in their lives. Notably, “Anomie has also been used to describe the social climate of prosperous countries such as the United States, which is characterized by low levels of generalized trust and high levels of income inequality” (Teymoori et al., 2016, p.2). Similarly, Morocco’s people have also lost faith in their system and suffer from a general lack of trust and financial inequality. Such socio-political conditions have contributed to anomie that threatens the cohesion and stability of Moroccan society.

Noële Burgi (2014) defines anomie as “a loss of legitimacy of norms that determine both the material conditions and the webs of intersubjective meanings giving coherence to life in society” (p. 3). The loss of legitimacy of norms causes social suffering since the common norms that once regulated behavior and shaped individuals’ expectations no longer provide the stability or security needed for developing societal cohesion or solidarity (Burgi, 2014, p. 3). The novel demonstrates this lack of social cohesion in twentieth century Morocco which had suffered from economic instability, modernization, French colonization, massive migrations, and threats against Islamic beliefs. Subsequently, many Moroccans found themselves unemployed, unable to fulfill their dreams in their homeland, and their Islamic practices weakened under the influence of the French (Hagopian, 1967).

Furthermore, the encroachment of the French continued to threaten Morocco’s national identity. In the process of “De- Arabizing Morocco,” as Samir Bennis (2023) puts it in his article entitled “What Moroccan Schools Do Not Teach About the Toxic Legacy of France’s Protectorate,” French imperialists worked on bringing changes and modernization that were harmful to Moroccans. French imperialists developed urban projects to serve the incoming European population, expanded tourist sites, and maintained their power over the Arab nation (Gnedash, 2018, p. 11). New buildings, parks, restaurants, cafes, and hotels replaced many local businesses and increased unemployment rates disrupting the lives of Moroccans (Moroccan Economy, 2014). Eventually, Moroccans had to get accustomed to the new cities and the gap created between the old and the new, and the anomic conditions caused by colonization and the French influence. Moroccans thought that the urbanized cities would create opportunities for them as these cities represented the refined West that was full of promise akin to the American dream. Instead, Moroccans were denied equal rights, were perceived as backward and incapable of advancement, and were treated as second class citizens in their own country (Bennis, 2023). Ultimately, they were caught in a space between westernization and a loss of cultural heritage and identity. Various Arab writers in the diaspora have documented this state of confusion and in-betweenness many Arabs struggle with. There is a burgeoning literature on how the Arab diasporic novel counters Western narratives in its focus on Arabs’ and the Middle East’s engagement with postcolonial conditions and how Moroccans attempt to uplift their societies and recover from the social, economic and political damage caused by colonization. Critics have explored the works of many Arab- American and Arab- British writers such as Mohja Kahf, Diana Abu-Jaber, Susan Abulhawa, Rabih Alameddine, Laila Lalami, Leila Aboulela, Ahdaf Soueif, and Fadia Faqir among others from a postcolonial and feminist perspective. However, the concept of anomie and its applications in Lalami’s *Hope and other Dangerous Pursuits* has never been addressed. Durkheim’s theory of anomie remains a terra incognita in Arab diasporic novels and it has rarely been discussed in the critical analysis of literary texts and Arab diasporic fiction.

Previous studies on Lalami’s novel mostly tackle migration and identity crisis as her characters leave the homeland to pursue their dreams in Spain. The current study furthers the above discussion by emphasizing that unemployment, corruption, and migration crises are part of the colonial legacy that threatened Moroccans’ unity and national consciousness. Ultimately, these crippling conditions motivate many Moroccans to work towards restoring their belief system, social cohesion, and commitment to their nation. In Lalami’s narrative, Moroccans’ attempts to migrate are not a personal choice, but a product of the colonial powers’ control over resources, political autonomy of the colonized, and the spread of their own language and culture within the nations they colonize. Such political, economic, and social pressures along with the moral decay and loss of human connection have pushed many Moroccans to risk their lives and travel to the West in the hope of finding a better life. In the novel, migration is a sign of the natives’ despair and struggle for survival. Soudeh Oladi and John Portelli (2017) explain that “Beneath the struggle for subjectivity and identity, there exists a discourse of survival that creates an image of the immigrant as the wandering and uncertain citizen” (p. 665); describing an uncertainty naturally caused by the migrant’s experience in foreign lands. Christián Ricci (2017), on the other hand, focuses on the migrant’s dual identity, experience of migration, and assimilation in the host country. Furthermore, Rima Abunasser (2016) delves into the concept of ‘home’ in the novel and the migrant’s “liminal, deterritorialized self that challenges not only the immigrant narrative” but the cultures between which the characters travel (p. 182). In *Hope and other Dangerous Pursuits*, immigration is not the only threat to Morocco’s stability, but anomie also poses a danger that disrupts the lives of Moroccans leaving them with a shaken faith and fading values that no longer have any hold on society which is the focus of the current study. The purpose of the current study is to explore the various manifestations of anomie in the novel and the way characters engage with anomie and contribute to dismantling the colonial narrative.

