

LAILA LALAMI'S *SECRET SON* (2009) AS AN APPROPRIATION OF FITZGERALD'S :*THE GREAT GATSBY* (1925)

رواية الابن السري (2009) لليلي العلمي كاستحواذ (اقتباس) على رواية غاتسبي العظيم
لفيتزجيرالد (1925)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the novel of Laila Lalami *Secret Son* (2009) appropriates F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). It aims at showing how adaptation helps in reframing local anxieties into global concerns. Through using Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, the paper shows how the two novels tackle similar issues such as, alienation, sport as a motif, class division, extramarital affairs, the importance of family background and religion versus secularism. The two stories follow the growth of their protagonists and the issues they encounter throughout their journey. Both Jay Gatsby and Youssef El-Mekki went through the same journey, which is a journey from rags to riches. However, as a post 9/11 novel, Lalami's *Secret Son* tries to highlight the circumstances and the seeds of fundamentalism. The paper argues that the appropriation of Gatsby's journey helps in revealing the complexities of ideological decisions that Muslims are sometimes obliged to go through.

Keywords:

Appropriation; Religious Fundamentalism ;Secret Son ; The Great Gatsby; The journey.

ملخص:

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية كيفية استحواذ رواية "الابن السري" (2009) للكاتبة ليلي العلمي على رواية "غاتسي العظيم" (1925) لسكوت فيتزجيرالد، وتهدف إلى بيان كيف يمكن للاقتباس الأدبي أن يعيد صياغة الهواجس المحلية وتحويلها إلى قضايا عالمية. بالاعتماد على نظرية ليندا هتشون في الاقتباس، تبين الورقة أن الروايتين تتناولان قضايا متشابهة، منها: الاغتراب، والرياضة كفكرة مهيمنة، والانقسام الطبقي، والعلاقات غير الشرعية، وأهمية الخلفية العائلية، بالإضافة إلى الصراع بين الدين والعلمانية. تتبع القصة نمو بطلَيْهما والمشكلات التي يواجهانها خلال رحلتيهما. جاي غاتسي ويوسف المكي يخوضان الرحلة نفسها، أي الرحلة من الفقر إلى الغنى. ومع ذلك، وباعتبارها رواية نُشرت بعد أحداث 11 سبتمبر تحاول رواية العلمي تسليط الضوء على الظروف التي تنبت بذور التطرف. وتجادل الورقة إلى أن استحواذ الرواية على رحلة غاتسي يساعد في كشف تعقيدات القرارات الأيديولوجية التي يُجبر المسلمون أحياناً على اتخاذها.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الابن السري ، الاستحواذ ، الاقتباس ، غاتسي العظيم ، التطرف.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lalami's *Secret Son* (2009) tells the story of Youssef El-Mekki, a lower-class young man who grew in the slums of Hay An Najat (Morocco). Youssef went through a journey that resembles Gatsby's journey in many ways. Like Gatsby, Youssef was ambitious and he wanted to become rich. Their journey from extreme poverty to wealth coincided with many twists and problems that are so similar. Lalami made her protagonist a prototype of Gatsby. She wanted to show part of the circumstances that led Youssef to end up in a terrorist milieu. Lalami's appropriation made use of Gatsby's world, which is the roaring twenties in America to compare it with the world of the protagonist; modern day Morocco.

Whereas Gatsby lived in a place and at a time where he had many possibilities, Youssef lived in a world that does not provide any possibilities for a better future.

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Lalami seems to be interested in highlighting the fact that if Gatsby lived in 21st century Morocco, he would end up just like Youssef; a man involved in fundamentalism and terrorism. By the same token, if Youssef lived in America during the roaring twenties, he would find other paths to go through. He may be even better than Gatsby himself who was a bootlegger, because, after all, bootlegging in the twenties was prohibited and illegal. Youssef may have chosen a decent path and a better one than that of Gatsby. Gaiutra Bahadur in her review of the book argues:

The comparison to “Gatsby” raises some uncomfortable questions: What if a man with such tortuously denied desires rose up not in clear proximity of the American Dream but far from it, in a prospectless and corrupt society? What if he lived not amid the roaring possibilities of the 1920s but after Sept. 11 and May 16? (That was the date in 2003 when coordinated suicide bombings shook Casablanca.)

