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## IMMIGRANT IDENTITY AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN *L'ÚLTIM PATRIARCA* BY NAJAT EL HACHMI

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Najat El Hachmi's novel *L'últim patriarca* [*El último patriarca*] (Premi Ramon Llull 2008) interweaves personal experience and literary history to tell a story not only of immigration but also of female self-realization.<sup>1</sup> The novel focuses on the patriarch's daughter who retells her father's immigration experience and links it inevitably to her own coming of age story. *L'últim patriarca* is a complex novel that explores the difficulties of assimilation but at the same time shows the change that cultural hybridity can bring, thus ending a vicious cycle of culturally embedded misogyny and violence toward women. Through the use of intertextuality, specifically Mercè Rodoreda's *La plaça del Diamant* (1962), El Hachmi presents gender inequality as a cross-cultural phenomenon and not rooted in any one tradition. The novel proposes that immigration with all of its inherent complexities and sacrifices provides an opportunity for women not to seek integration but rather to formulate a new, more empowered identity.

Identity politics in recent Spanish narrative written by immigrants has become an important field of study as it provides a myriad of perspective on the migratory experience. Cristián Ricci writes about several authors who "reject the idea of monolithic identities" ("African" 203) in order to construct more complex narratives of cultural intersection. While Ricci takes a broad look at literature in Spain by Moroccan, Berber and Equatorial Guinean writers, I will focus on women's narrative that explores the compounding complexities of identity that emerge when giving voice to female experience. In El Hachmi's case, Catalan is the tool used to reword and rework concepts of family but it is only a springboard for the narrative that goes beyond the local to address universal problems of female/male relationships and social constructs that dominate her work. In *L'últim patriarca* sexual and gender identity establishes the grounds on which the female immigrant experience unfolds and defines how women relate to others.

The intertext *La plaça del Diamant* works on several levels in El Hachmi's work and, perhaps most importantly, it creates a dialogue between literary interpretations of female experience in Catalunya during the twentieth century. The references to marriage and cultural conditions for women that appear in both works create a literary bridge between post-war Barcelona and twenty-first century urban sprawl. Within the novelistic genre, intertextuality creates an automatic space for the principal narrative within literary traditions as references and allusions to other titles, plots, and characters infuse the narrative with a sense of history and literary legacy. By incorporating intertexts within the narrative, El Hachmi is at once perpetuating a narrative legacy that begins with the origins of the novel, but the intertext also politicizes the work pointing to the great divide between Moroccan and Catalan literary histories. As Roland Barthes explains: "the metaphor of the Text is that of the *network*; if the Text extends itself, it is as a result of a combinatory systematic" (161). The text network does not just refer to other literature but depends on the open dialogue between ideologies and eras. The narrative conversation within *L'últim patriarca* depends on *La plaça del Diamant* to weave the landscape of female experience. In this way, the text breaks down seemingly impenetrable barriers between national

identities placing female experience as the central commonality. El Hachmi claims in an interview that through literature “se pueden conciliar mundos que parecen irreconciliables” (Dalmases s/p).

In “A Landscape of Relations: Peninsular Multiculturalism and the Avatars of Comparative Literature,” Antonio Monegal argues, following Homi Bhabha, that culture itself is a mesh of intertextualities: “Culture is not seen as unitary, not even as a binary opposition between the one and the other, but as a process of enunciation of a relational kind, which could also be called an intertextual process- or, more accurately, a process of interaction” (239). It is from the “in between” spaces that meaning arises out of difference and therefore culture cannot be considered a binary system of reconciliation or recognition between a subject and the “other.” Therefore we can read intertextuality on several levels when dealing with representations of cultural diversity. The text itself embraces the intertext as a way of fortifying meaning and solidifying the connection between reader and writer. Clearly in El Hachmi’s case, Rodoreda’s work is not only representative of Catalan literary history but it also speaks from the margins about the distinctly female struggle with all kinds of political, economical, sexual, and social hierarchies. The political nature of both Rodoreda and El Hachmi’s work elevates the textual relationship to one of reaction and interaction. The cultural complexities expressed by the young narrator of *L’últim patriarca* address issues of hybridity from a distinctly female perspective, and in this space of gender identity the cultural intertext emerges. Following Barthes’s textual network, *L’últim patriarca* becomes the “in-between space- that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha qtd. in Monegal 239). In the novel at hand, intertextuality is both literary and cultural as it weaves together national difference, sex, gender, and the many manifestations or absences of female autonomy.