## 2. Manifestations of Anomie

Living in an atomized society “where collective meanings have been distorted” by several sudden changes, “anomie threatens people with the prospect of annihilation, leading to individual and collective reactions of defense” (Burgi, 2014, p. 2). In Lalami’s novel, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, anomie is brought about by the damaging impact of colonialism, deterioration of living conditions and morals, unemployment, and lack of solidarity. Anomie is reflected through the lives of several characters: Murad, Halima, Faten, Noura, and Aziz.

They all struggle to find meaning and build a life for themselves in Morocco, but lose hope and some opt to immigrate to Spain while the rest end up embracing their culture and their current homeland.

### 2.1 *Losing a Voice*

In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, anomie disrupts a nation's peace and developmental attempts to thrive. Lalami's characters feel psychologically paralyzed and crippled by what has become a normless society. They have lost their ambitions and are debilitated by a lack of hope and loss of self. Murad, for instance, sees no value in education or hard work because his college degree in English literature did not result in financial security. Murad, "wondered if he should have worked with the smugglers, bringing in tax-free Goods from Ceuta, instead of wasting his time at the university" (Lalami, 2005, p. 103). Murad works as a tourist guide but most tourists wish to explore the city on their own. His unemployment leads to frustration and tensions within his family and an inability to head his family despite being a son and the decision maker and protector of the family after a father's death as per the Muslim faith. One day his mother tells him that she has discussed his sister's marriage proposal with his uncle. Murad then replies furiously, "I should have been in the know ... I'm The Man in the family now ... Just because I don't have a job, you think I'm invisible. I'm her older brother. You should have come to me" (Lalami, 2005, p. 102). Murad is offended that his family do not treat him like the man of the house because he cannot provide for them. His unemployment is a threat to his sense of self-worth and masculinity within the Moroccan society that values patriarchal roles. He decides to immigrate to Spain in search of a job regardless of the horror stories he heard about arrests, drownings, and deportations. Murad, who is willing to take such a suicidal risk, pays Rahal to go on a boat to Spain so that his mother would never disregard his opinion once he gets a job. Eventually, he is caught and deported. Risking his life illustrates the unregulated behavior typical of anomic societies. In such societies, the anomic behavior is described as:

A state of normlessness and where society fails to effectively regulate the expectations or behaviors of its members; it occurs when aspirations are allowed to develop beyond the possibility of fulfillment. In better functioning societies, ambitions are restrained, and human needs and desires are regulated by the collective order. (Inderbitzin, Bates, & Gainey, 2021, p. 133)

Murad's ambitions and expectations are unreasonable because Spain cannot take in every immigrant looking for a job. Ironically, France and Spain contributed to the development of such unrealistic aspirations and impossible dreams of success by setting themselves at the center of civilization and advancement during the colonial period. The European dream that should hold promises for a prosperous future and a way out of a life with limited prospects proves to be a false dream for Murad and other Moroccans.

### 2.2 *A Breakdown of Marriage*

John Wright's (1996) insightful work "Parental Support and Delinquent Behavior: The Limits of Control Theory" indicates that increases in anomie are influenced by social connections and relationships developed through marriage, family, religion and community and so these bonds can play a role in buffering its likelihood. In the novel, several individuals experience tension and disconnect with their families as relationships fall apart due to anomic conditions and normlessness. Halima, for example, does not find comfort within her broken marriage, and neither does her relationship with Maati, her husband, by any means act as a buffer against life's challenges. Halima is constantly being kicked, pushed, and slapped by her abusive husband. He loses his job and takes her money to buy his beer. She wonders what happened to the man that she married. He was full of energy and ambition. He has changed into an angry and lazy drunk who depends on her and abuses her. Being an alcoholic, Maati fails to provide for his family and physically attacks Halima whenever he is frustrated and needs money. Halima later musters the courage to divorce him but is afraid that she will lose her children. As the lines between right and wrong have been blurred, she tries to use bribery to keep her children. Halima is a practicing Muslim who is aware that bribery is not permitted in Islam, yet she compromises her principles to protect her family. She bribes a judge to make sure she keeps her children after the divorce. As Halima hands the judge the money, she doubts that he will follow through her request and asks for her money back. Halima's actions reveal that she has lost faith in her husband as a protector and provider, and has also lost her faith in the justice system. The judge accepts bribes and does not base his decisions on Islamic teachings or a moral compass. Halima is forced to deal with the judge and the corrupt judicial system that ignores previously respected norms and values in their entirety. Halima later gives up hope in obtaining justice or reclaiming her rights as a wife.