Bahadur’s argument suggests that Gatsby’s and Youssef’s journeys resemble the same journey but in different contexts.

Despite the fact that the novel deliberately adapts Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, existing scholarship did not address this specific topic. Critics have focused more on the sociopolitical and economic situation surrounding the protagonist’s world. In a paper entitled “Food for Thought: Un/savoury Socio-economic Im/mobility in Laila Lalami’s *Secret Son*,” Yousef Awad focuses on the theme of food in the novel and how it is seen as marker of economic and social status between people in Moroccan society. He argues that “*Laila Lalami’s Secret Son* (2009) deploys images of food to foreground the novel’s thematic concern about socio-economic inequalities that shape the lives of millions of Moroccan citizens” (109). This novel has also been discussed along with Lalami’s debut novel *Hope and other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) in an article entitled “The Dislocation of “Home” in the Writings of Laila Lalami” by Abdellah Elboubekri. Elboubekri discusses the notion of home and how

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people seem to be practicing “a kind of re-rooting to heal their amputated identity” (251). They are searching for home both inside and outside their countries.

Whereas *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) was about illegal immigration and people who have chosen “hrig” as an escape from their desperate conditions, this novel on the other hand discussed the possibility of the future of those people if they had decided to stay in their squalor. Lalami said “Some people in Hay An Najt had tried hrig . . . hardly any of them had been heard from after leaving the country on a boat” (Lalami 62), they were “tempted to try [their] luck in Europe” (ibid). In other words, Lalami “explores what it means for her characters to stay rather than flee from the socio-political morass that is modern-day Morocco” (Akbar). Lalami also presented religious fundamentalism as the main or the only driven force that controlled the fate of those young people, by giving them hope and promising them a better future.

Hutcheon argues that adaptations are "second without being secondary." (9) This means that adaptations perform their own cultural work precisely through their relationship to prior texts without privileging the original text. For Lalami, writing as an Arab-American novelist after September 11, 2001, her narrative becomes a strategic resource for the recognizability of her work in the west.

Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, Lalami adapts F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* focusing on the rags to riches trajectory, the motifs of sport and reinvention through illegal means, alienation and class division and religion versus secularism. Hutcheon argues that adaptation constitutes “an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work.” (Hutcheon 8) Thus, *Secret Son* does not merely borrow incidental elements from *The Great Gatsby* but rather engages in a sustained, interpretative dialogue with Fitzgerald's novel.

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Moving beyond mere plot comparison, the paper deploys Linda Hutcheon's notions of "indigenization," "transculturation" and the adaptation as palimpsest, alongside post-colonial and post-9/11 critical frameworks, to interrogate how Lalami's rewriting reconfigures the ideological codes of Fitzgerald's text. Rather than reading the two novels as parallel storylines, the analysis treats *Secret Son* as a critical counter-narrative that exposes the limits of the American Dream when it is transposed into a neoliberal, post-colonial Muslim context, and that reframes Gatsby's pursuit of self-invention as a critique of the structural conditions producing radicalisation.

2. The Rags to Riches Trajectory

As was mentioned earlier, Youssef's and Gatsby's journeys resemble each other. The first common link between the two characters is their journey from rags to riches. Like *The Great Gatsby*, *Secret Son* "follows this young man's fragile ascent from the nothingness of poverty — a reinvention that ultimately comes undone, in a conscious echo of *The Great Gatsby*" (Bahadur). Gatsby's wealth derives from organized crime. He is a bootlegger who made his fortune selling alcohol during Prohibition. Fitzgerald did not refer to Gatsby's bootlegging directly; Nick hears rumours, Gatsby answers questions, and the full extent of his operations remains suggestive rather than explicit.

Youssef does not become a bootlegger; instead, he has been introduced to stock market speculation, a form of accumulation that is legal but morally ambiguous within the Moroccan context. His father's wealth, like Gatsby's, is tainted by his collaboration with neoliberal economic forces. Both protagonists operate outside the law, but their crimes differ. Gatsby's crime is merely economic and romantic; Youssef's becomes political and ideological. Youssef's crime makes of the rags to

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riches journey a national concern rather than a personal one, turning Gatsby's romance into a Moroccan national trajectory.