El Hachmi’s narrator sets up parallels between Rodoreda’s character, Colometa, and her father, her mother, and later with her own experience as a young woman coming of age in a destructive domestic atmosphere. *L’últim patriarca* is divided in two parts that tell the story of Mimoun, the patriarch of a family from a small town in Morocco. The first section of the novel recounts Mimoun’s youth focusing on specific moments of trauma that influence his behavior as a grown man. Once Mimoun leaves Morocco and relocates to a suburb of Barcelona he becomes Manel, his Catalan alter ego who works hard, despite his addiction to alcohol, and eventually brings his family to join him. The second part of the novel incorporates the coming of age of Mimoun’s oldest daughter into the story of his demise as the patriarch of the family. Her voice narrates the entire novel recounting all of the details of her father’s life in the first part and then telling her own tale of dislocation and isolation in the second part. While the first part of the novel deals primarily with physical travel, leaving home and struggling in a foreign land, the second part recounts the psychological journey of a young woman coming to terms with her Moroccan cultural heritage that she cannot fully understand. The structure of the novel emphasizes men’s mobility and freedom seen in the first part and the strict regulation of female movement in the second. It is precisely because of her limited exposure to the outside world that our narrator begins to write, for through writing she finds the freedom to express herself.

The presence of *La plaça del Diamant* throughout El Hachmi’s novel emerges through direct allusions as well as in more subtle ways. The narrator’s father has a dovecote in the house (194) and she explains “La mare a vegades semblava la Colometa en comptes de la Mila, de tant com havia netejat els excrements secs de damunt els taulons de fusta. . .Només que ella no venia de cap guerra, semblava” (199) [“A veces madre parecía Colometa en vez de Mila, de

tanto que había limpiado los excrementos secos de encima de los tablones de madera...Sólo que ella no venía de ninguna guerra, o al menos eso parecía” (203)].<sup>2</sup> The narrator compares her mother to Colometa cleaning up after the doves but notes that her mother didn't have to survive a war. Of course, this offhanded remark is to be read ironically in that Mila, just like Colometa, must survive her own domestic war and the rupture and separation found in both postwar Spain and in the immigrant experience.

The act of naming in order to define and possess something links the fundamental structures of the two novels. In El Hachmi's novel *Mimoun*, the patriarch of the family, arrives in Barcelona, or *Barciluna* as it is written evoking the foreign tongue mispronouncing the name of the city (78) [81]. Barcelona is the destination that promises fortune and prosperity but at the same time is transformed in the phonetic expression that dislocates the idealization of Spain onto a problematic reality rooted in linguistic difference. Mimoun also notices immediately the stink of pigs and his uncle explains disgustedly how Spaniards eat so much pork (81) [85]. He is also surprised to see animal skins hanging to dry to make shoes, purses and jackets (81) [85]. Mimoun's negative reaction to the omnipresence of pork and pig products presents an alternative viewpoint of Spanish traditional food and suggests that the most common elements of any society, such as clothing and food, become strange or even repulsive to people not accustomed to the habits. But perhaps the most notable subversion of identity comes with the renaming of Mimoun himself. Once he has found a job working at a construction site he is notified that his boss cannot pronounce his name and “diu que a partir d'ara et diràs Manel” (83) [“dice que a partir de ahora te llamarás Manel” (87)]. Mimoun renounces his Tamazight name and at once acquires a Catalan name and identity that places him among the rest of the immigrant workers that the boss has appropriated and named.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly in *La plaça del Diamant*, the protagonist Natàlia is renamed “Colometa” by her boyfriend, Quimet. When she protests and tells him she already has a name “riu i va dir que jo només em podia dir un nom: Colometa” (21) [se volvió a reír y dijo que yo sólo podía tener un nombre: Colometa” (11)].<sup>4</sup> Of course the circumstances are quite different in that Mimoun's case is one of language and adaptation while the other is clearly a gendered hierarchy where the male places claim on the female by naming her and thus claiming her as his own. However, in both examples the shaping of an individual identity stems in part from how subjects consider and appropriate the identity of another. In the case of Mimoun/Manel and Natàlia/Colometa, the name does not represent a hybridization of two sides of the same person but a break with the past and the beginning of a new era. For Mimoun this means learning Catalan and erasing difference so that he can prosper economically and for Natàlia it means leaving behind her youth and her boyfriend, Pere, to embark on a journey of marriage and motherhood with Quimet.