Halima experiences anomie that involves the combination of three factors mentioned by Burgi (2014) including: "a loss of legitimacy of norms, situations of uncertainty and insecurity, and social suffering" (p.3). She feels alienated and insecure since she has no support system to rely on. She struggles in her marriage and has no one to help her in her conflict with Maati when she opts for a divorce. Within a just society, Maati would have been punished for physically abusing her, but his inability to fulfill his duties, his resort to alcohol, and attacks on his wife all go unpunished due to anomie. To make matters worse, Halima is reminded that a divorce will be frowned upon and that she alone will have to bear the consequences of a divorce because a society that is devoid of ethical standards only reinforces her victimization. Halima takes her insecurities along with her children on a boat to Spain since divorces go against Islamic traditions and her rights as a woman and wife are lost within the corrupt system. Halima believes that fleeing to a new world with new norms can solve her problems as she would no longer depend on a patriarchal figure, a delegitimized norm, or social cohesion for support or a chance for a fair existence. Such desperation in Halima's life almost costs her her life and that of her children as they were going to drown in the Mediterranean Sea. Maati then realizes that it was time to grant her a divorce. Halima's attempt to immigrate on an illegal boat with her children reflects her loss of hope because she put her life and that of her children in danger, an extreme act that ironically leads to her freedom from Maati and becomes her first step to building a new life.

### 2.3 Resistance

Other characters in Lalami's novel choose to deal with anomie through a return to faith and nationalism to preserve their identity and prevent themselves from being uprooted by foreign forces. The threat against Morocco's national and religious identity is reflected in a French ethnographer's claim that "religion lost its value and appeal in Morocco during France's colonial presence in the country. Mosques became empty" and "Moroccans' only concern was to emulate French customs" (Bennis, 2023). During this time, the imperialist agenda was focused on "de-Arabizing Morocco," i.e., spreading the French language and culture, and discouraging the use of Arabic that united Moroccans and allowed them to read their holy book. The French even banned the use of Arabic in public venues and replaced it with French to ensure it became the official language (Bennis, 2023). The act of denying a nation a right to speak in their native language is a crime and violates human rights (Taleb, 2021, p. 21). It is a serious threat to a society's identity and sense of self, and its ramifications are complex and continue to affect generations long after the colonial mission era.

Lalami demonstrates that such colonial attacks on religion and language are recognized and resisted by the natives. Noura and Faten, among others, hold on to their Moroccan identity and faith during these troubling times. Durkheim believes that during a crisis, people who encounter a loss of meaning tend to gravitate towards nationalism or any other form of identity movements which provide them with a sense of direction, social stability, and a source of group solidarity and integration (Durkheim, 2001, p. 209-210). Noura and her brother, Nadir, are brought up in a modern family and are raised to respect western education and ideals. While her brother continues his study in Quebec, her parents plan to send her to New York to pursue her studies. But Noura is influenced by her conservative friend Faten and wants to stay in Morocco and become a schoolteacher. Noura prefers to participate in social reform and address corruption in the system rather than study abroad. Noura tells her parents: "Morocco needs me. You two always talk about the shortage of teachers... Am I crazy to want to help my country? ... There's too much corruption in the system now, and I want to be a part of the solution" (Lalami, 2005, p. 39). She gives up on her dreams to pursue her education in the US and wishes to dedicate herself to a nationalist cause by teaching Moroccans. Larbi, her father, asks her friend Faten: "Don't you think that a degree from abroad would be better for her?" to which she replies:

No, I don't. I think it's a shame that we always value foreign degrees over ours. We are so blinded by our love for the West that we're willing to give them our brightest instead of keeping them here where we need them (Lalami, 2005, p. 43).

Faten understands the Moroccans' infatuation with the West and the danger it poses to society and societal advancement. She resists internalizing feelings of inferiority caused by colonialism. Noura too resorts to nationalism in her search for a sense of purpose and refuses to abandon the nation that needs her as serving the homeland is crucial. Her attempt to cope with the anomic condition she is facing is reflected in a desire to be part of a noble cause that is beyond self-interest.

