



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Geographies of Space: Spatial Impositions, Circularity, and  
Memory in Malika Mokeddem's *Les homes qui marchent* and *Le  
sicle des sauterelles*

Brinda J. Mehta

Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism, Volume 4, Number 1,  
2003, pp. 1-38 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mer.2004.0011>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/51152>

# Geographies of Space

## *Spatial Impositions, Circularity, and Memory in Malika Mokeddem's Les hommes qui marchent and Le siècle des sauterelles*

The Algerian writer Malika Mokeddem has won much international acclaim for her novels set at the very gateway to the great Algerian desert, the home of her nomadic ancestors. Born in the oasis settlement of Kenadsa on the imperceptibly traced border between Morocco and Algeria, Mokeddem's ancestry includes the mixed-race Saharan tribe of the Doui Menia nomads from the southwestern region of Kenadsa.<sup>1</sup> Of black African and Arab heritage, Mokeddem integrates the thematics of racial confluence or hybridity into her writing that finds its locale and source of inspiration in the formidable desert steppe separating North Africa from the heart of the Sahara. Her novels represent the problematics of racial, geographical, and cultural interstitiality whereby in-betweenness becomes a space of resistance, ambiguity, and exile as reflected by the author's personal situation as an Algerian immigrant writer in France who nevertheless suffers from the existential angst of uprootedness. A resident of Montpellier, Mokeddem divides her time between medical practice and writing whereby the "concrete" reality of medicine provides the essential point of motivation for the more urgent creative impulse to connect with severed origins. Consequently, her writings betray the simultaneous longing for the desert home as well as the alienation and critical objectivity of truncated affiliations as symbolized by her passionate feminist critique of colonial and patriarchal ideology in Algeria from the metropolis.

[Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism 2003, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1–38]  
©2003 by Smith College. All rights reserved.

Political regressions as a symptom of “the colonial residue” and 132 years of French occupation have progressively decimated her country through violence, repression, and spatial deteriorizations wherein formerly nomadic groups such as the Doui Menia have been forced to relocate to an urban environment as a result of “modernity” and its technological encroachment on traditional space.

An appreciation of the writings of Malika Mokeddem thereby depends upon an understanding of the treatment of space in her novels in which spatial configurations embody a network of colonial, patriarchal, and gender ideologies. These ideologies highlight, sustain, and disrupt spatial binaries that include the antithetical positioning of tradition/modernity, urban/rural, writing/orality, and colonial/postcolonial, among others. In other words, how is space imagined and imaged in the narrative text as a means of constructing cultural knowledge when confronted with loss and dispossession? How does the geography of space provide a reading of “meaningful forms” that inform cultural production and a particular ontology of human existence and the universe? How are traditional Islamic architecture, natural landscape, and mnemonic ritual imbued with the meaning-loads of memory to reveal a “graphic” sociology of lived-out cultural experience? This study contends that the interplay between spatial interrogations, postcolonial feminist critique, and cultural praxis unearths the palimpsest-like “geo-positioning” of spatial mappings that sediment and fragment the text at the same time through hierarchies of spatial difference. Within these hierarchies, liminality conversely contests “otherness” and marginal representation through the resurrection of ancestral memory, oral tradition, and circular movement. The architecture of words in the novels constructs an architecture of cultural forms and vice-versa to reveal a blueprint of “narrative spatial design.” These narrative intricacies establish the complexities of space, subjectivity, and culture as primary referents of influence in Mokeddem’s work.

While a naïve nostalgia for things past borders the limits of apolitical sentimentality and cultural regression according to bell hooks, the reclaiming of the past is expedient to create a more energized present in the face of neocolonial disorder and cultural annihilation. Associating the resurrection of the past with a struggle of memory against forgetting, hooks advocates “a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from

that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (1991, 147). In other words, recovering the past should not involve the futile act of duplicating it in a contemporary instance to reinscribe communities within the confines of an archaic timelessness, but rather, according to Jean Howard, it should lead to a dismantling and resituating of the very categories that structure and im(mobilize) the past (1991, 149–59).

Mokeddem’s novels stress the importance of reconstructing the past into a more favorable politicized present to afford her characters, the women in particular, a sense of cultural authority in the face of the destabilizing forces of (neo) colonialism, globalization, and the decentralization of the Algerian self. These spatial dislocations have favored the racism of French colonialists, the cultural regression of religious conservatives, and the alienation of the French-educated Algerian intellectual.

The thematics of space provides a cartography of location for the representation of liminal constituencies whose survival is threatened by an obfuscation of origin. This study examines the link between space and the creation of a narrative of origin through the prism of oral culture as the cornerstone of archival retrieval. The excavations of the obscured remnants of the past are resurrected by the “immediacy” of a vibrant oral present, reflected through a prismatic reading of regionally specific signifiers of “local” culture that embrace a particular poetics of the desert as the site of individual and collective memory. These signifiers assume a local historicity in nature, architecture, and ritual to posit an effective symbolic and visual “reading” of desert topography in Mokeddem’s novels. The desert’s multi-layered topography creates a palimpsest-like narrative that explores the link between the circularity of movement as a focal point of connection with nature and the spirit of the cosmos/ancestors and: (a) women-centered traditions such as weaving; (b) indigenous architectural space symbolized by the labyrinthine configuration of the *medina* or old city and the circular construction of the nomadic Bedouin tent; (c) the dominance of colonial space represented by the colonial school and the segregated colonial city; (d) rituals of female repossession such as the *hadra* as well as the circular narratives of popular culture found in storytelling and music. In other words, the desert becomes the primordial cultural space of scripted knowledge that keeps “memory alive” despite the internal and external threats of amnesia and obliteration.

In her novels *Les hommes qui marchent* [The Men Who Walk] and *Le siècle des*

sauterelles [*The Century of Locusts*], Mokeddem weaves a tapestry of interwoven local motifs representing a mosaic of disparate fragments from a marginalized and rapidly disappearing heritage. She creates an immortal patchwork carpet of cultural possibilities that resist erasure and political desecration. Each textual fiber vibrates with an individual resistance story that laments the consequences of enforced assimilation to Western ideology that invariably creates a nation in-alienation as well as present-day dogmatism resulting from the loss of cultural memory. The autobiographical novel, *The Men Who Walk*, in particular, demonstrates the danger of forgetting the past by adhering to false points of reference in the unstable present that suspend the French-schooled character Leïla in an existential void until she is able to reconnect with the ancestral voice of her grandmother at the end of the novel. In other words, it is important to determine whether the postcolonial present can engender an enabling narrative of the self when the very locus of identification bears witness to a mis-recognition of signs and cultural referents.

The two novels cover different periods in Algerian history. *The Men Who Walk* (1941–1970) weaves together the triple narrative of colonial domination, the nationalist movement culminating in independence, and the story of women by integrating a familial narrative within a broader historical context. While underlying the ambiguities involved in a colonial education and the characters' struggles for individuation within imperialist and patriarchal systems of power, I contend that a more prismatic reading of the novel focuses more directly on the cultural spaces that affirm and negate the creative positioning of the self. These self-assertions reveal the simultaneous (interstitial) resistance to and the accommodation of space negotiated by the female characters in particular. On the other hand, *The Century of Locusts* (1901–1939) describes a young girl Yasmine's rite of passage as she finally "comes to voice" under the tutelage of her poet-father Mahmoud after overcoming the paralysis of traumatic memory symbolized by the brutal rape and murder of her mother. The novels constitute North African (Maghrebi) *Bildungsroman* in which the characters Leïla and Yasmine undergo painful initiation rites to reach a higher state of consciousness. Leila can only overcome her sense of discursive and psychological exile when she incorporates the ancestral voice of her grandmother into her sterile writings while Yasmine celebrates her father's memory through poetry and music and immortalizes her mother through

calligraphic inscriptions in the sand. The novels thereby recognize the post-colonial dilemma that vacillates between the act of keeping memory alive through oral tradition or braving the consequences of *errance* or wandering and psychic dislocation.

My future is a desert

.....

The cities break up

The earth is a train of dust

Only love

Knows how to marry this space .

