

## Research Article

# THE TERM "HARATIN" IN TAFILALT: FROM THE CONTROVERSY OF NAMING TO PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

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### ABSTRACT

The issue of origin in the Tafilalt region of Morocco is a fundamental topic that requires in-depth studies to understand the diverse Filaali fabric, with the aim of deconstructing racially charged concepts, such as the term "Haratin." This derogatory term, inherited through generations, has remained ingrained in the Filaali dialect, often without awareness of its psychological and social consequences. This paper seeks to unveil the psychological and sociological dimensions associated with the use of this term, while guiding the concerned reader toward refraining from using such expressions and distancing themselves from racial classifications. In this regard, the study goes beyond exploring the historical roots of the term "Haratin" to shed light on the detrimental behaviors that have resulted from the use of these concepts — and continue to do so — over the course of several decades up to the present day, in an environment characterized by ethnic diversity and ongoing coexistence, despite the challenges posed by cultural pluralism.

**Keywords:** Haratins, Tafilalt, Impact, Racism.

### INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the term has a significant impact on reality, whether it is agreed upon by the public or not. It is an inseparable part of language and a means of communication and understanding between individuals. It is a "linguistic symbol that indicates a mental conception" (Al-Kafawi, 1992). Furthermore, it is not limited to a specific group but encompasses all sections of society, regardless of their cultural, scientific, or civilizational levels. Naturally, the term transcends its superficial aspects to deeper and more meaningful dimensions, reflecting aspects of social and cultural reality in general. In Tafilalt, in the southeastern region of Morocco, the term *Haratin* goes beyond its superficial linguistic meaning to acquire deep social and psychological dimensions. The term is not just an ordinary concept used to name something previously agreed upon; rather, it expresses a clear distinction between individuals with darker skin and those with lighter skin. The "Sharif" (noble) is placed in one category, the "free" in another, and the "Haratini" in yet another.

Thus, the term "Haratini" is frequently heard in Tafilalt, becoming part of the local lexicon. For those who use this term, whether they are "free" or "noble"—according to the prevailing social classification in the region—it may seem like a passing expression, one that has become entrenched in everyday speech, to the point where even the "Haratini" themselves accept it as natural. However, the undeniable truth is that this term carries a condescending view of this wide segment of the Tafilalt community.

The use of this term in both speech and writing embodies an overt racial dimension. However, addressing this issue requires an approach that goes beyond surface-level analysis, touching on its semantic, psychological, and social aspects to understand its implications and effects on the social fabric. To address this subject, this study relies on two main aspects:

- The first is theoretical, encompassing the research problem, its significance, objectives, boundaries, and methodology.
- The second is practical, examining the debate surrounding the term *Haratin* as a second-class social group—referred to by some as such—who lived in the oases of Tafilalt. The study attempts to go beyond the term's immediate meaning to uncover the psychological and social effects it has. This was achieved by interviewing a sample of dark-skinned friends in the region, initiating discussions with them to reveal hidden realities and work towards a society free from all forms of discrimination.

The research concludes with a set of recommendations drawn from societal realities, highlighting the dangers of using this term in everyday conversation and calling for its cessation due to its negative consequences for both individuals and society as a whole.

### FIRST: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

**Research Problem:** Throughout my educational career, particularly during my time in the primary and secondary schools in the Tafilalt region in southeastern Morocco, I became increasingly aware of deep sensitivities toward certain terms that carry inherited racial dimensions passed down through generations. This observation, which seemed vague at the time, became clearer after more than a decade, when the views of several friends on the manifestations of racial discrimination worldwide, such as racism in the United States, led the discussion to shift toward forms of racism in the region. These forms are evident in the social classification of individuals in Tafilalt into three categories: Sharif (noble), Free, and Haratini. This prompted the need to study this issue, which can be framed by the following question:

How does the use of the term "Haratini," with its racial connotation, affect the psychological structure of individuals and social relationships?