Individuals routinely find comfort in religion when there is anomie and a breakdown of ideals and ties that hold society together. Religion provides solidarity and meaning for life and reinforces the cultural norms that are collectively embraced within a society. The social control religion provides is critical for the stability of a nation, as Durkheim asserts (Durkheim, 2001, p. 230). Noura holds on to her faith, particularly when she recognizes the threat to her national identity and her parents' deviation from cultural and religious traditions. She is attracted to religion as a source of security and unity with others which also keeps her grounded. One day Noura tells her parents about her intention to wear the headscarf because it is God's commandment, and that they should believe the word of God. Larbi objects to the idea by saying "but those were different times" (Lalami, 2005, p. 33). Her mother believes that the Koran's verses about the headscarf apply to the Pagan times and not to the 21st century. Noura's response to her mother is "God's Commandments are true for all time" (Lalami, 2005, p. 33). Larbi is in shock and thinks that his daughter will take on the hijab and dress like "some ignorant peasant" and in his mind "even peasants did not dress like that" (Lalami, 2005, p. 34). He is ashamed of her and thinks that "she would look like those rabble-rousers you see on live news channels, eyes darting, mouths agape, fists raised" and hopes that his daughter's wishes are temporary (Lalami, 2005, p. 34). When Noura puts on the headscarf, her father pulls it off her head angrily, throws it on the floor, and does not allow her to go out wearing the headscarf. Noura refuses to listen to him and tells him "You cannot stop me!" (Lalami, 2005, p. 36). He then realizes that she is right and that he can not do anything to dissuade her. Sadly, once she takes on the headscarf, he stops mentioning her at work because he thinks "it was beneath someone like him to have a daughter in a headscarf" (Lalami, 2005, p. 38).

Larbi is disappointed in his daughter and wonders why someone as beautiful as Noura would want to cover herself with a headscarf. He thinks "God is beautiful, and he loves Beauty, so why hide it beneath all that cloth?" (Lalami, 2005, p. 41). His views of the Muslim headscarf reflect his loss of faith and a lack of an in-depth understanding of Islamic teachings. His understanding of the practice is so distorted that it has led him to look down on women who choose to follow Islamic teachings and wear the headscarf. These views represent an orientalist perspective of the Islamic headcover that attach negative meanings such as backwardness, ignorance, and submission to the veil. The influence of French colonization and westernization have clouded Larbi's judgment when it comes to practicing his faith. He does not appreciate religion's ability to hold the family and society together in a state of social anomie where meanings have been distorted and common values have been lost leading to confusion and a disconnection from any belief system. Lalami chooses "The Fanatic" as a title for this chapter to call attention to the way the headscarf is perceived and has been misconstrued to imply fanaticism rather than modesty. The chapter thus critiques the discourse used in addressing the Islamic faith. Religion, as perceived by Larbi, disturbs the peace in the family and ruins his relationship with Noura. Accordingly, the critical functions of religion of creating strong bonds between people and uniting families through shared values and concerns is undermined.

Habib Fekih (1998) explains that one of religion's functions is to build a homogeneous society. Moreover, religious teachings strengthen

and support such homogeneity and provide a sense of “belonging to a structured group” (p. 105). Religion advocates this assemblage and unity among individuals for each to find a true place for themselves within the community while maintaining their rights and fulfilling their obligations towards themselves, their families, and society. In the novel, Noura’s search for a sense of belonging leads her to Faten and an intention to uphold religious principles. Noura finds herself a place where she can play an active role to serve God and society within a structured group. Her resort to religion at a critical time within Moroccan history is an act of self-preservation against the threats of anomic conditions in her society and within her family. Noura is aware of her father’s habit of drinking and non-Islamic behavior, as well as the moral decay consuming society. Her father’s negative attitude toward the headscarf shows his internalization of a colonial mentality and skepticism toward the belief system that once brought people together in harmony and achieved cohesion within a society that shared common goals and aspirations. The rupture within Noura’s family is a sign of anomic and a microcosm of the divisions within modern Moroccan society. This schism within the family makes Larbi worry about the possibility of having lost his daughter to religion. He wonders:

Where had he gone wrong? He had always had Noura's best interests at heart. What was so bad about her life before? She had it all, and she was happy. Why did she have to turn to religion? Perhaps it was his absences from home, his fondness for the drink, or maybe it was all the bribes he took. It could be any of these things. He was at fault somehow. Or could it be none of these things at all. In the end it didn't matter, he had lost her again, and this time he didn't dare hope for someone to return her to him. (Lalami, 2005, p. 50- 51).