Consequently, what Lalami's appropriation foregrounds is not the biographical resemblance between two ambitious young men but the structural impossibility of the Gatsby plot in the Arab world. Where Fitzgerald's text mourns the corruption of the American Dream from within, *Secret Son* exposes that this dream is not merely corrupted but unavailable: the neoliberal Moroccan economy, shaped by post-colonial dependency and by the so-called "children of independence" (Lalami 85), recycles the rhetoric of self-made success while foreclosing its material conditions. Youssef's ascent, mediated entirely by paternal recognition rather than by labour or even bootlegging entrepreneurship, therefore functions as a metonym for a society in which mobility is granted, never earned. By transposing Gatsby's economic crime into Youssef's ideological drift, Lalami reframes the rags-to-riches arc as a diagnosis of what Hutcheon would call "the politics of intertextuality" (xvi), in which the silent loser of the American Dream becomes the audible terrorist of the post-9/11 imagination.

3. Between Belonging and Alienation

The protagonists' journey from poverty to wealth coincided with many feelings, most importantly the feeling of alienation that both of them encountered. Gatsby felt as an outsider in the new area of West Egg. He wanted to be seen as a member of the old money class but this did not suit him. In trying to assimilate into that world, Gatsby made everything in his house white; a color that symbolizes the upper class. He tried to wear like upper class people; however, his choice has never been that of the upper class. When Gatsby was coming back from East Egg, Nick said: "we hadn't reached West Egg Village before Gatsby began leaving his elegant sentences unfinished and slapping himself indecisively on the knee of his caramel-colored suit"

(Fitzgerald 70). This shows that he does not feel comfortable in that world and he does not feel fully belonging. Thus, for Gatsby, belonging is an impossible dream, a green light that recedes forever.

Youssef encounters nearly the same feelings. When he moved to live in his father's apartment in Casablanca and went to walk outside in the neighborhood, "it surprised him that there were no young men his age standing around at street corners. Where were they all?" (Lalami 115) He experiences such feelings of not belonging because he found himself in a world that he does not fit in, a world of wealth and richness where everything is different from Hay An Najat. Moreover, "At the Tahiti Beach Club, where he spent idle moments, Youssef could not see the seagulls in the blue sky or hear the breaking of the ocean's waves without reflecting on the rootlessness of his new life" (136). This clearly shows his sense of alienation and outsidership in this new world, no sense of belonging is offered to him.

Therefore, one may argue that the alienation motif carries a different ideological charge in each text. Gatsby's alienation is the wound of class mobility within a single national frame; it remains intelligible to him as an aesthetic problem of taste and self-fashioning (like the pink suit he wore). Youssef's alienation, by contrast, is double: he is estranged from the slum that produced him and from the bourgeois Casablanca that refuses to acknowledge him, while also being estranged from the secular, francophone, Western-coded modernity embodied by his father. The Tahiti Beach Club scene, read critically, is not simply a moment of melancholy: it is the site where post-colonial class hierarchy and the cultural after-life of French colonialism meet, exposing the way Moroccan elites reproduce a Western lifestyle that remains structurally inaccessible to the very nation they govern. Alienation thus becomes, in Lamami's appropriation, a symptom of an unfinished decolonisation rather than a private concern.

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4. Sport as a Motif

The 1920's witnessed a huge growth and success in many disciplines, including sports. The field of sport flourished and people's interest in it grew largely. It became widespread and students in universities were all trying to be involved in sport groups. One of those people is Scott Fitzgerald himself who was obsessed to become a member of the football team at his university but he failed. Both writers use sport in their novels to highlight social and political implications. Though at the surface level, sport and politics seem to be fully separated and different from each other, they are actually in a constant interaction. In America for instance, sport has been one of the most racist disciplines through which the Afro-Americans were widely segregated. No matter their talent was, they did not have the right to participate in the major leagues.

In addition to racism, sport has always been a marker of social status; since some sports were played only by the upper-class people. In Fitzgerald's novel, sport is represented in the characters of Jordan Baker and Tom Buchanan. Baker feels superior and somehow arrogant because of her fame. This fame is a result of her success in golf sport which was played only by rich people. Tom Buchanan was also a famous football player in his youth at Yale University. He also plays polo which is a sport played mainly by upper-class people and this shows his wealthy background. So, Fitzgerald used sport as a way to highlight the class difference in the American society. solely from sport, the reader of the novel can recognize that Tom Buchanan came from a wealthy background; the old money class whereas Gatsby belongs to the new money class. Thus, class division and the difference between the new and old money can be seen through the kind of sport a person practices.