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**Research Questions:**

- **First Question:** What debate has been—and continues to be—generated by the term *Haratin* in the Tafilalt region?
- **Second Question:** What are the psychological and social effects of using the term *Haratin* as a racial classification in the Tafilalt region?

**Study Objectives:**

- To raise awareness among individuals and communities about avoiding the use of derogatory terms.
- To understand the manifestations of inherited discrimination in the Tafilalt region.
- To study the psychological and social impact of discrimination on individuals.
- To promote social awareness of breaking away from all forms of discrimination and preventing them from being passed on to future generations.

**Significance of the Study:** The significance of this study lies in shedding light on a central issue related to racial bias in the Tafilalt region, an issue that has largely remained confined to oral traditions passed down through generations. The study also aims to contribute to changing the demeaning perception of the "Haratini" group, recognizing them as an essential and vital part of the social fabric of Tafilalt.

**Previous Studies:**

The study conducted by Abdelaziz Gordo (2014), titled "*Integrating Haratin within the Slaves of Bukhari*," aimed to analyze the historical text concerning the debate surrounding the attempt to integrate the Haratin into the royal court during the reign of Sultan Moulay Ismail. This integration led to divisions in opinion between supporters and opponents. The researcher concluded that, during this period, the Haratin enjoyed a legal status similar to that of free individuals, but they continued to suffer from social discrimination and marginalization. This contradiction reflects the gap between theoretical laws and actual practices in society.

In his 2021 study, researcher Habib Al-Asri sought to answer several key questions. The first part of the study focused on exploring the concept of "Haratin" from both a linguistic and terminological perspective. The second part examined the origins of this group, attempting to determine whether their roots were Moroccan or extended beyond Morocco. The researcher also addressed the attributes associated with the term *Haratini*, questioning whether they were linked to skin color or due to the nature of the roles this group performed, such as hard labor and working for the elites and prominent figures of Tafilalt (Al-Asri & Stito, 2021). Al-Asri concluded that the "Haratin" group settled in the region before the Roman presence in Morocco and was spread across the oases of southeastern Morocco, where they were considered a second-class social group.

In an unpublished field study conducted by Samir Saidi (2020), he presented the results of his research on ethnic relations in the Tafilalt region. He conducted interviews with various groups in the area to provide a comprehensive view of the ethnic situation in southeastern Morocco. Saidi concluded that the cultural environment in the region is full of tensions and conflicts between individuals and ethnic groups, creating an atmosphere marked by prejudice. "This has led the Haratin to adopt various strategies to change the image of their reference group" (Saidi, 2020). He also emphasized that this topic

requires further studies and research for a more accurate understanding.

**Commentary on Previous Studies:**

Researchers have often approached the issue of *Haratin* from a strictly historical perspective, focusing on the ethnic origins of this group, especially in the Mauritanian context, which still faces significant challenges in human rights. However, the proposed study focuses on the psychological and social effects of the term *Haratin*. In Morocco, this issue has rarely been explored from a humanitarian angle. Investigating the history of the term and the origins of this group cannot eliminate the derogatory view they are subjected to in Tafilalt. Therefore, the current study concentrates on the effects of using this term within the Tafilalt society, which remains entrenched in classifications based on race and skin color.

**Study Boundaries:**

- **Thematic Boundaries:** The study focuses on the term *Haratin* in the Tafilalt region of Morocco, aiming to analyze its psychological and social impact on this group, raise awareness about the dangers of using the term, and encourage its discontinuation.
- **Human Boundaries:** The study included a sample of *Haratin* individuals from the Tafilalt region to offer insights from real-world experiences, through interviews with people belonging to this group.
- **Spatial Boundaries:** The study is confined to the Tafilalt region and its surrounding areas.
- **Methodology:**
- Based on the nature of the topic, which requires collecting data aimed at investigating the impact of the term *Haratin* on the people of Tafilalt, the research adopted a qualitative approach. This approach involved conducting personal interviews to gather opinions and insights, with the goal of providing data that would deepen the discussion.