It was beyond Larbi’s comprehension why his daughter would choose to follow religion and prioritize it over her parents’ wishes. Her parents thought they had provided her with everything that would grant her a good and happy life outside the constraints of religion. He felt she had everything a person would wish for and therefore had no reason to become a conservative Muslim. Larbi does not respect her choice to be an observant Muslim and take on the veil. He only sees the veil as a symbol of ignorance and oppression and does not realize that such meanings are only determined by “institutional practices and power relations” and that new meanings could be inferred from the veil under different circumstances (Abdeen & Abd-Rabbo, 2018, p. 314). He cannot look beyond his own biases and worldly interests, nor appreciate Noura’s yearning for something deeper than materialism and social appearances which she finds in her relationship with God.

#### 2.4 Corruption

Anomie destabilizing the Moroccan society is also illustrated by failed expectations from a corrupt system. In the novel, university students anticipate completing their degrees and competing to get a job; but this is no longer the societal norm as favoritism and use of connections to get a job becomes the “new” widely accepted norm. Tawfiq, Larbi’s old friend, asks Larbi to help his niece to get a job without questioning the legitimacy of his request, or the injustice it entails to all the other graduates striving to succeed in the world. Larbi’s initial response to Tawfiq’s request is “I wish I could... But we have so few jobs in the city these days. The waiting list is this thick.” Tawfiq tells Larbi that he is willing to do anything to help him out in return. Larbi, who “was not above taking the occasional bribe,” does not want a bribe at this time (Lalami, 2005, p. 21). Larbi then decides to help Tawfiq because he does not want to disappoint him and thought “what sense did it make to refuse a favor to a department head in the Surete Nationale?” But Tawfiq would have to be discreet about it (Lalami, 2005, p. 21). Larbi in the past had honorable goals and started out as an educator at the beginning of his career at the Ministry of Education. With the passage of time, Larbi could not resist the temptations to get involved in bribery. Larbi often wondered what had happened to him. “He felt he had failed, though he didn’t know when that had happened” (Lalami, 2005, p. 48). Larbi’s drinking also demonstrates societal deviation from the norm and the breakdown of ideals. The reader is told that Larbi practices Islam, prays and fasts during the month of Ramadan, but regularly drinks alcohol. Larbi is selective in his practice of the Islamic faith and does not see the double standards in his lifestyle. He also happily sabotages Faten’s future by getting her expelled from the university to get her out of Noura’s life because he disagreed with Faten’s religious views. In addition, Noura misapplies her religion as she defends Faten when she cheats on the exam. A neutral attitude towards Faten’s wrongdoing indicates Noura’s flawed understanding of what is permissible by the Islamic faith. Noura is influenced by the lack of morality in society that is so pervasive that she does not even notice the contradiction between Faten’s actions and her preaching. -Ironically, Noura does not feel betrayed by Faten and accepts that she does not practice what she preaches, and it does not affect the way she feels about her friend. Noura does not even question her commitment to the faith although both she and Faten are aware that cheating contradicts basic Islamic teachings.

#### 2.5 Clashes with the Government

Anomie and many ills in society such as bribery and favoritism should be addressed by the government. Governmental intervention can prevent the abuse of power such as that exemplified by Larbi’s actions. Mathieu Deflem (2015) explains that for Durkheim, the government is a central organ that can bring about unity, integration, and cohesion in society by putting in place laws that promote national collectivity (p. 719). Lalami portrays how individuals are forced to find a path of their own when the government does not control societal chaos and fragmentation. Her characters feel that they have been failed by their government but go on to reconcile with this reality and build a life and future for themselves. Faten has been failed by the government and society. Her nationalist tendencies are informed by the Islamic notion that “Life in a group within the framework of a moral system is a necessary condition for human responsibility” (Fekih, 1998, p. 104). She believes that once every individual realizes his/ her responsibility to others, his or her rights and obligations are protected and various needs are met and this creates a tight-knit community that serves common interests. Faten’s comment reinforces the idea that a moral and religious system can regulate and improve individual behavior and government decisions and actions.

The injustice we see every day... is proof enough of the corruption of... the government, and the political parties. But if we had been better Muslims, perhaps these problems wouldn't have been visited on our nation and on our brethren elsewhere" (Lalami, 2005, p. 26)

One day, she is excited about social reform and makes a derogatory comment about the king and risks getting arrested. Faten's freedom of speech is limited, and she finds herself alone without any source of support. Her Imam then recommends that she leaves the country to evade arrest. Although she is not prepared for the transition, Faten leaves for Spain. Such a decision places her on a wrong path where she alone eventually chooses her freedom over her commitment to the faith. She understands that selling her body to the Spanish coast guard would save her from deportation. She then pays this cost to remain in Spain. She finds that the easiest way to make a life for herself in Spain is through prostitution and pleasing men. Faten's shift from one extreme to another, from being a strict Muslim to a prostitute, highlights the loss of guidance and social anomie that haunts Faten's life.