Adonis, "The Desert"

The desert occupies a preeminent place in the Maghrebi literary and cultural imaginary as the very birthplace of Islam and the foundation of religious consciousness and transcendental thought. In fact, as Christine Jo Dykgraaf asserts, the Koran describes the world itself in terms of a vast desert-like expanse or an "even expanse" to demonstrate the interconnection between the workings of the universe and the immanence of the desert in terms of life cycles and the progression of nature (2001, 1). The desert has been viewed ambivalently as a harsh physical "aridland" as well as the very source of poetic and spiritual energy by Arab and African writers (Abou-Youssef Hayward 2001). Poets such as the Palestinian Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, the Lebanese Andrée Chedid, the Syrian Adonis, and writers such as the Senegalese Sembène Ousmane, the Sudanese Tayeb Saleh, and Malika Mokeddem herself express a very personal relationship to the desert in which they integrate the complexity of human emotions in the form of nostalgia, exile, alienation, fear, love, and liberation into the dynamism of the landscape. Mokkedem's novels evoke the power of the great Sahara (desert in Arabic) as an immovable presence in her psyche by making it a dominant trope in her writing. It is impossible to separate her work from its saharian poetics in which the desert becomes a multi-layered palimpsest of ancestral memory and cultural documentation as well as the site of "remembered" knowledge and identity transmitted orally through the physical dimensions of spatiality. Spatial transcriptions of desert culture resemble pre-discursive traces of memory located between narrative lines, permeating the entire text to reveal the undifferentiated space of the

unconscious in literary and artistic creation. As *The Men Who Walk* indicates: “How does one consider the passage of time in such an unchanging landscape. . . . No border can resist the excessiveness of the Sahara. . . . Here, space and sky devour each other indefinitely” (Mokeddem 1997, 8).<sup>2</sup> The desert acquires mythical proportions by embracing an all-encompassing expansiveness where open space and sky present an undistinguishable horizon and a resistance to territorial demarcations. The idea of a “borderless frontier” is of particular importance to Mokeddem whose life example personifies the act of transgressive border crossings in time and place, diasporic journeys of nomadic meanderings between “home” and exile that have questioned the very notion of postcolonial mobility in terms of physical space and creative possibility. In this regard, the “physicality” of the desert mirrors both the physicality of women’s fight for subjectivity and a nomadic community’s struggle for survival when faced with the exigencies of sedentary life.

Mokeddem’s ancestral and familial affiliations are identified with the Bedouin tribes for whom the desert symbolizes the ultimate connection between God, nature, and the environment. The novel describes this sacred, ecologically sensitive communion as a divine transcendent light, “the intensity of this light was like the quintessence of gazes to us” (1997, 31)<sup>3</sup>, thereby invoking the simultaneous presence of Allah as the supreme creator and the Prophet Mohammed whose illumination projects itself onto a divinely sanctified space of origin. The desert as “original” space establishes its historicity through divine mediation/creation just as the Bedouin<sup>4</sup> trace their ancestry to the first Arabs who wandered through the eastern Mediterranean and the Maghreb (Abou-Youssef Hayward 2001, 3). The novel establishes the primacy of the land as the locus of communal identification by demonstrating how ancestral filiations take “root” in the Saharan sand: “But since the Ajallis lived in the desert . . . there was perhaps a chance” (1997, 61).<sup>5</sup> The novel further identifies the Ajalli clan as “the one from the Algerian desert!” (1997, 61).<sup>6</sup> Both landscape and tribe are inscribed in a narrative of origin to confirm Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that life, and civilization in general, begin and end in the South, the South metaphorically referring to a nomadic space that opens onto a certain plenitude or limitlessness (1987, 21). In this respect, the novel infers that the desert represents a horizon of possibilities, a creative expanding of the limits of existence: “But in this desert, the very image of

excessiveness and exalted thought . . .” (1997, 11).<sup>7</sup> The idea of expansiveness is crucial when confronted with the limits of sedentary life whereby the grandmother Zohra compares the confinement of immobility to the passivity of death in enclosure, “the immobility of a sedentary life is like death that seized me by the feet” (1997, 9).<sup>8</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of the desert as a rhizomatic space reinforces the idea of horizontal spatiality, the intermezzo of inbetweenness wherein “the rhizome . . . has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows” (1987, 21). The rhizome as a movable center or as a multiplicity of concentric circles traces the ex-centric movements of the desert nomads whose sense of spatial mobility offers them the assurance of several portable homes located at focal points along circular trade routes visited by “the caravans of salt” (1997, 10).<sup>9</sup> The primacy of transversal movement promotes a certain “horizontality of vision” as the motivator of a holistic prismatic sensibility in which physical nomadism complements spiritual or cosmic nomadism as the sign of an elevated sense of consciousness. *The Century of Locusts* graphically exposes the horizontal dimension of the desert that contains a virginal sense of the pristine within its parameters. As the novel demonstrates: “Its best protection is precisely this rampart of nothingness, these unlimited horizontalities . . . [which] give to the yellow of her eyes the serenity of a tomcat sure of the inviolability of its territory” (Mokeddem 1992, 11).<sup>10</sup>

The limitlessness of the desert offers creative possibilities to chart alternative routes of access as resistance to established hierarchies and stasis. Transversality is thereby associated with primordial thought, a preinstitutionalized way of thinking that eludes systematization and favors intellectual wanderings wherein knowledge is perceived in terms of a universal cosmovision. *The Men Who Walk* describes the nomadic consciousness or *conscience originelle* of the desert tribes by affirming, “Perhaps they have the intelligence of the first humans who understood that survival was based on displacement, that of the lifelong rebels who never adhere to any established system. Now I believe that their movement is a certain conception of freedom” (1997, 23).<sup>11</sup> The novel associates nomadic consciousness with the flexibility to move and think freely, on one’s feet so to speak, as a defense mechanism to deal with the inconsistencies of nature and human existence. Horizontality can be compared to a form of



transformative knowledge that is nevertheless rooted in a collective saharian sensibility of universal movement reflected in the following statement, “The nomads disappeared further into the depths of the land. We were their descendents, the men who walk. They walked. We walked” (1997, 10).<sup>12</sup> The novel locates this sensibility in the very heart of the desert as the primary axis of movement where spatial mobility is not seen as a symptom of psychic displacement as experienced within the confines of the city but as an original pivot of rotation that mirrors the movement of the cosmos. The narrator identifies with this ancestral model (“ils”) by referring to the collectivity of the first personal plural “we” wherein horizontal communication becomes a way of negotiating the desert as a means of charting the course of life through the mediation of the “entre-deux” or the middle path evoked in *The Century of Locusts* (1992, 59).

The idea of negotiating the radius or the sacred path (*Tariqa*) located within the circumference of a larger path (*Sharī’a*) that encompasses the entire community (*‘Umma*) constitutes one of the basic principles of Islamic thought and Sufism in particular (de Vitray-Meyerovitch 1987). The *Sharī’a* or communal law provides the tenets to negotiate the *Tariqa* or path of transcendence with the decisive goal of reaching the Supreme Truth (*Haqīqa*) and realizing the ultimate concretization of the individual into the Perfect/Universal Self or *Al Insân-ul-kâmi* (de Vitray-Meyerovitch 1987, 78). However, these points of immanence do not remain fixed or immovable nor do they establish hierarchies of importance in the quest for *Haqīqa* or the Ultimate precisely due to the circularity of vision and movement wherein the circle’s geometry displaces the fragmentation of “tunnel vision” in favor of complementarity and interdimensional linkages. Within the circle, as de Vitray-Meyerovitch explains, the truth is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. “. . . [It] . . . symbolically creates the *Tarîqa* and the *Sharî’a*, as a point creates the radius and the circumference at the same time . . . The Law and the Path, both brought into existence by God, who is the Truth, reflect the center, each in its own way” (1987, 75). Similarly, by embracing a multiplicity of centers, nomadic consciousness remains alien to the idea of a unitary hegemonic center as represented by the colonial metropolis as will be discussed later.

The act of following a sacred path evokes the idea of a holy pilgrimage undertaken by the *salik* or pilgrim (1987, 78) just as Islam requires every dutiful Muslim citizen to perform the *Haj* or journey to the holy desert

cities of Mecca and Medina as part of an ancestral ritual of reverence to the Prophet Mohammed. In this way, a collective Muslim/Arab identity is translated into the spatial construction of a physical journey as a commemorative act of diasporic connection between the two mighty deserts of the Maghreb and the Arabian Peninsula as the manifestation of a transcontinental Pan-Arab heritage. In this instance, the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca undertaken with regularity every year to pay homage to the Prophet's memory by praying around the *Kaaba*<sup>13</sup> or divine cube parallels the trajectories of the ancient caravans of salt that are resurrected in the novel through oral repetition in local legend. As the narrator claims: "The caravans of salt remain a tale of illumination for me" (1997, 10).<sup>14</sup> Whereas nomads go back to the same place year after year, it must be pointed out that in the pilgrimage to Mecca, it is always different individuals who go back since each person is only expected to go there once in their lifetime. However, irrespective of the specificity of each individual who makes the trip to Mecca, the pilgrimage and nomadic returns are characterized by a common frequency of repetition given the fact that the Haj takes place with cyclical regularity every year. While different people may embark on the yearly pilgrimage at different periods in their life, the Haj as a ritualistic performative act is commemorated both physically through the actual journey to Saudi Arabia, and symbolically by former pilgrims who imaginatively return to this sacred place in memory during consecutive years. In other words, the pilgrims keep the memory of the sacred home alive through symbolic returns that complement the physical journey of other believers.