**SECOND: THE APPLIED FRAMEWORK****1. The Term "Haratin" and the Naming Controversy**

The use of the term "Haratini" carries an intention to belittle the individual and diminish their dignity, reflecting a societal view that perpetuates the superiority of white people over those with dark skin. For centuries, the inhabitants of Tafilalt and its neighboring regions have divided the Fhilali society into hierarchical categories that distinguish them by social status. At the top are the Sharifs, followed by the Free (Ahrar), then the Haratin, and lastly, the slaves. Despite the efforts of international organizations to combat racial discrimination, the people of the region continue to cling to classifications that reflect their social ranks and highlight ethnic and skin color differences. Terms like "Sharif" and "Haratini" are often used, while the word "free" is implicitly understood as a given, rarely used in daily conversation. Conversely, the word "slave" has been intertwined with "Haratini," as both terms are associated with those of darker skin, despite the obvious differences between them. The Haratini is known for a light brown complexion, while the slave typically has a much darker skin tone. Nonetheless, the locals have merged the two terms into one, and "Haratini" is often used as a synonym for "slave." Scholars have debated the origin of the term "Haratini." Some have linked it to the ancient human, describing it as "the second free man, with the first free man being the original free man, and this ancient free man being the second, which eventually became widely used in speech and evolved into Haratini as a form of

linguistic simplification" (Abu Abbas, 2001). Others believe that the term "Haratini" was not necessarily used exclusively for people of black or African descent but sometimes included white-skinned individuals as well, depending on the nature of the work they performed and their social status. This distinction made between "Haratin" working in fields and farms and "Haratin" working in houses and palaces was noted (Alawi, 1997). There are also those who trace the term "Haratini" to its Berber origins, derived from the word "Ahrtan" (Walnashr, 1995), meaning a hybrid or mixed-race person. According to Mohamed al-Mokhtar Soussi, it refers to the second or recent free person (Soussi, 1960). Bouzidi, on the other hand, concluded that "Haratini" is a distortion of the word "Ihrdhan," which is the plural form of the Berber term "Ihradhen," meaning reddish or mixed in color (Bouzidi, 1994). Meanwhile, Meunié believes the term refers to "plowmen" or "farmers" who till and cultivate the land (Meunié, 1982). Other researchers argue that the use of "Haratin" has more of a socio-economic meaning than an ethnic one, referring to those who worked the land under the supervision of Arabs or Berbers.

Historian Allal al-Fassi posits that the terms "Haratin" and "Harathin" stem from the same phonetic root, both referring to blacks who are descendants of the region's indigenous population. Some stories suggest that the term was used to describe free individuals with dark skin, while others trace the word to "AhrarTaroun," referring to those who had recently gained their freedom. Another view holds that the term is derived from "plowmen" who arrived from Central Africa to North Africa, where they worked as farmers for landowners with white skin.

The term "Haratini" thus represents a form of modern racial discrimination against a social group, aiming primarily to marginalize individuals with dark skin and keep them in lower social positions compared to their white counterparts. Regardless of the differing opinions on the definition and connotations of the term "Haratini," the issue lies not only in understanding its meaning but also in the negative perception held by white individuals toward this group, who share the same geographical affiliation and culture of the Fhilali society. Therefore, the word "Haratini" has a profound impact on the psyche of those labeled by it, contributing to the entrenchment of social stratification from a racial perspective.

## 2 The Reality of the Term "Haratini" in Fhilali Society

The discussion began spontaneously by addressing the nature of American society, which is made up of a diverse mix of races and ethnicities, and how it has managed—despite the challenges—to build a social structure capable of achieving coexistence. However, this coexistence has not prevented the widespread spread and intensification of racism, where white racism toward black people has become a deeply ingrained phenomenon within the fabric of American society, leading to a profound social division driven by ethnic affiliations that impact various aspects of life.