On some nights Faten remembers her college days when she put on the headscarf and taught others to do the same and thought how foolish she had been. She also thought about Noura and wondered whether Noura had kept on wearing the hijab or discarded it. She thought Noura probably kept on wearing her hijab because she was rich and "had the luxury of having faith," or having had "the luxury of having no faith; she'd probably found the hijab too constraining and ended up taking it off to show off her designer clothes. That was the thing with money. It gave you choices" (Lalami, 2005, p. 138- 139). Money is used as a justification for making the right or wrong choice: this illustrates the damaging impact anomie has had on how people meet their needs without regard to regulation or responsibility toward themselves, their well- being, or their communities.

### 3. Chasing the Dream

Sandro Serpa and Carlos Ferreira (2018) argue that anomie occurs when conflict and competition surpass cooperation in the division of labor and "lack of social regulation." Subsequently, accepted values or goals set by individuals are no longer collective but become highly individualized (p. 690). Consequently, social harmony is lost since society cannot impose any rules on any individual, and any attempts to impose any rules would be resisted (Serpa & Ferreira, 2018, p. 690). Aziz, who has a degree in automation, opts for more individualized goals such as carving a life for himself through immigrating to Spain following his failure in Morocco. He is informed of all risks that he may face on his journey which he weighs against all the years he lost asking his parents for money to get on a bus, and evading questions about what he did for a living. Ultimately, Aziz who is jobless, is willing to risk his life to migrate to Spain as he believes that emigration is a "shortcut to happiness" (Benzidan, 2011, p. 202).

Talcott Parsons builds on Durkheim's conceptualization of anomie by referring to anomie as the inability to keep "a hold of norms over individual conduct" (as cited in Deflem, 2015, p. 720) as exemplified by Aziz' betrayal of his wife with other women. Although infidelity is a taboo by social and religious standards, societal norms no longer have a hold over his conduct. Aziz believes his loneliness justifies his conduct, and after all, "he was only human" (Lalami, 2005, p. 163). He convinces himself that his relationship with other women meant nothing to him as he was sure that he had meant nothing to them. Aziz loses the bond that connects him to his wife and keeps his family united. He finds that his wife Zohra takes great interest in a young neighbor's daughter Meriem; his wife cares for Meriem and spends time with her every day as the little girl brings her joy. Meriem takes Zohra's dough to get it baked at a public oven and has been of great help to Zohra. Zohra's relationship with the girl reflects Zohra's need to experience motherhood. But Aziz is not ready for children at this time because they live in separate countries and his wife's paperwork still needs to be processed. Aziz and Zohra continue to live in uncertainty and do not know what future awaits them. Aziz does not know when he would be sufficiently economically stable to bring his wife to Spain, or whether she would accept to join him or be able to adapt to the new environment. His focus is merely on making a profit and sending his family some money once he has saved enough. His disconnection from his wife and the lifestyle she has adopted, which he is not accustomed to in Spain, is highlighted through his observation:

He couldn't imagine her with him in Madrid. She was used to the neighbor's kid pushing the door open and coming in. She was used to the outdoor market where she could haggle over everything. She was used to having her relatives drop in without notice. He could not think of her alone in an apartment, with no one to talk to, while he was at work, and he, too, had his own habits now. He closed his suitcase and lifted it off the bed. It felt lighter than when he had arrived. (Lalami, 2005, p. 167)

Aziz experiences a new appreciation for individuality through which he reclaims his previously weakened sense of masculinity which had delinked him of belonging to family and cultural roots. In the absence of a collective conscience in Morocco, he finds the freedom to explore a new world outside the confines his traditional society and religious constraints. During his visit to Casablanca, he was unable to follow his own interests. He had seen most of the films shown at movie theaters and would have liked to go to "a nightclub, but he couldn't imagine Zohra going with him or even letting him go" (Lalami, 2005, p. 166). He and his wife did not have a satellite dish because his wife thought there was "no need to bring filth into the house" as there was plenty 'of filth' on the street (Lalami, 2005, p. 166). Clearly, Aziz and his wife were growing distant and did not have the same priorities or goals. Aziz's immigration was initially driven by an urgent need to succeed and provide for his family, but his priorities later shifted as he went on his journey of self- discovery and adventure through extramarital affairs. He no longer shares Zora's concern about family unity or maintaining strong ties to the homeland, or values and beliefs that regulated their lives and ambitions. Aziz and his wife are left in a state of anomie.