Lalami made use of the same motif of sport in a different context. Her focus in *Secret Son* was all on football or soccer. She shows the importance of it in the lives of young adults, and how the party took advantage of this. The party, or as it is called

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in the novel "Al Hizb," worked on gaining people's confidence by all means. They helped them during the flood by providing them with the necessities that the government was unable to provide. After that, they made use of the younger generation. To gain their trust, Hatim, the party leader decided to build for them a stadium where they can spend their time and do the thing that they are fond of. "The partisans had cleared a dirt lot of the trash that was regularly dumped in it, planted white poles and goal nets, and turned it into a football field for the young men of Hay An Najat." (Lalami 32). Here, it can be said that the party made use of football as a tool through which it can achieve its goals. Thus, "football has become a site of contestation between conflicting political powers in Morocco" (Awad 11). It is "employed by contesting political bodies to gain legitimacy on the masses" (Lalami 12). More than this, the party people turned the cinema of Hay An Najat into "HEADQUARTERS OF THE PARTY" (Lalami 19) which includes in its ground floor "a café named Oasis" (ibib). In this café, Youssef and his friends met to drink tea and watch TV, especially matches. The headquarters of the party becomes a place of enjoyment.

Overall, sport in Fitzgerald's text is a sign system that quietly encodes class (golf, polo, Yale football.) In Lalami, sport is no longer a passive marker but an active instrument of bio-political recruitment: "Al Hizb" weaponises football to capture leisure time, masculinity and communal affect, transforming a stadium into what Foucault would describe as a disciplinary space. By rewriting Fitzgerald's class-coded leisure as a site of ideological capture, Lalami performs an explicitly political reading of the very motif Fitzgerald left implicit, demonstrating Hutcheon's claim that adaptation is always "interpretation as well as creation" (8).

5. Space as a Social Class Marker

Another important theme that was appropriated by Lalami in her *Secret Son* is class division and its relation to space. In *The Great Gatsby*, the division is made between the Eggs (East Egg and West Egg) and the Valley of Ashes. The Eggs are inhabited by wealthy upper-class people (Nick Carraway, Jay Gatsby, Jordan Baker, Daisy and Tom Buchanan) whereas the Valley of Ashes is inhabited by poor lower-class citizens (Myrtle and George Wilson). However, though both wealthy, the Eggs in themselves denote a kind of class and social difference between them. West Egg where Gatsby lives is a symbol of people who are seen as the new money class, without having a rich background and who worked hard to achieve their dream; the American dream. East Egg on the other hand is a place of old money; a place whose inhabitants are wealthy with prominent and well to do backgrounds. For example, Nick talked about his family “the Carraways” as being prominent and important and well known for several generations (Fitzgerald 08).

In *Secret Son*, similar to the contrast between the East and West Eggs and the Valley of Ashes, there is the contrast between Casablanca and its slums; Hay An Najat. Casablanca's inhabitants are wealthy people with prominent status. Casablanca is inhabited by important families like The Amranis. Such people enjoy a life influenced by the west and they are most of the time liberals and secularists. Youssef's father, Nabil Amrani is one of those people and he is one of “the children of independence” (Lalami 85) who enjoyed many privileges from the government. Hay An Najat on the other hand is a place of extreme poverty whose dwellers barely find what to eat. They live in squalor, filthiness and degradation. Youssef, the protagonist of this novel grows up with his mother in those slums and he is ashamed of this. Because of its dreadful conditions, Hay An Najat seems to be the perfect place for the Islamic Fundamentalists to sew themselves in it through driving and manipulating people by helping them in their most difficult time.

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What the spatial parallel ultimately discloses is the difference between geography as metaphor and geography as policy. In Fitzgerald, the Valley of Ashes operates as a moral allegory: it is the dumping ground of the wealth produced elsewhere, the ethical residue of Jazz-Age capitalism. In *Secret Son*, Hay An Najat is not allegorical at all; it is a documentary indictment of an actually existing urban policy, the bidonville circle that surrounds Casablanca and that the Moroccan state has historically neglected. Lalami's indigenization (Hutcheon 150) of Fitzgerald's spatial dichotomy thus politicises what was originally symbolic, transforming a literary backdrop into a critique of the post-colonial state's abandonment of its own poor.