The conversation quickly shifted to our region, where one of the participants pointed out that the term "Haratini" carries many negative connotations. It reflects a latent racism toward people with dark skin in the Tafilalt region. Another participant added that despite the region's rich history and acceptance of diversity, this term continues to be passed down through generations. Despite global advancements and the progress Morocco has made in human rights, the people of Fhilali society remain attached to this term, which carries a derogatory tone. In another intervention, a friend clarified that the sense of superiority and the derogatory view toward others through the use of this term represents a form of racial discrimination.

To expand and deepen the discussion, it was proposed to hold another dialogue session with a sample of six individuals with dark skin. The purpose of this was to explore the impact of this term on the Haratini group and its influence on their daily lives.

- **Study Tool:** In order to deepen the research and gather accurate information related to the issue of the term "Haratini" and its psychological and social impact on the affected group, and to achieve a deeper understanding through exploring real opinions and experiences—especially considering the sensitivity of the topic—the tool was designed to include questions directed at a group of individuals, covering two main aspects: the psychological aspect and the social aspect. The questions focused on the following areas:

**Table (1): Psychological Aspect**

| Question  | Answer   |
|---|--|
| 1-Does the term " Haratin" affect your sense of inferiority or inferiority complex?   | No, but I realize that the term carries negative connotations for some, which sometimes makes me feel marginalized.  |
| 2-Do you think this term contributes to increasing or decreasing your self-confidence?  | Yes, because I feel that I am being categorized based on my racial origin rather than my qualifications or abilities.  |
| 3-When you hear this term used in your surroundings, what psychological effect do you feel? (anger, sadness, embarrassment, or shame) | I feel embarrassed and ashamed, especially if I am in a public place or among a group where the term is used offensively.  |
| 4-Do you think the repeated use of this term affects your long-term mental health?  | Yes, if the term continues to be used frequently, it can lead to accumulated feelings of frustration, isolation, and marginalization.  |
| 5-Do you feel less valuable compared to others?   | No, because I believe my value does not depend on what others say. I deal with these terms positively and believe I am equal to everyone.  |
| 6-Is there a difference in the effect of this term between different generations in your family or environment?                       | Yes, the older generation in my family might be more affected by this term and understand it differently, while the current generation might ignore it or try to resist it.  |
| 7-What do you see as the most effective way to deal with the psychological impact of the term "Haratini"?                             | I believe the best way is awareness and education. We need to work on changing the negative associations with this term through open dialogue and education. - Dealing with this effect requires inner strength; we must teach ourselves how to confront these negative classifications with confidence and encourage equality and respect in society. |

**Table (2): Social Aspect**

| Question  | Answer   |
|---|--|
| 1- How does the term "Haratini" affect your social relationships within the community?                    | I sometimes feel marginalized or not accepted by certain groups.   |
| 2- Have you ever felt that you were treated differently or with less respect due to the use of this term? | No, I haven't felt that directly, but I know that this term carries connotations that make some people look at me differently. |
| 3- How does the use of this term affect your sense of acceptance within social groups?                    | It doesn't affect much, but sometimes I feel like I'm not welcomed in certain social groups.                                   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 4- Does the term affect relationships between families?   | Yes, it affects relationships between families, especially since it distinguishes one family from another.            |
| 5- Do you think the community is trying to pass on these negative concepts to future generations, or is there an increasing awareness to get rid of them? | Unfortunately, some people pass these negative concepts onto the next generations.                                    |
| 6- What social efforts do you think are necessary to reduce the use of this term and its negative impact?   | Spreading awareness through awareness campaigns that include schools, universities, and social media.                 |
| 7- Have you noticed any changes in the way this term is used or understood in the community over the years?   | No, I believe its use hasn't changed much, but it has become less obvious and is used more covertly than in the past. |

Regarding the term itself, signs of change have emerged in how it is used. It is now being used implicitly, reflecting a partial shift in social awareness. Although change may be slow, this shift in the term's usage indicates the beginning of a deeper understanding of its negative effects and its destructive impact on the social fabric. Nevertheless, there is still a need to continue efforts for awareness and education to change the cultural perceptions linked to this term and expand this awareness to include all sectors of society.