The novels themselves describe nomadic journeys as voyages of knowledge and self-discovery that push the limits of the self in its search for an enduring connection with God in the same way that the Haj symbolizes the ultimate pilgrimage to the birthplace of the Prophet to reaffirm one's submission to Islam. The nomads of *The Men Who Walk* endure the physical hardships of these journeys to reach a point of divine transcendence when they feel the presence of God on the desert horizon and within their weary bodies where fatigue parallels a state of ecstasy. The novel describes the state of the ecstatic soul: "This is why those who still walk have the strange feeling that a Presence watches over them. It disperses loneliness and, when the body wavers from fatigue, it tenses the arc of its willpower, so that one regains composure, and the stumbling foot presses forward . . . in

this ultimate effort, one is overcome by a certain intoxication. One has the impression of reaching a certain immateriality; to be nothing but a ray of the firmament” (1997, 31).<sup>15</sup> The feeling of rapture afforded by the sensation of merging with the divine force of the cosmos parallels the transcendence achieved through the act of whirling or repetitive circular motion at varying degrees of speed. The circular movements of the whirling dervishes of the Sufi order symbolize the circular motion of the planets as well as the universal movement that represents the unifying power of Allah and all creation. Whirling promotes a sense of wholeness within the individual who fuses with the cosmos in a gesture of total union. *The Men Who Walk* refers to this fusion as “un orgasme cosmique” (a cosmic orgasm) (1997, 101), a divine breath that leads to the total liberation of the self as it submits to the presence of God manifested symbolically in the spirit and physically in the desert.

The desert’s divine immanence assumes particular importance in the articulation of gender. In other words, the combined forces of circularity and movement provide women with the possibility of negotiating their alterity within the confined spaces of colonial, patriarchal, and religious doctrine. The desert as matrix or *origine matricielle* affords a unique feminist repositioning through a matri-centered poetics of living symbolized by the ancient wisdom of the grandmother Zohra in *The Men Who Walk* who incarnates the very spirit of the desert, “Zohra was the desert” (1997, 9).<sup>16</sup> The association Zohra-desert establishes the primacy of the desert as a feminine space, a maternal refuge in which the female characters such as Saâdia and Leïla find comfort and solace. Leïla seeks the protection of the saharian dunes whose rounded contours provide a sense of maternal intimacy denied to her by her own mother. As the novel demonstrates: “. . . Leïla went to take refuge in the dune’s bosom” (1997, 78).<sup>17</sup> The maternal breast (represented symbolically by the dune) as a primary source of nourishment and attachment for a child establishes an immediate pre-oedipal connection between the feminine Imaginary and the landscape as the original track or signifier of memory. Leïla is able to experience a certain sense of harmony promoted by the desert ethos of “sand, solitude and sun” (1997, 14)<sup>18</sup> where the stability of place, quiet reflection, and sun-powered energy rehabilitate the self after the alienation encountered in spaces that remain antithetical to the desert’s philosophy of synthesis. Antithetical spaces include the “alien” curriculum of colonial school and

the male-centered dynamics of Leïla's urban home that fragment family life through imbalances in power. In other words, the desert becomes a site of physical and emotional reterritorialization after the social dislocation engendered in and by urban space. Leïla constantly returns to the safe haven of the maternal womb whose circularity offers a protective cocoon and a primary source of identification: "Putting down her books, Leïla went out to take refuge on the dune. She let herself sink into the sand like one enters the sea. She curled herself up into a ball as in the mother's bosom. There, everything died out, the sorrows of men as well as the devastation of their history" (1997, 227).<sup>19</sup> In this way, her frequent flights to the desert become an example of "territorial nomadism" where the desire to escape intellectual and social stagnation sustains the memory of the nomadic consciousness of her ancestors who have recently been forced to accept a sedentary life.

Similarly, the character Saâdia intuitively traces her steps to the desert after escaping from the abjection of brothel life and its commodification of the female body. The body's rehabilitation in nature is achieved after its reunion with the mother in a cosmic dance (1997, 65) that leads to its liberation from sexual incarceration. The novel describes Saâdia's sense of jubilation: "A festival, vast lands. A cosmic dance, the movement of the dunes retained by the blue sky. A dream, the camels' amble, Saâdia was intoxicated. Forgetting all prudence, she moved away from the city, she walked a long, long time. And, when her muscles, tetanized by the effort, became painful and refused to obey, Saâdia let herself sink into the sand and looked in ecstasy at the vanishing horizons" (1997, 65).<sup>20</sup> The cosmic dance embraces the universe through the expansiveness of vertiginous movement culminating in the merger of body and sand as the proverbial return to dust, the locus of origin. The cyclical return to the matrix ushers in a new beginning for Saâdia in which "two or three years of responsible living had given her back her self-confidence" (1997, 65).<sup>21</sup>

Saâdia's determination to make a fresh start finds its inspiration in the desert sand that has witnessed the resilience of Bedouin men and women whose endurance has typified an archetypal force of resistance to subjugation. As the novel reveals: "... he drew the force and faith of his commitment from his nomadic piety and endurance..." (1997, 134).<sup>22</sup> Nomadic resistance establishes an intergenerational legacy of expression as evidenced by the legendary example of Zohra and Khadidja from *The Century of*

Locusts who not only become external projections of the desert's internal spirit but incarnate the law of the desert in their position as familial matriarchs even though the Bedouin observe patrilineal kinship ties. Khadidja, who shares her name with the first wife of the Prophet noted for her business acumen and trading skills, establishes the primacy of her position within the family by affirming: "My name is Khadidja, from the tribe of the Hamanis . . . I have five grown-up boys and I am proud to be a grandmother several times over" (1992, 175).<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Zohra in *The Men Who Walk* establishes her importance in the family through her "timelessness" that is related to the idea of borderless space even though she has been forced into a sedentary life as a result of "modernization." The novel describes her in archetypal terms wherein she is capable of transcending the boundaries of time and space to assume a mythical position: "She was seventy-five years old for many years. Was she ten, twelve, fifteen years older? Zohra didn't care" (1997, 9).<sup>24</sup> However, the idea of timelessness in Zohra's case does not imply the immobility of stasis. She compensates for static time through her discursive nomadism in which "she holds a formidable power, the power of words" (1997, 27).<sup>25</sup> The immobility of sedentary life does not impede the fluidity of "liquid memory" where the verve of the spoken word, *la parole vive*, imitates the cadence of the desert caravans. The spoken word as oracle inscribes itself in a circular narrative of refrain and openendedness "there was the oracle" [1997, 12]<sup>26</sup> whereby Zohra's origin stories as the voice of memory revive the muffled echoes of the ancestors that resound in the desert: "The rocks hanging over the dune relayed them, amplified them and propelled them higher in a haunting crescendo. And then, overcome by the same fever, the grandmother started as well!" (1997, 127).<sup>27</sup> By giving the desert a voice, Zohra animates its presence by transforming it into an open slate of living memory. Orality gives her magical powers to achieve the "unspeakable" just as the legendary Scheherazade performed the "unimaginable" act of surviving a bloodthirsty husband's need for revenge through the manipulative power of oral narrative in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Associating the act of storytelling with conjuring, the narrator claims: "Be aware that a storyteller is a fantastical being. He manipulates everything, even his own history. He adulterates it, refashions it between his dreams and the perditions of reality. He exists only in the 'in-between'. A space unceasingly moved. Always reinvented" (1997, 10).<sup>28</sup> In other

words, storytelling bases itself on a multiplicity of narrative centers that are at once displaced and recreated within the spatial interstices of the narration.