### 4. The Silver Lining

Lalami not only exposes the various dilemmas and anomic situations that present a challenge to any given society, but also gives her

readers a glimpse of hope to inspire positivity. Her solutions to many problems or the means to ease a character's hardships in Morocco do not necessarily lie in formal institutions, such as the justice system, or the educational system, or organized religion as represented through Muslim imams. Lalami provides her characters with rewards or ways to make their lives more livable following the despair and dismalness that anomie entails in this fractured society. Halima, for instance, is blessed to have a helpful son who is a saint. He saves her life in the Mediterranean and continuously gives her the moral support she needs in the absence of a caring husband. She obtains a divorce and "this feeling of elation was entirely new to her" (Lalami, 2005, p. 116). Ironically, she and her son both find comfort in her divorce. He tells his mother "I wish Baba had divorced you the first time you asked" (Lalami, 2005, p. 116). Although divorce is frowned upon within Arab and Islamic culture, Halima is content as her divorce provides her with a new hope for a better life and a stable future for her children. Halima even perceives her divorce as an opportunity to transform her life and become an independent woman. Ultimately, she recognizes her passion to start a small business from which she can make money and feel empowered without having to rely on a provider. Halima is then able to pay for her mother's treatment for arthritis from her business.

Research shows that belonging to a religious community and following religious beliefs contribute to a better quality of life and individual well-being. Thoroddur Bjarnason (1998) studied the roles of the family and religion in relation to perceived social coherence and found that social support can directly enhance individual well-being and indirectly serve "as a buffer against the impact of negative life events" (as cited in Bjarnason, 1998, p. 6). A sense of belonging to a community or faith can positively decrease individual-level anomie as demonstrated by Halima's life. Halima remains truthful to her religious beliefs and is committed to her family and society in the midst of her crisis. When her neighbor comes to tell her of a superstition that her son can do miracles and bring good luck, Halima strongly rejects such a practice and explains to him that such a superstition is un-Islamic. Moreover, Halima gets her neighbor's son off the street and pushes him to succeed at school and financially supports her mother with the little she has in show of her solidarity with others. She takes on the responsibility of morally raising her children, and protects them from anomie and their father's degeneracy, and is thankful to God for granting her a son who is a blessing and a great source of love and comfort. Halima's connection to God, that is visible in her practice of the faith and the way she raises her children, gives her the strength to overcome her abusive relationship with her unloving husband and improves her well-being and quality of life after the divorce.

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (2001) emphasizes the role of a positive relationship with God in strengthening individuals' ability to endure or overcome the ups and downs of life (p. 419-420). He encourages a connection with God because it translates into a communal act of worship that connects people's lives. Hence individuals gain moral support through committing to religious beliefs, rituals, and social interaction. He believes such religious practices contribute to the development of societal cohesion that helps individuals have a sense of purpose that guides their life and makes it more meaningful. In the novel, Zohra is portrayed as a believer who embraces her faith and its principles of loyalty, unity, and solidarity. She takes on the responsibility of looking after her aging mother-in-law which is not her duty by Islamic law. Zohra only expects to be rewarded by God for her good deed. Zohra commits to her marriage regardless of her husband's absence. She finds solace in bonding with the neighbor's young daughter, Meriem. Zohra loves Meriem despite not being connected to her by blood; a relationship that brings Zohra lots of satisfaction. Zohra is grounded in her faith and does not become a victim to anomie. She resists the loss of her principles and engagement with chaos and immorality that threaten her belief system and sense of security unlike her husband who gives in to temptations and betrays her with other women secondary to anomic conditions.

Towards the end of the novel, Murad overcomes the anomie that is characterized by a lack of productivity and loss of meaning and hope. He accepts his fate and is grateful that he did not end up in a body bag next to the Mediterranean Sea. He returns to Morocco, embraces his culture, and acknowledges that he had been consumed by his "imagined future" in Spain as his past was drifting away, and his childhood stories were fading. He realized he would no longer be able to pass his childhood stories on to his children. He decides to write his own story and the nearly forgotten stories told by his father. Subsequently, Moroccan culture and identity can be preserved and its narrative written beyond a history of colonization and French and Spanish influence.

## 5. Subversive Discourse

In the new chaotic world established by Lalami that is characterized by anomie, a subversive discourse emerges. In this subversive discourse, families are not devastated by painful circumstances and are depicted as having taken on new paths that deviate from the norm. Halima comes to terms with her divorce and is elated to regain her freedom. She becomes an empowered woman who provides for her family in the absence of a patriarch. Maati loses his role as the provider and the protector of his family and is perceived as useless by his wife. Maati's son is happy not to share a life with his father who became an alcoholic and added to the suffering of the family. Halima then goes on to raise her children to be good Muslims and tries to remain faithful to the true meaning of Islam. Maati, however, remains indifferent to his detachment from his family and faith.