However, the use of the term "Haratani" remains prevalent within the Filali society, reinforcing racial discrimination, and deeply affecting the "Haratini" group, both psychologically and socially. These effects range from feelings of marginalization and isolation to deteriorating self-confidence and may lead to the breakdown of social bonds between families and groups. Nevertheless, there is hope in combating this discrimination through awareness, education, and intensifying community efforts to create a tolerant environment that accepts everyone and guarantees their rights.

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The answers provided in the previous tables reveal the impact of the term "Haratani" on people with dark skin, where respondents confirmed the presence of social discrimination that leads to feelings of marginalization. Although they do not directly feel inferior, the repeated use of this term ingrains in their minds the idea that there is a social group rejected because of its ethnic origins—specifically, the "Haratini" group. This sense of marginalization is not a fleeting feeling but rather the result of social and cultural perceptions that generate racial classifications affecting the social status of these individuals. They are aware that the term carries negative connotations that make it harder for them to integrate into various social groups.

The impact of this term on the Haratani group deepens through the psychological effect it causes, leading to a deterioration in self-confidence. It is evident that racial classification contributes to individuals seeing themselves as inferior to others based on ethnic standards unrelated to their personal qualifications or abilities. This negative self-image reinforces feelings of inferiority, which translates into lowered self-esteem. When this term is used within the social environment, its psychological effect becomes clear, as this group feels embarrassed and ashamed. Feelings of isolation and humiliation grow within their social circles as a result of years of exposure to such discriminatory patterns. Therefore, the effects of this discrimination are not confined to the psychological level but also extend to family and social relationships. The use of this term not only affects individuals but also contributes to deepening divisions between families and different groups, thereby reinforcing social divides in society. Consequently, the term deepens the gaps between individuals and families based on racial classifications, weakening social cohesion and increasing isolation between different groups. Its impact may even extend to future generations, becoming a cycle that is difficult to break.

This racial classification requires serious efforts, particularly in the fields of education and awareness. Raising awareness in schools, universities, and even through media outlets is an effective way to counter this racial discrimination. Educating society, especially the younger generation, helps correct misconceptions about this term and contributes to promoting respect for human rights and equality among individuals, regardless of their race or color, enabling the construction of a more aware society capable of resisting racial classifications. On the individual level, confronting these racial classifications with self-confidence can help alleviate the psychological and social effects of this term.

### 3 Psychological and Sociological Dimensions of the Term "Haratani"

#### • Psychological Dimension

The "Haratani" group suffers from a racial stigma based on a dual social structure that contrasts whites and blacks, where skin color becomes a criterion for differentiation. This stigma contributes to reinforcing feelings of inferiority among this group, which negatively impacts their mental health and may lead to psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression. This racism may also push individuals to adopt aggressive behaviors as a reaction to the discrimination they face.

The stigma that follows the Haratani group marginalizes them and weakens their position within the white community, leading to "social isolation and the dissolution of social bonds" (Chabo, 2017). As a result, negative reactions emerge among those targeted by this racial discrimination, manifesting as low self-esteem, feelings of humiliation, and isolation, with a profound impact on the psychological aspect. In most cases, individuals can overcome mild psychological traumas resulting from mistreatment or ordinary problems and gradually regain their well-being over time. However, deeper traumas, such as racial trauma, persist throughout life, where individuals face continuous psychological challenges. Those with strong will can overcome it, while those with fragile mental health are deeply affected, leading them into a spiral of mental disorders.