The act of naming in order to reestablish identity in El Hachmi's novel transfers from Mimoun to his daughter, the narrator. In the second part of the novel, when the narrative voice turns to her own story to tell how she survived the violence and oppression of her father, she assumes his power through writing and through discovering her sexuality. Once she reaches puberty, her father forbids her to leave the house alone and so she passes her time doing chores with her mother and spending time alone, thus she becomes an avid reader and uses literature to escape her confined existence: “Sort en vaig tenir, de *Mirall trencat*, de *l'Ariadna al laberint grotesc*, de les memòries del Tísner, de Faulkner, de Goethe, de totes les lectures que passaven per les meves mans” (286) [“Suerte tuve de *Espejo roto*, de *Adriana en el laberinto*

*grotesco*, de las memorias de Tísner, de Faulkner, de Goethe, de todas las lecturas que pasaban por mis manos” (291)]. She reads word for word the Catalan dictionary and at the end of every chapter of the novel several words from the dictionary appear that suggest her progression through the alphabet. This act of reading the dictionary symbolically places her in a position of linguistic superiority over her father, for he never learned the language but was forced to change his name to the Catalan Manel. The words from the Catalan dictionary provide a constant reminder at the end of each chapter of the progress toward the goal of self-expression. The acquisition of language suggests both a conformity and assimilation into Catalan culture and at the same time it is what separates her from her father and family. The Catalan words identify her as different in an effort to fight against the isolation and estrangement imposed on her by her father. Through language and literature the narrator finds a space to metaphorically travel and escape the confines of the family home.

The narrator, who ironically remains nameless, also has a precarious relationship with her mother because she considers her a victim of a patriarchal marriage but at the same time recognizes that it is indeed women that create the great patriarch. “Molts dels èxits del gran patriarca no s’explicarien si no fos per les dones que l’han envoltat sempre i que li treien – i encara li treuen- les castanyes del foc: l’àvia, les tietes, i més tard, la mare” (98) [Muchos de los éxitos del gran patriarca no se explicarían si no fuera por las mujeres que lo han rodeado siempre y que le sacaban-y todavía le sacan- las castañas del fuego: la abuela, las tías y, más tarde, madre” (102)]. The implication is that the entire social structure or sex/gender system (179), to use Gayle Rubin’s term, promotes inequality between the sexes. Rubin writes about the interdependence of politics, economy, and sexuality in capitalist society from an anthropological view and she grounds her ideologies in what she reads as clearly sexist and misogynist intellectual debates held by psychoanalysts and anthropologists such as Freud and Levi-Strauss. Rubin points to the formulation of a sex/gender system that imposes the concept of gender on the sexes and she insists that gender is a “product of the social relations of sexuality” (179). The narrator of the novel begins to see the constructed nature of her family unit and of the patriarch’s power, realizing that her potential to usurp the paradigm resides in her own sexuality. The oppressive marriage and family unit is the same sex/gender system that bears down on Natàlia/Colometa and forces her into two marriages that define her existence and shape her identity.<sup>5</sup>