Participating in anomie, Aziz leaves his wife Zohra in Morocco as he returns to Spain to find a life for himself. Zohra remains in Morocco to take care of Aziz's mother in place of Aziz and his siblings contrary to Islamic teachings. Nevertheless, Zohra treats Aziz's mother with kindness and resists family disintegration and the crumbling of values needed to restore social solidarity. Zohra gets a job to provide for herself and creates a new bond with a little girl that makes up for her inability to experience motherhood. Ironically, all the members of this family can cope with such arrangements without complaining about the loss of family unity in Zohra's family, nor the previous order of things, nor the traditional world they inhabited. Moreover, Faten, who has become a prostitute in Spain and lost her connection to the Islamic faith, no longer shows an interest in Western men or their roles in saving her as a Muslim inferior "other." She reconciles with her

past and present existence and tries to reconnect with her cultural origins by sharing a meal with her Moroccan roommate.

Murad has given up all attempts to pursue the European dream and has no faith in the false promise of success and prosperity in the West. He comes to terms with his past and embraces Moroccan culture. He finds his voice and decides to become a writer in his homeland. Murad prefers to write his own narrative rather than being consumed by the Western narrative of the Orient and their superior sense of morality. Murad is finally content to remain in his homeland and no longer needs to chase after a dream that involves hardships and does not guarantee happiness or stability. He experiences a sense of belonging to his own culture without resentment and feelings of bitterness about missed opportunities in the unknown West. These sentiments reflect his liberation from a colonial discourse and the internalization of the binaries of superior / inferior created by a colonial legacy. He is no longer defined by the colonial process, but constructs an identity of his own which he takes pride in. As a writer, he is his own master who creates a counter- narrative that attains two goals, reflecting the reality of Moroccan culture and its people's lived experiences, and unsettling Western perceptions and power over knowledge (Qutami, 2022, p. 226).

## 6. Conclusion

Durkheim's discussion of anomie exposes the ills of society and explores ways to overcome the breakdown of moral values and normlessness. Durkheim suggests that solidarity and a commitment to faith and one's nation can reduce the impact of anomie and deregulation in society regardless of the harsh conditions generated by colonialism or rapid economic or political changes. He posits that social cohesion can be achieved through religious and nationalist movements as they provide a sense of direction, give meaning to life, and help protect the collective consciousness. Lalami's novel also demonstrates the ability of a society to overcome anomic conditions caused by colonialism and envision a new reality for its people.

The current study extends the above discussion beyond the common migrant experience in the diaspora and the victim/ escapee narrative to unpack the past and complex root causes of migration and anomie. It examines the colonial legacy and its impact on Moroccan life, value system, and family relations and the natives' resistance to anomie. The study contributes to the counter-discourse on an Arab/African society and highlights Arab/African society's attempt to deal with the damage that threatens social norms and values that were the glue that held it together prior to colonialism. Lalami's reflections on postcolonial Morocco demystify the myth of migration to fulfil the African dream and the promise of success and prosperity in the modern West. The current analysis delves into representations of Moroccans' resilience, commitment to combat anomie, their will to transform their society and recover from corruption, immorality, and social disintegration, thereby challenging the image of Arabs and Africans as passive and helpless victims of colonization. Throughout the narrative, African societies carve a path for themselves to move forward beyond a colonial past and discourse that meddled with their national consciousness. The recreated image in this study presents Africans as individuals who are unwavering in their efforts to protect their cultural and religious identity, to uplift their society, and to bring back prosperity to their land. Therefore, the current study contributes to rewriting the African narrative and enriching discussions about African literature.

Furthermore, the novel reconstructs the narrative of the Muslim female by illustrating her positive role in society and her ability to uphold moral values within the family circle in the absence of male figures or in the presence of male figures' indiscipline and noncommitment to social norms and belief systems. Most females in the novel do not submit to anomic conditions and face every challenge that comes their way resisting alienation, destabilization, and the crumbling of relationships within their society. Moroccan women are not the oppressed victims that need rescuing by the West. Lalami depicts Moroccan women as active and productive members of society who fight for their rights and the survival of their families and culture. Not only does this study unsettle negative images of African and Arab women, but it also dismantles the western narrative of a failing Africa whose history is flattened and ideologies are corrupt. This study emphasizes Lalami's counter- narrative that reflects the will power of a subjugated people to resist western attempts to "divide and rule" and de-Arabize their nation. Lalami attempts to articulate an alternative reality in which there is solidarity and a collective consciousness that keeps Moroccans united in their struggle to combat anomie and normlessness and rebuild their nation and future by probing into the challenges Moroccans face within a postcolonial era.

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