6. Extramarital Affairs

Both novels share the theme of illegal extramarital affairs. Such relationships permeate the whole of the two novels. In *The Great Gatsby*, Tom Buchanan is married and he has a relationship with Myrtle Wilson, a married lower-class woman who has an ambition to improve her situation. There is also the love affair between Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan, Tom's wife. Before being married to Tom, Daisy was in love with Gatsby. However, as time passes and Gatsby was absent fighting in WWI, Daisy married Tom. After the re-appearance of Gatsby in her life, Daisy started meeting him without telling her husband and with the help of her cousin Nick, who was Gatsby's neighbor. Gatsby became rich for her sake and "he bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay" (Fitzgerald 85). In the words of Youssef, the protagonist of *Secret Son*, Daisy was "Gatsby's dream." (Lalami 31).

In *Secret Son*, there are also many illegal extramarital affairs. Youssef himself was a result of an affair between Nabil Amrani and Rachida Ouchak. Rachida was working as a maid for the Amranis. She was taking care of Nabil's house after his wife fell ill when she was pregnant with Amal. Nabil seduces Rachida until she fell to him and she became pregnant as a result. When Nabil's mother knew about this

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affair she fired Rachida and ordered her to abort the baby. Rachida left and she decided to keep her son. Rachida was not the only woman in Nabil's life beside his wife. Rather, he had many relationships. When he gave the keys of his apartment to Youssef, Youssef discovered that his father "is using this apartment for meeting women. Women like my mother" (Lalami 114). Such affairs show the corruption and the lack of morality that was prevalent in America in the twenties and is still prevalent in modern day Morocco. Lalami therefore appropriates Fitzgerald's romance plot in order to interrogate the gendered architecture of class itself, a critical dimension largely absent from Fitzgerald's text and central to Lalami's rewriting.

7. Names and Family Background

Lalami's *Secret Son* appropriates also the idea of family background and family history. This idea is mainly seen in the importance of family names. When Youssef went to Alia's house, her father asked him about his family name, Alia introduced Youssef: "Papa, this is Youssef, a *copain de classe*," (Lalami 67) her father said: "Youssef *comment*?" "El Mekki," Youssef replied. He "knew well that such a name did not count in this man's eyes: it was not a chorfa's name; it did not have a pedigree" (67). Later in the novel, Youssef knew his father and he knew that he is originally from Amrani family, a wealthy family "whose ancestors had fought battles and won wars, conquered land and ruled clans, been part of the power structure of this country for as long as anyone could remember," (94) and he felt proud. By the end of the novel, he knew his origins from both sides, "he was half-Berber and half-Arab; he was a man of the mountains, and a man of the city; a man of the people and an aristocrat; a full-blooded Moroccan, with the culture and the history of a thousand years __ a rich identity, of which he could be proud" (282). This shows the importance of family history and background in the Moroccan society.

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In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald also developed this idea of family names. There is Nick Carraway who said about his family: "My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations. The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we're descended from Dukes of Buccleuch" (Fitzgerald 08). There is also Gatsby who described himself as the following: "I am the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West – all dead now. I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition." (71) This idea of the prestigious university of Oxford and how Gatsby is proud of it and keeps repeating it is also present in *Secret Son*, Nabil Amrani said to his son:

We'll have to think of something for you to do. A degree in English isn't going to lead anywhere . . . It's not your fault. It's the university's. It churns out graduates who have no marketable skills. And with the new reforms, they're even awarding degrees in three years instead of four. But we'll think of something. (Lalami 122)

It is only poor people who go to public universities. Rich people like the Amranis go to study abroad. Nabil sent his daughter Amal to study in America (UCLA), and in this regard, Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*; as an upper-class man, studied in the prestigious university of Yale, and he kept accusing Gatsby of lying because he knew that he is from the new money class and it was impossible for him to attend Oxford.

What the name motif foregrounds, beyond mere genealogical pride, is the persistence of pre-modern hierarchies inside modern institutions. Fitzgerald's old-money names (Buchanan, Carraway) anchor an Anglo-Protestant aristocratic fiction grafted onto American capitalism. Lalami's "chorfa" lineage and the Amrani name index a Moroccan post-colonial elite that fuses sharifian religious prestige with francophone Western capital.