In one episode when Mimoun has returned from Catalunya to see his family he beats his wife for having left the house while he was away. The narrator describes her mother as voiceless, “La mare no en sabia de cridar, i cridar l’hauria ajudat” (111) [“Madre no sabía gritar, y gritar la hubiera ayudado” (115)]. The enforced silence and resulting inability to scream out for help during the scene represent on a symbolic level the general nature of the hierarchical relationship between Mimoun and his wife. She is voiceless and cannot condemn the violence that ensues nor can she confront the barriers created around her that limit her movement. The lack of mobility for women surfaces again when the young narrator finds herself relegated to her room once she has reached puberty. However, even though the family structure in the novel may reflect certain Arabic cultural expectations of women within the family and marriage, the dichotomy is not exclusively African/European or Muslim/Christian cultures. Within this dialogue between gendered expectations, El Hachmi establishes common ground between Catalan and Moroccan women as both Mimoun’s wife and various Catalan girlfriends are subjugated to his violence and humiliation. While the text explores cultural

differences and questions the validity of the notion of hybridity, it foremost gives voice to female experience through the intertextuality and creates a kind of literary female solidarity.

When the narrator's mother finally challenges her husband on his infidelity and demands that "o la deixes, o et deixo" (222) [o la dejas, o te deixo" (226)] the narrator reacts with surprise and admiration. "Jo no em vaig creure el que sentia, però era la meva mare que parlava, era Mila que s'havia afartat de netejar capelles i relíquies, la Colometa que fugia de tot per trobar-se." (222) [No podía creerme lo que oía, pero era madre quien hablaba, era Mila quien se había hartado de limpiar capillas y reliquias, la Colometa que huía de todo para encontrarse" (226-27)]. Her mother's indignation that leads her to confront the patriarch identifies her as an individual for the first time in the novel. She is Mila, her proper name, not "madre" or "mujer" but in the act of speaking out she regains her identity as a person rather than as a role she plays within the family and society. Also, she is given a literary counterpart, Colometa, that inflates the moment with meaning and significance because Colometa acts as a resource for the reader to fill in the blanks of Mila's untold story. The suffering that Colometa endures in *La plaça del Diamant* is revealed and released in the moment she finally finds her voice and screams out in the plaça. The scream is the act of articulating suffering that saturates the text at this point as well as in El Hachmi's novel when Mila is fed up and speaks out and in this way Colometa and Mila's experiences converge and blend.<sup>6</sup> The inability or ability to scream and release inner tension links the two fictional characters.

At the end of this scene, Mila demands that her husband's lover, Rosa, come in the apartment. Rosa is waiting outside in the car for Mimoun to take her out, as her constant presence and relationship with Mimoun have always been tolerated. Rosa enters the apartment and Mila shows her the new baby that she recently had with Mimoun and tells her to get out and never return. Mila then slaps Rosa violently across the face and the narrator admits "jo vaig admirar la mare per ser més que una Mila, més que una Colometa, per ser de debò" (223) ["yo admiré a madre por ser más que Mila, más que Colometa, por ser auténtica" (228)]. In an interesting twist of identity politics it is the narrator who must speak for her mother and translate to Rosa as her mother does not speak Catalan or Castilian Spanish and so she actively participates in the conversation and feels "més dura que mai" (224) [más dura que nunca" (228)] as she watches the tears stream down Rosa's face. Mother and daughter adopt the same emotional hardness in the face of the "other" woman and this doubling of identity is compounded if we consider the physical display of violence as a reenactment of Mimoun's behavior. Thus, in order to speak out, Mila uses the same force that the patriarch uses to silence her but ironically the narrator sees this as a more authentic side of her mother. At this moment the text complicates notions of digression and power by equating physical violence with autonomy. The inversion of roles that places Mila in the "masculine" position of authority when she hits Rosa does not subvert the gender hierarchy that oppresses women but it does call into question the ways in which women can express power and autonomy within the system. The narrator will try several ways to assert herself and develop her own sense of identity yet she will find that ultimately the locus of female autonomy resides in claiming her own sexuality.

One way in which the narrator tries to separate herself from her family is by wearing the headscarf traditional to Muslim women. She acts not out of religious devotion "no tenia pensada fer cap revolució musulmana" (228) ["no había pensado hacer ninguna revolución musulmana" (232)] but to physically mark herself as different. The great irony of this need to be different lies in the father's desire to assimilate into Catalan society and not to be seen as different.