The grandmother's popular stories narrated in the everyday parlance of the populace transform the status of dialectic Arabic from a vernacular or street language into the language of historic memory thereby displacing the centrality of institutionalized Arabic or colonial French as the official languages of historical documentation. Consequently, saharian Arabic becomes the living language of the desert archive articulated in the language of the people and inscribed within the dynamism of a plurivocal, fluid space in which history becomes a "familiar" expression of how life is lived, an indigenous narrative of self-expression to replace the colonizing perspective of the outsider. The reclaiming of the self through history involves the deployment of the transformative power of words wherein a linguistic revolution advocates a political revolution for the disenfranchised through the articulation of an innovative feminist language that ensures the inscription of the "marginal" in the national and cultural imaginary: "A new language. Freedom, the revolution of all these heroines' names, it was marvelous" (1997, 132).<sup>29</sup> The new language finds its source in the desert where the forgotten heroes and heroines of the distant and not-so-distant past are constantly resurrected to establish an enduring chain of resistance. This ancestry could possibly claim its referents among "role models in-movement" symbolized by the mythical Jazya, the ancient Bedouin warrior-heroine of the Hilalian epic, and the more immediate textual invocation of Bouhaloufa, the wandering ancestor of the Ajalli clan brought to life in Zohra's stories.

In fact, Leïla herself assumes her sense of self only after she is able to identify with the memorable figures of her Algerian past such as her grandmother at the end of the novel. Self-knowledge leads to the historicity of the subjective self that ultimately finds its locus of origin after years of intellectual and moral brainwashing in colonial school. As the novel indicates: "To narrate? . . . But where to begin? There was so much to say! She did not have to look for a long time. Her nib started to write feverishly, as if under the dictation of the grandmother who lived through her. A powerful breath untied her entrails and released her memory at last" (1997, 325).<sup>30</sup> Orality-in-writing is therefore able to create and maintain spaces in-formation through the collapsing and subsequent reconfiguring of

mental and physical spatial boundaries represented by time, history and architectural design. Through the poetics of orality-in-writing, Mokeddem's novels creatively "imagine" culturally defined spaces as a locus for asserting nomadic identity through spatial mappings found in architecture.

Architecture is part of a 'way of life' or 'mode of dwelling' in a minimalist ecosystem called 'Desert.'

—Puffin Curtin

The intersections of oral culture, space, and domestic design find their most graphic expression in the construction of the Bedouin tent. 'Ibn Khaldun, the renowned Arab historian of the fourteenth century, claimed that Bedouin life was predicated on a negation of building whereby the nomads followed an ethos of "anti-architecture."<sup>31</sup> However, while refusing to conform to Western norms of formalized architecture, the Bedouin did, in fact, have an indigenous system of construction well adapted to lifestyle and environment. A nomadic existence required a highly transportable form of dwelling that could be easily erected with minimal resources. The Bedouin tent was consequently an architectural construct that was in consonance with the geography of the desert represented by the circularity of form, the use of "natural" fabric such as black goats' hair (hence the appellation Black Tent or *beyt es sharr*, the "House of Hair") and a very personal connection between man, nature, and dwelling. The Bedouin relationship to the tent extended well beyond the concept of mere dwelling or habitation to embrace an entire system of ecological, social, and cosmological belief that was embedded in ancient ritual and the respect for the sanctity of space. According to Puffin's essay, the origin of The Black Tent can be traced to Mesopotamia around 3000–4000 BC making it one of the most antique and enduring architectural styles that established its historicity in the desert world centuries before institutionalized Western architecture imposed its presence on desert landscape as revealed in Mokeddem's novels. Puffin contrasts the Bedouin ethic of living horizontally in the landscape by integrating lifestyle into nature with the verticality of Western architecture that seeks to dominate nature instead through imposing angular forms such as columns and the permanence of construction: "The Black Tent of the Bedouin may be regarded as

the symbolic antithesis of the kind of massive, white western architecture . . . The Black Tent is incidental, portable, temporary. It is engendered, erected and maintained by a tribe, while the bureaucratically sanctioned 'White House' type of western architecture may be characterized as episodic, solidly permanent, and symbolically erected in 'perpetuity' by a hierarchy of specialists" (Puffin n.d., 2).

Two conflicting world views represented in architectural design produce dramatic tensions between indigenous and "alien" systems of form and content in which the circularity of the tent as a symbol of the familial womb and the nexus of communal life contrasts sharply with the phallically-constructed asymmetry of construction in concrete. Zohra bemoans her (solitary) confinement within four walls and longs for the openness of her *kheïma* or tent that welcomes human contact and hospitality. She states: "Life in a house, even with a door always open, was very painful for me. The mere presence of walls oppressed me. In a tent, a flap can be opened so quickly that the eyes immediately encounter friendly faces" (1997, 33).<sup>32</sup> Zohra's comments reveal the communal nature of nomadic living in which each tent becomes a microcosmic unit of a larger network of coexistence that eliminates the oppression of individualistic space for her. This pattern, in turn, aligns itself with the planetary system wherein the circular configuration of the desert encampment mirrors the axis of rotation of the cosmos. In this fashion, "cohabitational" space is endowed with a sense of the sacred given the austere conditions of living in the desert where the sharing of resources in a difficult terrain becomes a necessity as well as a communal ideal. The paucity of daily victuals does not promote greed and selfishness but a culture of hospitality and generosity in which the familiarity of "friendly faces" offers a welcome presence. Moreover, these "cycles of friendship" maintain and renew themselves by the constant reconfiguration of the encampment and the cyclical maintenance of its various components to reveal a sophisticated understanding of the importance of synchronized living as a precursor to physical and psychic well-being (Puffin, 13).

By its very location in nature, the tent provides women with the territorial mobility that eludes them within the enclosure of urban space based on the inside/outside, public/private dichotomy. The consequent distribution of roles involves an undifferentiated spatiality wherein women participate in the erecting of tents and the tending of goats and sheep while being



responsible for the tasks of cooking, childcare, spinning, and weaving (Puffin n.d., 5). In this way, they collaborate in a transgendered occupational system of productivity that gives them simultaneous access to the inside and outside. This does not mean, however, that role distribution sustains an equal output of labor. Spatial symmetries do not uphold a corresponding equity in terms of gender to demonstrate the human tendency to initiate structural dissonance by violating the divine plan of cosmic synthesis.<sup>33</sup> As *The Century of Locusts* reveals: “. . . the men have no other occupation, while in the ‘mechtas’ their wives worked at multiple tasks . . .” (1992, 212).<sup>34</sup> Gender imbalances in terms of work are sustained by the cultural belief in women’s unilateral care-giving capacities that invariably subsume them under the onus of maintaining communal honor and welfare. Yasmine equates this imbalance with a form of female serfdom in which circular progression is disrupted by the intrusion of patriarchal ideology sustained by men and women in the name of tradition. She demonstrates her rejection of the feminine condition to her father who has hitherto protected her from the “inevitability” of a woman’s destiny in which the synchronicity of nomadic consciousness is violated by gender dystopia. She exclaims: “They will not kill me, Father, neither the wool, nor the children, nor the men, nor all these parasitical objects stuck to the women’s fingers, nor even their fatalism. Thanks to you, I have evaded a girl’s and a woman’s education” (1992, 259).<sup>35</sup>

To survive, our memory and our eyes are  
surrounded with images, traces of the past,  
remains, which persist and fail to fall away,  
memories which resist and refuse to die.

—Mohammed Serifi Villar

The elaboration of women-centered rituals in Bedouin society provides an autonomous space of creating alternative life patterns in which women assume their personal subjectivities. Rituals such as the pitching of tents and the setting up of the household interior enable women to demarcate their own spatial boundaries in terms of privacy, autonomy, and spatial control to establish their specific domains of influence. The art of tent erection and the complexity of interior design in the form of a balanced and natural color scheme together with the choice and symmetry of textile

as ornamentation involves a refined knowledge of the dynamics of space and the ability to create a welcoming, harmonized, and structurally stable home environment with limited resources. These skills position the women as primary installation artists who have an intuitive understanding of spatial geography through a creative understanding of the self and its relationship to the environment (Vandenbroeck 2001, 13). *The Century of Locusts* establishes the primacy of the women who weave the collective history of their clan through intricate design as a particular woman-authored language and who engage in collaborative work through a system of organizational entrepreneurship. As the novel reveals: “Khadidja took out all the washed, sheared wool, thus sounding the call to work. There was an enormous heap of a certain abundance. One of the daughters-in-law remains alone, in the distance, preoccupied with the preparation of the bread and lunch. All the other women: mothers, aunts and cousins who are joined by the young girls come to the rescue. Yasmine is filled with wonder at the organization and virtuosity of the work” (1992, 207).<sup>36</sup> Through a network of role distribution, the women participate in a noncapitalist, nonpatriarchal system of economic production in a “familiar” language that excludes the mediation of middlemen and the machinations of the “commercialized” discourse of labor exploitation.