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8. Religion Versus Secularism

In addition to all these similarities, religion is another theme that is shared between the two novels, one focusing on the decadence of religion and loss of faith, the other focused on secularism Vs religious extremism. *The Great Gatsby* presents a number of characters who lost their faith in God. Fitzgerald was a Christian catholic and his representation of such characters seems to be a criticism of the American society at the time. The characters' "bad behavior takes place directly under the unflinching gaze of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg at the Valley of Ashes." (Hauhart 200) Here, the eyes of Doctor Eckleburg are seen as the eyes of God who is watching everyone, as if Fitzgerald is saying that though you neglect him, God is everywhere.

In Lalami's novel, religion is very important because through it, Lalami highlights the roots of fundamentalism and extremism. She portrays in her novel the other side of Casablanca. Her focus was on the political as well as religious corruption of people of the parties. She shows the extreme poverty that people in Hay An Najat live in, and how their condition became the winning card for Al Hizb. People of the party took their chance in the flood that destroyed Hay An Najat in which they helped the people and provided them with food and blankets. They also took benefit from young adults as was mentioned earlier, by building the football field for them. Those young generations are the ones who have hope and who will do anything to get out from the life of poverty that they were born into it. They are also easily brainwashed. So, they are the most adequate people to do the crimes of the party for them. Killian argued that "For young men with few prospects, the possibility of belonging to the Party, as it is called, can be appealing when everything else is going wrong."

Hatim, the party's leader was encouraging people to go against the government saying: "The government has abandoned the people" (Lalami 17) and to believe that

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their power comes “through God, with God, and by God” (17-18). The party granted refuge to the people, especially Youssef and his friends and it becomes “a place to call home” (44). As a result of this, Youssef and his friend were victims of the party. Amin was killed during the operation and Youssef was taken to jail after that. He lost his future for the sake of something that he did not even choose and that he did not understand. Thus, this novel shows how the seeds of Islamic Fundamentalism are sown in the poor parts of Morocco and how people became involved in things they do not understand.

By this token, Lalami refuses both the secular liberal explanation (religion as the cause of violence) and the Islamist apology (religion as victim). She instead locates fundamentalism at the intersection of state withdrawal, neoliberal precarity and ideological supply, presenting Youssef less as a believer than as a young man recruited by the only social safety net available to him. This is the principal critical achievement of the appropriation: by overlaying Gatsby’s spiritual vacancy with Youssef’s ideological capture, Lalami stages a global conversation about how late capitalism manufactures, in different idioms, its own forms of unbelief and its own forms of fanaticism.

9. CONCLUSION

As a post 9/11 novel, Lalami discussed the roots of Islamic fundamentalism in her *Secret Son*. She discussed how people who live in poor villages such as Hay An Najat found their only refuge in terrorist groups. Those fundamentalists present themselves as the only saviors of the people, as the government did not take actions to help them. To show the complexity of the journey of her protagonist, Lalami relied on Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, mainly on the complex journey of Gatsby and the issues that he encountered throughout his way. She employed many themes and motifs from *The Great Gatsby* that Youssef became a prototype of Gatsby. She wanted to highlight the circumstances that led people to convert to terrorism and to

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contrast modern day Morocco to America in the roaring twenties. It can be concluded that if Gatsby and Youssef lived at the same period and place, they would end up in the same way, and vice versa. If Youssef lived in the roaring twenties and Gatsby lived in Morocco, Gatsby may end up in terrorism and Youssef may have many other possibilities in his life. So, both novels tell the same story but in different contexts.

Building on Gatsby, Lalami succeeded in turning local issues into global reality. Her approach allows Western readers to approach Moroccan realities through a familiar frame, making the Arab experience more accessible. Through Hutcheon's palimpsestic logic of indigenization and transculturation, Lalami turns Fitzgerald's national tragedy of failed self-invention into a transnational diagnosis of neoliberal abandonment, gendered class violence, and ideologically engineered radicalisation. The appropriation is therefore not imitation but counter-writing: *Secret Son* does not retell Gatsby, it answers it. In doing so, it refuses both the Orientalist framing of the Muslim terrorist as cultural essence and the liberal framing of the American Dream as universal aspiration, opening instead a critical space in which the post-9/11 Moroccan subject can be read with the same complexity, ambivalence and moral fatigue that the canon has long granted to Jay Gatsby.

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