The young girl likes wearing the scarf and claims that when she went to market wearing it “*vaig sentir les mirades estranyades de les botigueres que em coneixien*” (228) [*percibí las miradas asombradas de los tenderos que me conocían*] (232). Her father, however, reprimands her saying “*no surtis més amb aquest drap al cap*” (228) [*no salgas más con ese trapo en la cabeza*] (232) affirming his control over her movement and physical appearance. The pleasure the girl experiences wearing the headscarf stems from her desire to be different but also from her need to be seen. She is invisible to her father as an individual and exists in his eyes as a symbol of the family’s honor and so she is treated as a liability he must control. When she does wear the headscarf again in direct defiance of her father’s wishes, he chases her and beats her on the street with the clientele of the neighborhood bar watching. Instead of being “seen” as a Muslim woman wearing the headscarf, she is “seen” by the neighbors as a disobedient girl, beaten down publicly in the street. This scene is pivotal in the novel because a public act of humility (wearing the headscarf) provokes a humiliating public beating, and the irony inherent in a father prohibiting his daughter to wear the headscarf draws on the complex identity politics of assimilation and differentiation that plagues the family. Furthermore, her efforts to cover her hair, symbolic of female sensuality, only engender rage in her father because she goes against his command but her intentions are to cover herself so as not to attract the male gaze. At this moment the narrator realizes that whatever she might choose to do, no matter how culturally acceptable, if it goes against her father’s wishes, she will be beaten. So the violence that governs her existence is not rooted in a specific cultural heritage but it is rooted in a gender hierarchy based on physical power and perceived control. Shortly after this episode she begins to explore her sexuality and finds that, through knowledge of her own body, she can destroy the power of the patriarch.

When our young narrator begins to menstruate her world changes and she becomes aware that her sexuality threatens her father’s control of her. She claims: “*Era la sang que ho havia espatllat tot. La sang de fer-te dona que fa que tots estiguin més per tu, que si has de fer això, no fer això, que si no pots saltar massa fort, ni muntar al cavall ni obrir massa les cames, que vés a saber*” (264) [*Había sido la sangre la que lo había estropeado todo. La sangre de hacerte mujer que hace que todos estén pendientes de ti, que si tienes que hacer esto, no aquello, que si no puedes saltar demasiado fuerte, ni montar a caballo ni abrir mucho las piernas, que vete tú a saber*] (268). Once her period arrives she must stay in and help her mother with all of the chores, she is prohibited to go on fieldtrips with her classmates, and she even receives a beating for accidentally catching a glimpse of a shirtless man on television (267) [271]. However, one day on her way home from school she finally meets a young man, also from Morocco, and begins a secret affair.

Her sexual awakening is paired with the stress and fear of the clandestine nature of her relationship that culminates in the pain and loss she experiences when she has sex for the first time. The narrator must lie to her mother and she fears her father will see her with her boyfriend and kill them both. When the couple has decided to eventually marry, the narrator feels that it is time for her first sexual experience. After smoking some hash she finally relaxes enough both mentally and physically to go through with the act of penetration. She describes it as both a physical and emotional pain: “*Vaig plorar sanglotant com si encara tingués dos anys, però no era només el dolor, era que ja m’havia cavat una fossa a mi mateixa o era que començava a teixir el camí cap a l’enderrocament definitiu del patriarcat*” (303) [*Lloré, sollocé como si aún tuviera dos años, pero no era sólo el dolor, era que ya me había cavado una fosa a mí misma o era que empezaba a tejer el camino hacia la derrota definitiva del patriarcado*] (308). The two revelations in this passage both deal with loss but there is also a sense of triumph and a profound sense of melancholy. As Tabea Alexa

Linhard has pointed out: “postcolonial ghosts materialize, revealing a profound melancholia that, I would argue, lies at the core of any literary engagement with immigration in recent Spanish literature” (2). The melancholia and yearning for the past stems from migratory movement toward change and adaptation. In El Hachmi’s novel the separation from past traditions of marriage, virginity, and of sexual innocence collides with the brazen movement toward liberated ideas of sexuality. However, the narrator describes the experience in contradictory and somewhat disturbing terms. She cries out in pain but suggests that perhaps she owes her tears more to the emptiness she feels inside as she describes herself physically as an empty grave, suggesting death and decay. The abject notion of her sexuality resides in the unknown darkness of female sexuality so adeptly captured in the ironic metaphor of the birth canal as a grave. The contradiction inherent in the image produces the sadness or melancholia that permeates the scene for she gains sexual knowledge, which in this case is power over the strict control of her family, yet at the same time she feels empty and hollow.