An individual motif of self-representation is woven into a larger pattern of interconnected designs as scriptural signifiers of a primal language that symbolizes the art of interpersonal communication and interaction. It is interesting to see how a personal design of self-expression establishes its individuality while harmonizing with the entire weaving scheme to reveal women’s mediating skills in which weaving becomes a script of negotiation. Each motif, while representing a particular woman’s story and worldview, complements a panoramic exposition of collective stories/motifs that are harmoniously woven together with the sturdy threads of reflection, recollection, and unity. Woven fabric as woman-text represents an empowering act of articulating the female body in prescriptural form and broadens the parameters of our appreciation of the technique of “writing the body” understood solely in discursive terms in the Western world. In contrast, *The Century of Locusts* demonstrates how women speak their bodies graphically and textually in cross-cultural terms to present a viable and ancient medium of self-inscription. In this way, the women become artistic *griottes* or history makers whose exclusion from patriarchal

and colonial texts does not impede them from making their own contributions to Algerian history.

The visual representation of tribal subjectivity maintains the agency of the clan in general as it faces increased pressure to adopt a sedentary lifestyle and a consequent loss of tradition. At the same time, this representation is of particular importance for women who suffer the added dimension of gender alterity. For this reason, weaving takes on a politicized perspective by making a visible statement about underrepresentation in formalized discourses of power. Paul Vandenbroeck consequently establishes weaving as the original art of feminine signification, *l'art matriciel*, or the primary trace that resurrects the pre-symbolic/pre-natal stage of development that has been eclipsed by dominant culture and its emphasis on the male-figured Oedipal structure (2001, 17). The establishment of the matrix positions women as the historical founders of a balanced system of social and cultural organization operating according to the rhythmic movements of a ballet wherein: "Khadidja, whose fingers are intoxicated by the touch of her weaving loom's weft, like an enormous harp, orchestrates the ballet of the women to the rhythm of her song from the interior of the tent whose folds she has raised" (1992, 208).<sup>37</sup> With the crooning of a lullaby as the original voice of the mother, Khadidja orchestrates a symphony of nimble fingers that breathe new life into the axis of the spindle. The rotation of the spindle harmonizes with the rotation of the earth's axis to confirm the connection between the matrix and the cosmos as a symbol of the harmony espoused by the Bedouin perspective of viewing the earth and the cosmos horizontally. Weaving thereby carries the imprint of the collective imaginary wherein the women create their own palimpsest-like cultural texts to safeguard against the loss of memory and the disappearance of a vital female-centered tradition of cultural and historical documentation. Moreover, the intimate relationship established between the weaver and her material, be it goatskin, wool, cotton or vegetable dyes, confirms the Bedouin ethos of "natural integration" in which animals, plants, and human beings sustain themselves through ties of mutuality and interdependence.

If Yasmine overtly rejects weaving as sign of female abjection, she nevertheless participates in her own method of weaving in the form of the delicate arabesques that she traces in the desert sand. Discursive loopings in the sand resemble the curved contours of the womb as a particular form

of “writing the maternal.” As the novel demonstrates: “Yasmine turns away from the women and with her index finger to the ground, rediscovers the general direction of her own profession, writing on the sand” (1992, 208).<sup>38</sup> Yasmine’s calligraphy compensates for her aphasia or temporary loss of speech experienced as a symptom of the traumatic rape and murder of her mother. The loss of the mother as the primordial void is articulated through “maternal inscriptions” in the sand where the violence of memory encodes a text of absence and mourning. In other words, Yasmine’s sand-inspired writing resembles an act of excavation in which the buried remains of the mother are brought to life through circular configurations as a form of *mémoire mosaïque* in which, “I want it to be woven with writing, crossbred in memory with all its wonders and with orality. I want it to be a mosaic, sparkling with differences.” (1992, 114).<sup>39</sup>

Calligraphic traces in the sand resemble the vital umbilical affiliations between mother and child who resurrects the mother’s memory through discursive sculptures in the dust, referred to as “primitive” writing in the novel. However, the use of the term primitive does not mean uncivilized or unsophisticated but connotes a primal language as the very voice of ancestral memory that imbibes the internal secret language of the desert. The novel describes these re-creations of memory by stating: “Her first words had been thrown on the sand, isolated, like cries of freedom, like the jerky language of primitives” (1992, 162).<sup>40</sup> Each word is comparable to a primal scream as the particular language of birthing symbolized by the mother’s screams during labor and the child’s first cry as it enters the world to establish an original and primordial bond of oral communication whose memory gives form to silence in the novel. Memory thereby assumes a certain corporeality of expression in Yasmine’s psyche by moving beyond sensorial perception to a definite visibility of presence. As the novel reveals: “Hearing these words, the way in which they echo her own resonance, Yasmine doesn’t only give them an adequate coloring: she also finds their odor, taste, weight, and speed. They are alive” (1992, 157).<sup>41</sup> Memory as living presence rehabilitates the mother’s body in scriptural form to establish the recuperative power of sand and its ability to create a “body in-text” through the continuum of life and death.

The novel consequently refers to memory as feminine in orientation in its capacity to nourish Yasmine’s creative impulses and liberate her from the trauma of separation. The voice as wound, this “parole blessée”

{wounded word} (1992, 191) expresses itself “violently” through the ferocity of the primal scream when Yasmine recognizes her mother’s assailants: “But she does not have any control over this voice. It is irrepressible. She can only modulate it.—Oummi, oummi {mummy, mummy}, she repeats in a drunken and lost whisper” (1992, 188).<sup>42</sup> The memory of death conversely articulates life in the name of the mother, *oummi*, through the voicing-out of pain as a means of healing the original wound. In this instance, the mother ceases to represent a tattooed imprint on Yasmine’s tortured mind but assumes the presence of spirit in her thoughts and actions where her search for the extraordinary—“she wants something else” (1992, 261)<sup>43</sup>—transports her into the undifferentiated world of the Imaginary. The Imaginary, as orality’s muse, sutures the connections that have been severed by the physical death of both parents who are spiritually kept alive as immortal guides. The permanence of oral tradition and the circularity of movement/thought practiced by the nomadic ancestors leave enduring traces in the desert sand as a sign of eternal life: “Sands are inscribed with the writings of eternity. The word is a living memory. It weaves together the burning links of glances, across generations” (1992, 225).<sup>44</sup> Orality weaves the language of memory into an immovable landscape that bears witness to time and history. In this fashion, Mokeddem’s novel gives the reader the opportunity to go beyond a purely Lacanian model of interpretation. Yasmine’s writing could be seen as a way to bring together the Imaginary and the Symbolic, orality and writing, maternal and paternal sides into a creatively reconfigured discursive mosaic. The author thereby creates a theoretical intervention that deconstructs the (arguably phallogocentric) Lacanian binary opposition between the Imaginary (coded as feminine) and the Symbolic (coded as masculine) by showing how these binary oppositions do not operate in the same way in a nomad space.

Similarly, Leïla invokes the memory of her dead grandmother in a “plaintive ballad” or “ritual incantation,” as suggested by Yolande Helm (2000, 201), in the concluding pages of *The Men Who Walk* when she realizes the extent to which colonial education, exile, and her own intellectual disorientation have alienated her from the circularity of her nomadic origins. Her assimilation of Western discourse in the form of linearity and binary thinking stifles her powers of creation whereby she can only produce sterile stillborn words devoid of meaning. She laments to her

grandmother: “Then these heavy and bitter unspoken words dug into the bottom of her chest. Grandma, the weight of words. Especially still-born words” (1997, 324).<sup>45</sup> Leïla’s abortive attempts at creation are a symptom of the intellectual and spiritual paralysis she experiences in the absence of orality and its recuperative aesthetic energy. This force represents a form of cyclical nomadic errance in which the grandmother “with her endless flow of tales and stories, with waves of light” (1997, 324)<sup>46</sup> fills the void of homelessness and deterritorialization through the constant movement of stories and history to achieve the transcendence of a venerable ancestor. As mentioned before, Leïla finds her center only after immortalizing Zohra’s transcendence in her own writing by incorporating the oral past, in the form of her grandmother’s “parole vive,” into the specifics of her literary esthetics.