This concept can plant a deep-seated sense of inferiority, even if it is subtle and unspoken. The individual finds themselves trapped by a lack of self-worth and forms a negative self-image as a result of the ingrained inferiority associated with the habit of hearing this pejorative term. The effect of this concept goes beyond the psychological aspect, overwhelming the person with excessive unhappiness, tension, and anxiety, which may ultimately lead them to adopt an aggressive attitude toward others as a reaction to their suffering.

#### • Sociological Dimension

Such concepts significantly contribute to deepening social gaps and entrenching class structures, especially in the region. The term is not just a social label but carries implications that affect social dynamics, reinforcing structural inequalities among different groups. Additionally, the term supports the stereotypical view of the Haratani as a group linked to limited social roles, further deepening their marginalization and exclusion.

It is well-known that this group is a key part of the social fabric of the Filali community, actively contributing to the formation of the social structure through the creation of tribes spanning the Tafilalt oases. Yet, they are still treated as a second-class group, socially punished due to their race. These inhumane practices reinforce their social isolation by denying their existence as fully social beings with equal rights. This alienation becomes more apparent when they are excluded from participating in social events such as weddings and festive rituals, intensifying their sense of exclusion and marginalization.

Thus, social origin is closely related to social class in its varying ranks—an inferior class represented by the black segment and a superior class represented by the white segment. The latter group continuously strives to "maintain superiority over others, to satisfy a desire for control, or a fear of losing all of that" (Jalal, 1998). Consequently, the Haratani group is pushed to the bottom of the social hierarchy, bearing the consequences of this inequality, leading to a worsening human rights crisis that is clearly evident in their strained social status.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

To reduce the use of this discriminatory term, it is necessary to:

- Encourage the active participation of "Haratani" individuals in social events to strengthen solidarity and brotherhood.
- Raise awareness among young people about the dangers of using discriminatory terms, both in schools and in public life, to cultivate future generations that respect everyone.
- Encourage children to respect others regardless of their cultural or social backgrounds, by promoting the values of coexistence.
- Design curricula that promote the values of equality and reject all forms of discrimination, with a focus on human rights education.
- Organize awareness campaigns for parents in the region to avoid using discriminatory terms in their daily lives and replace them with more positive vocabulary.
- Provide comprehensive care for students who suffer from discrimination in educational institutions to ensure their mental health and better integration into the school environment.

## CONCLUSION

From the above, it is clear that the Filali society still preserves the customs and traditions of its ancestors, passing them down from generation to generation, which is commendable. However, unfortunately, it remains attached to classifications that divide the Filali people based on their origin and skin color, presenting a bleak image that contradicts the noble human principles that have no color or nationality, and this is a drawback. The use of the term "Haratani" in everyday discourse diminishes the value of the individual, who constantly feels inferior and belittled in terms of their personal dignity and social standing. The issue becomes more complicated when those who use these offensive terms do not recognize their profound impact, giving them no attention. The respondents in the sample confirmed the racial nature of this term, especially when it is used among people, which affects an individual's psychology and creates tensions in social relationships.

Thus, we highlighted this phenomenon from three aspects: the first is the semantic aspect of the term "Haratani" and the debate it has sparked among scholars; the second is the psychological effects this term has on the affected group (the Haratani); and the third is the harmful social effects leading to bias, hidden conflict, disputes, and

occasional clashes. Despite the fact that the study relied on a questionnaire as a tool for gathering information by interviewing a group of close friends to add realism to the issue at hand, it did not rely on preconceived hypotheses to answer the core question. It is evident that the use of this term has negative consequences and harmful effects that manifest in the daily practices of the Filali individual in the street, at school, and in cafés. However, addressing this issue can be a real entry point for reducing the spread of such terms or at least mitigating their use. For, neither color nor origin should be a criterion for differentiation, but rather piety and knowledge, as mentioned in the Quran: "*Allah raises those among you who have believed and those who were given knowledge, by degrees.*" (Quran 58:11)

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