The second revelation or perhaps the real cause of her tears stems from the realization that the sexual act defies everything her father has commanded of her and she begins to weave the path toward the destruction of the patriarch. The destruction of her father’s control over her must incorporate the loss of her innocence, the loss of family, and literally the loss of her virginity. The destruction of the father, the name of the father in Lacanian terms, can also be seen as a rebirth of the narrator’s identity in that she sees the possibility to move out from under the patriarch’s oppressive control. Julia Kristeva writes: “One does not give birth in pain, one gives birth to pain” (167) and so our narrator gives birth to herself and to pain and she links the sadness of loss to the destruction of patriarchal hegemony.

The final chapter of the novel is titled “Una venjança en tota regla” [“Una venganza en toda regla”] and implies that the narrator finally gets revenge for all that she has suffered at the hands of her father and at the hands of patriarchal society in general. Again, the breakthrough for the narrator’s sense of identity and purpose resides in her control of her sexuality. Her socially liberal uncle works in Morocco as an academic and plans to stay with her at her apartment in Barcelona on his way to Paris for a conference. When they are alone in her apartment she considers sleeping with him to get back at her father. She thinks “Jo no era Mercè Rodoreda, però havia d’acabar amb l’ordre que ja feia temps que em perseguia” (331) [“Yo no era Mercè Rodoreda, pero debía acabar con el orden que hacía tanto tiempo que me perseguía” (336)]. The relationship between the novel and the intertext has shifted from the character Colometa to the author Rodoreda. While we have seen how the narrator’s father and mother are both compared to Colometa at various points in the novel, the narrator compares herself not to Colometa but to Rodoreda for several reasons. It is at this point that the narrator feels in control of her destiny and empowered to “write” her future. It is also a well known fact that Mercè Rodoreda was married off to her uncle 12 years her senior on her twentieth birthday. The resulting marriage was brief and, even though she had a son, Rodoreda left Catalunya with a group of writers that included her lover Armand Obiols.<sup>7</sup> The overt reference to the relationship with her uncle and breaking with an established order link the narrator to Rodoreda not only through the texts but also through life experience. By aligning herself with Rodoreda’s novel and with her persona, the narrator textualizes and contextualizes her own digression.

The narrator makes a conscious decision in the final scene to defy her father and reject her debt to the historical role of daughter within the traditional family unit. She leaves the shades up and the light on in an attempt to not only expose herself sexually but perhaps even more boldly to expose her command of her own body and reveal her

empowerment. Thus the sexual act itself is not precisely the location of power but the authority shown in the narrator's insistence to announce it, flaunt it, and expose her body as a place of identity is empowering. Cristián Ricci observes that the use of the body in this way injects it with new meaning and that it possesses "la capacidad de subvertir, pervertir e intensificar los intercambios sociales" (Ricci *L'últim* 85). Her uncle asks her: "Ho has fet mai pel darrere?" (El Hachmi 331) ["lo has hecho alguna vez por detrás?" (El Hachmi 336)] and she consents, which clearly demarcates her body as a sexual space and dislocates it and sex from the traditionally necessary act of procreation. Her biological womanhood does not come into play as the penetration here signifies the opposite of fertilization and resulting procreation. (Ricci *L'últim* 85). While they are having sex on the floor, the *videoportero* in her apartment comes up and she sees her father's face watching her, witnessing the sexual act. In this moment she realizes that she has imposed a deathly silence on her father, for he will never be able to speak of what he sees, the knowledge of her sexuality will destroy him. The father's trauma stems directly from his own relationship of power over his daughter, for it is not the sex that startles him, but it is seeing his daughter, the icon of purity, obedience, and chastity, in a sexual context that destroys all of his notions of gendered social order. The narrator explains that her father will never be able to understand or explain: "una traició tan fonda no l'hauria imaginada ni ell i encara menys venint d'una filla tan estimada" (332) ["ni él hubiera imaginado nunca una traición tan honda, a aún menos viniendo de una hija tan amada" (337)].