In other words, the grandmother develops Leïla’s ear by instilling in her an appreciation for everyday speech in an attempt to familiarize her with the importance of speech in motion as a reflection of a dynamic oral culture in motion. The novel reveals the grandmother’s skills in developing her granddaughter’s aural capacities by stating: “She had been the first one to sensitize her hearing to the sonority of words” (1997, 302).<sup>47</sup> The grandmother’s art implies that creation is not merely an exercise for the intellect but an integrative participation of all the senses to produce a work “with feeling” since creation is a dynamic expression of lived-out experience through a total “immersion” of mind and body. The corporeality of words endows them with the sensuality of immediacy that eludes Leïla when she limits herself to the abstraction of conceptual thinking. It is only when Leïla finally synthesizes the multifaceted dimensions of orality, a resonant embodiment of a poetics of the desert with the discursive wanderings of her postcolonial present that she can accompany her grandmother in a symbolic return to their common origin. This return culminates in a celebratory ode of commemoration in which she “had resumed her walk towards Bouhaloufa, towards Zohra the grandmother . . . towards the headlights that marked the swelling shore of the erg” (1997, 325).<sup>48</sup> The immortalization of the ancestors through the resurrection of a vibrant past, the *verbe flamboyant* of speech, provides Leïla with the necessary guiding force to liberate her writing from the impotence of colonial mimicry and the censorship of free thought which, according to the grandmother,

constitutes the apostasy of immobility: “Talk to me, darling, and walk, because deserts are open seas at the edge of which immobility is a heresy” (1997, 325).<sup>49</sup>

This singing art is sea foam.  
The graceful movements come from a pearl  
Somewhere on the ocean floor.  
Stop the words now.

---

Open the window in the center of your chest,  
And let the spirits fly in and out.  
—Rumi, “Where Everything is Music”

The reclaiming of spiritual space by women finds its most powerful expression in the *hadra* or musical and ritual ceremony of trance-inspired dances and invocations to Allah and the Prophet. As *The Men Who Walk* reveals: “Hadras are gatherings of women that celebrate Allah and his Prophet” (1997, 128).<sup>50</sup> These dances and songs involve a direct communication with God without the mediation of human godmen or imams thereby permitting women to freely express themselves before the forces of the “invisible” through the “sensualization” of the divine. The female body repossesses itself through the rituals of memory in which a feast of celebration enables the articulation of voice/body through rhythmic movement. The body voices its lament by dancing its multiple alienations to present a “moving” text in which: “with bruised voices, strange rumblings from the limbs of consciousness and sensitivity exacerbated by the vibrato of the choruses, each woman waited for *Her Song*. A rhythm and words that matched her distress” (1997, 129).<sup>51</sup> A collective ritual nevertheless enables each woman to find her individual space of assertion in which she narrates her life story before a sympathetic audience of God and women.

Based on Sufi traditions, the *hadra* ceremonies become active sites of female remembering when the female body liberates itself from daily tensions experienced in patriarchal systems that inhibit a circular range of movement for women. Women can free themselves from their interior demons through “performatory exorcisms” practiced within the intimacy of female space that permit the body to speak itself through trance-induced states of the unconscious: “Trances orchestrated by the lyricism of the incantations and the powerful beat of the drums. A dance of freedom, from

accumulated tensions” (1997, 129).<sup>52</sup> In this instance, spatial segregations are beneficial to women whereby the absence of the male gaze allows them to participate in the entire spectrum of consciousness that includes the body, spirit, and soul. A vital point of connection between women, the hadra simultaneously offers a creative opportunity for self-possession through the ecstasy of mythical grandeur relived in the feminine imaginary. The novel describes the transformational powers of the hadra: “With the beauty of an unchained fury, alas! Shortlived, the submissive woman gave birth to a goddess worthy of mythology” (1997, 129–130).<sup>53</sup> The hadra consequently symbolizes a space of revival, a mythical and imaginative return to the origin when women were endowed with divine immanence. Through the force of ritual, women reconfigure space through mythical inscriptions in a maternal past that is brought to life by the primordial power of the *yoyou* or vibrating of the uvula as the language of the mother tongue and the medium of expression of the hadra.

The *yoyou* represents an interior language, the cry of the unspoken that articulates itself through the reconstruction of the Imaginary: “*Youyou*, the voluptuous vertigo of the sob, the cry of the invincible launched towards the skies” (1997, 127).<sup>54</sup> Comparable to the primal scream, the *yoyou* liberates women from oblivion by vocally resurrecting their presence through the primacy of the oral and the audible in a rich symphony of polyphonic sound. As Leïla marvels: “Leïla reconsidered these ululations which left their imprint on her ear. Henceforth, her hearing will train itself to distinguish all their nuances. She will discover a range so rich that her spirit will call these masterful vocalese the brilliance of music, poetry and theater” (1997, 127).<sup>55</sup> Like the heteroclitic text, the *yoyou* represents Khatibi’s evocation of “tribes of words” in “The Colonial Labyrinth” (1998, 9) that resonate in harmony to create a circular flow of possibility and meaning through the migratory competence of words. The trilling of voice like the symbolic migration of words creates a space to recognize the possible, and as Antoine Raybaud claims, to apprehend “the multiple, a means of circulation between open possibilities and perspectives, and, especially, new perspectives” (1993, 56). The access to multiplicity does not merely imply the opening of new perspectives but rather, the restoration of the repressed presymbolic feminine imaginary that precedes the law of the letter. The novel states: “A renewal of courage to hold on to the thread of life. These women ate embers, until the burning of the uncon-



scious . . . until the unreal” (1997, 130).<sup>56</sup> These spatial reclaimings engender the dislodging of trauma and separation by creating revised feminine mythologies through the resurrectional and insurrectional authority of mnemonic ritual. Women consequently transgress the limits of the acceptable through multiple expressions afforded by a certain “horizontalness of vision” as compensation for forbidden speech and action. As the novel states: “For women, the youyou symbolizes all that is missing in their lives. The youyou is the brilliance, the lightning that words are deprived of” (1997, 128).<sup>57</sup> The enforcement of social deprivation converts itself into a cry for justice through the horizontal perspective of a renewed prismatic consciousness that finds its source in the desert, as suggested in the novel. The novel compares the articulation of the female voice with the desert wind in which each grain of sand represents an individual voice of self-affirmation among a multitude of collective harmonies within the desert’s expanse: “Their words were fever, fire and blood. The storm of voices rose up, like the intoxication of the sand in the desert wind” (1997, 129).<sup>58</sup>

Thanks I want to give to the divine  
 Labyrinth of effects and causes  
 for the diversity of the creatures  
 that form this singular universe . . .  
 —Jorge Luis Borges, “Another poem of the gifts”

The idea of space as resistance is best exemplified by the labyrinthine configuration of the *medina* or walled historic city as one of the most distinguishing features of traditional Arabo-Muslim architecture. The very symbol of the precolonial city in the Islamic spatial imaginary, the *medina* has historically served as the site of creative possibility in the form of poetic license and indigenous resistance as exemplified by the monumental role of the Casbah of Algiers during the War of Independence (Sari 1996, 68–80). The circularity of the *medina* whose labyrinthine structure has defied the squareness of Western logic represents an impenetrable fortress in the city center. Located within an autonomous urban space, the *medina* is governed by an internal esthetics of living that remains indiscernible to the Western eye through a local network of rhizomatic patterns that establish a twin relationship of circularity between the desert and its

mirror image in the city. Umberto Eco describes circularity as a Rhizome Labyrinth, “so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. It has no centre, no periphery, no exit because it is potentially infinite. The space of conjecture is a rhizome space”<sup>59</sup> (1983, 1). Referred to as a space of infinite possibilities, the labyrinth recreates itself incessantly through the logistics of space information to represent the limitlessness of the horizon as the territory of the inviolable, the city’s best defense against penetration.

It is therefore no coincidence that the medina and the desert have remained resistant to external conquest through the internal logic of what Abdelkebir Khatibi calls a movement of “deambulation” or a culturally determined psychology of evasion. He asserts: “What I mean is that this so-called labyrinth is also a cultural way of treating space, of learning . . . a psychology and strategy of walking, of meeting. . . , of all the displacements of the body when it is caught in a social network such as this one” (Khatibi 1993, 8). Resisting the imprint of the finite, the labyrinth’s evasiveness is based on a certain fluidity of spatial negotiation comparable to the circular passage of the amniotic fluids in the womb that epitomizes a woman-centered subterranean maze. *The Men Who Walk* suggests the connection between the labyrinth and the womb in the following passage: “Djelloul often went to dawdle in the lanes of the médina and the souk. The pink and crenellated walls enclosing the gardens attracted his curiosity. He inhaled fragrances that damned his senses. It seemed to him that the perfume of an unknown woman reigned everywhere” (1997, 16).<sup>60</sup> The fecund mysteries of the womb resemble the crenellated walls of the medina that are impregnated with a rich history. The subliminal reference to women symbolizes the power of suggestion as a particular strategy of contour mentioned by Khatibi (1993, 9), the rehabilitative force of women that nevertheless remains hidden within the interstices of representation. However, woman as enigmatic force within the medina eludes the penetrability of the male gaze through the suggestive hinting of presence as a protective veil. The novel demonstrates how the tactic of suggestive presence deflects the full import of the male’s visual colonization of the female body whereby unfulfilled desire suspends the aggression of physical contact: “Each passerby hidden behind her veil was an exciting enigma. The médina abounded with the light touch of their haïks brushing against each other. These shadows magnetized him. Assaults of desire

pierced his young body” (1997, 16–17).<sup>61</sup> Like the medina’s inaccessible walls, the female body demonstrates a similar imperviousness to control. The female body’s apparent deambulation constitutes its very locus of resistance in which stealth, obscurity, and fluidity of movement simultaneously become tactics of detour and distraction, a strategy that proved to be so crucial to the success of guerilla warfare in the Casbah during the 1950s war of liberation. Like a masterminded chess game, deambulatory movements involve strategic positionings that invariably outwit the opponent in a series of surprising checkmates.

By its very structure and significance, the medina represents the indigenous urban archive, the repository of precolonial memory in which each spatial meander transforms itself into the shadow of anamnesis as the site of the infinite or the unconscious. The multi-layering of collective memory within a three-dimensional mazelike archival space represents the complexity, perplexity, and diversity of the Human Comedy that plays itself out within the rhizomatic folds of the Divine Library of the cosmos. The Argentinean intellectual Jorge Luis Borges compares the universe to a library that is “unlimited and cyclical. If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder . . . ” (1988).<sup>62</sup> What Borges sees as disorder could, in fact, represent the internal order of nomadic consciousness that suspends “rationality” in the eternal quest to extend the limits of human possibility. This expansion is facilitated by the vastness of the interminable also symbolized by the desert’s horizon. In fact, the ancestral father of the Ajalli clan, Djelloul (adopted name Bouhaloufa), initiates the search for the eternal when he leaves the desert’s circularity to find himself within the urban circularity of the medina. The unconscious circumnavigation of physical space represents an inherently spiritual engagement with the poetics of the metaphysical in which “never had Arabic poetry been so rich and delirious” (1997, 17).<sup>63</sup> The metaphysics of Arabic poetry as the language of creative memory revives the “Jahili” (1997, 17) or pre-Islamic golden age of knowledge that flourished in a vibrant medina culture only to be banned later by the narrowness of religious dogmatism. Djelloul’s poetic flights into the realm of the fantastic border the search for the ecstatic in the form of ancestral knowledge hidden within the textual fabric of the medina. As the novel states: “Djelloul had happily plunged into the freedom of these poets who celebrated nights of love and all kinds of

ecstasies" (1997, 17).<sup>64</sup> Poetry as the creative freedom to express the inexpressible becomes the instrument to negotiate the rhythm of existence in which "subterranean" thought merges with Khatibi's "drapé" (1993, 9) or the fluidity of the walk in a richly-textured cycle of movement.

Justin McGuinness associates the idea of texture with the sensory richness of the medina's streetscape (1996, 105). Texture as a dynamic space in-motion refers to the variety of ways in which the medina's inhabitants construct spaces "through the practices and habits of living" (1997, 111). The texture of the medina as an intricate spatial weaving consists of a tapestry of everyday shapes and forms that are animated by the corporeality of the senses. The novel describes this sensory extravaganza: "In the maze of passages you could smell the earth that the women sprinkled with water and then swept. Scents of cinnamon, cumin, ginger, coriander, mint, caraway . . . reached his nostrils like heady spray. The color of the spices, juxtaposed in large heaps, and the dark clay of the walls . . . a succession of hues to ravish the eyes. Children's babbling. The muezzin's call that stirred the entrails" (1997, 69).<sup>65</sup> The medina as a perfumed Eden, a fertile oasis that contrasts with the concrete jungle of the colonial city, titillates the senses through the vibrancy of smell, taste, sight, and sound in the form of a visceral call to life. The vibrancy of the old city opposes orientalized representations of it as an arcane and ethereal image of a forgotten past immobilized in colonial painting and architecture.

Space is about power, knowledge and control. It is something that has to be constituted, imposed on spaces and places not imagined through itself.

—Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*

If memory is preserved within the architectural womb of the urban medina, its subsequent dislodging by the "verticality" of colonial architecture reveals the structural patterns of imposition and dominance maintained by Western spatial reconfigurations insensitive to indigenous traditions of space. *The Century of Locusts* describes colonial architecture as an imposition on local spatial schemes: "Nothing more of all that. In its place, a huge building that could easily shelter an entire tribe. With the intense heat, with the cheerfulness of its shutters and even with its design,

it wounded his vision, attacked his past” (1992, 41).<sup>66</sup> By introducing patterns of structural irregularity that conflict with local landscape, colonial architecture maintains its incongruity as a highly visible signifier of difference. The concretization of dominant colonial ideology finds its physical representation in “alien” urban forms such as the colonial city and school that sustain an entire philosophy of Western praxis. While commenting on these structures of dominance within an urban environment, Nezar AlSayyad highlights the links between “colonialist discourse, the interest in knowledge and practice, and ultimately the realization of these in built form” (1992, 3–4). In other words, colonial architecture is never incidental or unintentional because it represents a concrete text of authority and entitlement based on the age-old colonial strategy of segregation, surveillance, and confinement as the ultimate weapons of control.

Based on the oppositional logic of binary thought predicated by the inherent belief in Western superiority over native backwardness, urban architecture reinforced the binary imprint through spatial antagonisms that divided colonial cities along the dual-city concept of new quarters (colonial cantonment) versus old city (*al madinah*). The fragmentation of urban space established parameters of spatial hegemony and inequality whereby the colonial quarter, as highly selective space through the verticality and squareness of its dimensions, imposed its dominance over the rounded contours of the *medina*. Aspiring to divine transcendence, colonial architecture with its imposing spires, flagpoles, and other phallically constructed signifiers attempted to rival the divine through the supremacy of form. This justification legitimized the civilizing mission of the West that imposed its rule as a mandate from heaven in the name of the Christian God. On the other hand, the circularity of the old city was more earth bound and organic with its emphasis on inter-uterine connection and the introversion of form.<sup>67</sup> The fragmentation of space induced by the dual city concept and reinforced by the confrontation between Cartesian geometry and the arabesque not only established different standards of living and lifestyles between the two populations but further “served to create and maintain actual physical differentiation between the colonizer and the colonized,” according to AlSayyad (1992, 13). In other words, the physicality of difference was maintained by the spatiality of difference that promoted political, racial, sexual, and esthetical antagonisms between colonizer and colonized.

Spatial segregations reinforce ethnic tensions among the disenfranchised wherein the lack of primary resources leads to racialized battles between ethnicities in the struggle to survive. Colonial racism toward the “natives” is ingested by them and then projected onto similarly marginalized groups as a symptom of psychological colonization. Ethnic tensions further fragment the colonized who are unable to present a unified front to colonial oppression, thereby simplifying the conqueror’s task of further subjugating “his” people. In other words, colonial manipulations of space and resources instigate a process of psychological imbalance that encourages unconscious or conscious conformity to the colonial ideal in the form of ethnic scapegoating. As Albert Memmi states, the colonized “by assuming all the accusations and condemnations of the colonizer,” becomes “accustomed to looking at his own people through the eyes of their procurer” (1965, 121). By grafting the colonial eye/“I” onto his person, the colonized person achieves a brief moment of transcendence through psychic and ocular distortions. In other words, the creation of ethnic ghettos to ensure the physical compartmentalization of Muslims, Jews, and noncolonial Christians into separate but unequal constituencies guarantees the psychological fragmentation of these communities who remain blind to their commonality of oppression under French imperialism. For example, Leïla is confounded by her own mother’s racism towards other groups. As the novel affirms: “Alas! The dilemma of Leïla’s childhood, none of the three communities had the monopoly on racism. Her mother, Yamina, was as virulent as Mrs. Fernandez on this topic” (1997, 155).<sup>68</sup> Each community establishes its own criteria for discriminating against others as part of a colonial-orchestrated master plan of separating and ruling local populations through divisive politicking in which the latter are outlawed through arbitrary process and inaccessibility.