Turning to Rodoreda's text once again, it seems fitting that, at the end of *La plaça del Diamant*, Natàlia is in bed with her husband and in an act that has been interpreted as sexual, she sticks her finger in his bellybutton so that "no se'm buidés tot ell per allí" (251) ["no me vaciase todo él por allí" (254)]. In this subtle and highly symbolic "penetration" Natàlia does in some ways assert herself and a sexual identity. Maureen Tobin Stanley has analyzed the end of the novel as a return to the maternal, pre-oedipal stage that blurs sex/gender lines of hierarchy and authority. The final scene reinforces the interdependence of the two characters in lieu of the dominance demonstrated in her first marriage to Quimet. Tobin Stanley writes about the apparent sexual equality that allows Natàlia to arrive at a sense of autonomy: "En la casa que comparten Natàlia y Antoni, las necesidades físicas y básicas de sustento y cobijo se cumplen, igual que las psicológicas. En este entorno maternal cada miembro de la familia recibe el amor y el apoyo que requiere para poder actualizarse" (Tobin Stanley 132). This maternal love also eschews issues of motherhood as Antoni has been left impotent from an old war wound. Thus Natàlia's sensuality and the overt sexuality in the final scene of *L'últim* explicitly avoid the accepted manifestations of women's sexuality that would hopefully result in procreation.

Nevertheless, the differences between the final scenes of the two novels at hand are obviously extremely important. But it is significant that the narrator in El Hachmi's tale chooses to align herself with the author Rodoreda at this final moment and declare that her "mission" goes beyond that of a specific feminine literary history. The sexuality expressed in both scenes is empowering to the female characters involved and reveals the importance of the body as a mediator between social, cultural, and political structures that reinforce feminine oppression and often hinder individual autonomy.

The intertextuality in *L'últim patriarca* embraces the notion of hybridity in that it represents a female literary solidarity as well as an alternate view of assimilation. In a culturally complicated context, the narrator is able to reformulate her sense of self and ultimately divest herself of the overbearing control exerted on her by her father, but

perhaps more so by a hierarchical gender/sex system that continuously places her at the disempowered bottom of the heap. Even though I have pointed out passages in the novel that directly refer to Rodoreda's novel, I think the spirit of the intertext resides in the semiotics of the novel that guide us through the development of the narrator's character in her search for autonomy. Barthes affirms that "the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *always read*: they are quotations without inverted commas" (160). The presence of a rich feminist Catalan literary history pulsates throughout *L'últim patriarca*, and references to *La plaça del Diamant* in the text are the concrete manifestation of El Hachmi's awareness of the importance of the literary past.

### Notes

1. Najat El Hachmi was born in Morocco in 1979 and immigrated to Catalunya with her family when she was 8 years old. She studied Arabic literature at the University of Barcelona and has published two works. *Jo també soc Catalana* (2004) is an autobiographical account of her immigration experience and the novel *L'últim patriarca* (2008) was awarded the prestigious Premi de Lletres Catalanes Ramon Llull.
2. All quotes in Castilian are from the 2008 translation of El Hachmi's novel by Rosa Maria Prats.
3. Tamazight is the language of the Amazigh culture of Northern Morocco, also referred to as Berber. (Ricci "L'últim" 71).
4. All Castilian quotes are from Enrique Sordo's translation of Rodoreda's novel.
5. See Everly for an analysis of marriage in *La plaça del Diamant*.
6. Colometa leaves her home in the middle of the night and wanders the streets, winding up at the plaça del Diamant. This is where she met her first husband Quimet and where the story begins and ends. She explains: "vaig fer un crit d'infern. Un crit que devia fer molts anys que duia a dintre" (248) ["di un grito de infierno. Un grito que debía hacer muchos años que llavaba dentro" (250)].
7. For more complete biographical information see Ibarz.

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