The pedagogical project is created in order to place . . . lives inside the classroom and to employ knowledge and transformation as weapons to change the world. From the perspective of the social location of the condemned on earth, it becomes clear that knowledge alone, as intended by the school, does not transform life. Only the conversion of knowledge into action can transform life.

—Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Colonial pathology finds its power in enclosure or confinement, represented on two levels in Mokeddem's writings—spatial enclosure and the fixity of the colonial syllabus. Like the prison, army barracks or plantation, the physical dimensions of the school are defined by colonizing spaces represented by stone walls, gates, and confining classrooms. Leïla's introduction to colonial school seems far from welcoming whereby the thickness of architecture in the form of imposing columns, and the restriction of space represented by confining window bars and gates, creates the impression of a disciplinary space as a site of intimidation and subservience. The novel describes this space: "Pushed against a pillar, her anxious eyes flickered. Behind the closed iron gates . . ." (1997, 84).<sup>69</sup> The primacy of spatial cloistering creates spaces of alienation for Leïla, who is handicapped by her inability to circumnavigate the rectangular blocks of construction that initially limit her spatial mobility and her academic performance: "Leïla still felt handicapped by her background, by different concerns, by misery . . . in a word she felt foreign among the pied-noir schoolgirls" (1997, 123).<sup>70</sup>

The alienation in and by space further compounds the alienation she experiences when confronted with the colonial curriculum despite the benevolent attitude of the *roumia* or white teachers committed to her education. While the obvious merits of education cannot be ignored as a springboard to salvation in the form of future possibility, her "last hope" (1997, 262) represents a gangplank of no-return at the same time by offering her the illusion of possibility. As her grandmother cautions her: "These words laid down on paper do not seem to make you happy. They carry you away, to a world which is not ours" (1997, 279).<sup>71</sup> The confines of the colonial curriculum with French culture and civilization as the primary (and only) reference of signification, (symbolized by the chanting of the oft-repeated mantra of the colonial repertoire "our ancestors the Gauls"), stimulate Leïla's intellectual skills while simultaneously disorienting her from her own family and culture to the point of false identifications: "For the first time, Leïla felt alone facing a family welded together by tradition" (1997, 144).<sup>72</sup> The dogmatism of the colonial curriculum displays a similar narrowness of perspective on the part of the educated intellectual when the ideology of assimilation promoted by the colonial school is unconsciously absorbed by the "educated native" as an uncompromising point of no return. The dangers of tunnel vision compromise the dynamism of the rhizomatic

perspective through the civilizing imperative of conversion and cloning. Leïla becomes a stranger to herself and her family by her seemingly willing acceptance of the “us versus them” binary in which she participates in and witnesses her own alienation in space. The inflexibility of her education leads to the (intellectual) immobility of her mind that ultimately frees itself when she embraces the multiplicity of the rhizome represented by her grandmother’s example as “a woman of space and movement” (1997, 303).<sup>73</sup> The grandmother as the mistress of space cautions Leïla about the dangers of becoming a victim of physical and ideological spatial confinement. Zohra models her own life pattern according to the *juste milieu* of a liberating nomadic consciousness “one step, two steps, wasn’t it Zohra who had found her way again” (1997, 304).<sup>74</sup> Zohra’s example encourages Leïla to accept her nomadic heritage by confronting the limits of her intellectually determined exilic consciousness wherein “before the front door, a dune was born. The desert had taken possession of her past” (1997, 320).<sup>75</sup>

In conclusion, Malika Mokeddem’s narrative meanderings take her characters to the data bank of memory via the circuitous route of history, nomadic movement, natural landscape, and cultural practice to demonstrate a community’s fight for its integrity amid the divisive forces of modernity, neo-patriarchy, and racism. The nomadic consciousness of the ancestors represents an effective negotiation of the multiple alienations of alterity by respecting the primacy of “natural” law over institutionalized dominance. The desert’s safeguarding of memory restores the dynamism of ancient customs and traditions as valuable points of orientation that offer the women, in particular, a sense of autonomy through rites of creation. The weaving of women’s subjectivity into the very fabric of nomadic society contrasts with the colonial displacement experienced by colonized populations in the urban setting of the school and colonial city. The desert’s all-encompassing inclusiveness loses its influence within the concrete walls of urban architecture only to be revived within the labyrinthine urban medina as the storehouse of memory in the colonial metropolis. The integration of the past into the specifics of the postcolonial present finds successful expression in the “speakerly” text as evidence of an intergenerational grandmother-granddaughter understanding while the separation from the ancestral past through western indoctrination leads to the existential crisis of the postmodern heroine. Through spatial



reclaimings that nevertheless direct the characters along tortuous paths of recognition, disavowal, and repossession, Mokeddem creates a mosaic of life's experiences, a richly textured Bedouin carpet carefully hand-sewn with the fine threads of memory. Symbolizing more than a museum piece or exotic artifact, Mokeddem's tapestry contains a vital bloodline, a diasporic reminder of origin in her Montpellier home where she regularly negotiates the borders of otherness in search of the elusive ancestral rhizome in France.

#### NOTES

1. See Laura Rice (2001) and Yolande Helm (2000) for more biographical information on the author.
2. Translations assisted by Vanessa Gelican. "Comment envisager l'écoulement du temps dans un paysage aussi immuable . . . Aucune limite ne résiste aux démesures du Sahara . . . Ici, l'espace et le ciel se dévorent indéfiniment."
3. "cette lumière si intense, qu'elle était, pour nous, comme une quintessence de regards."
4. The Bedouins are the nomads of the Arab peninsula up to Jordania. In the Maghreb, the nomads are called "Berbères/Amazigh" nomads of which the more representative group is the "Touareg." Nevertheless, Mokeddem herself does not make that distinction.
5. "Mais puisque les Ajalli habitaient le désert . . . Il y avait peut-être là une chance."
6. "celui du désert algérien!"
7. "Mais dans ce désert, image même de l'outrance et qui exalte les pensées . . ."
8. "l'immobilité du sédentaire, c'est la mort qui m'a saisie par les pieds."
9. "les caravanes du sel"
10. "Sa meilleure protection, c'est précisément ce rempart du néant, ces horizontalités illimitées . . . [qui] . . . donne[nt] au jaune de ses yeux une sérénité de matou sûr de l'inviolabilité de son territoire."
11. "Peut-être ont-ils l'intelligence des premiers humains qui comprirent que la survie était dans le déplacement . . . Celle des rebelles de toujours qui jamais n'adhèrent à aucun système établi. Maintenant je crois que leur marche est une certaine conception de la liberté."
12. "les nomades s'enfoncèrent de plus en plus vers l'intérieur des terres. Nous descendons de ceux-là, des hommes qui marchent. Ils marchaient. Nous marchions."
13. The Kaaba is the focal point of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. H. Taj Masud states that the word Kaaba in Arabic means the "cube" as well as "a shape that emerges," referring both to the form itself and the emergence of form. He explains, "The mosque is defined as a segment of a circle whose center is the Kaaba." Belonging to a "global concentric system made up by all the mosques

in the world oriented to a single centre is a geometrical analogue of *Tawhid*—a doctrine of the Oneness of God and the unity of all existence. *Tawhid* is the foundation of Islam. Hence the cube is an ordering device; it is a marker that locates the centre of the concentric system. In it, all the axes of our horizontal plane of material existence converge and connect to the vertical axis mundi . . . As an ordering device, the Kaaba is not the modest cube in Mecca but a monumental project that has, for over a millennium now, been redefining the world in its own image. It has been constructing its circumferences (without which the centre is a point without identity)” (2001, 2).

14. “Les caravanes du sel restent pour moi un conte de lumière.”
15. “C’est pourquoi ceux qui marchent encore ont cette étrange sensation d’une Présence qui veille sur eux. Elle éloigne la solitude et, quand le corps vacille de fatigue, tend un peu plus l’arc de la volonté, alors on se redresse, et le pied qui trébuchait se presse . . . dans cet ultime effort, on est gagné par une sorte d’ivresse. On a l’impression d’accéder à une sorte d’immatérialité. De n’être plus qu’un rayon du firmament.”
16. “Zohra était le désert”
17. “ . . . Leïla alla se réfugier dans le giron de la dune.”
18. “sable, solitude et soleil”
19. “Posant ses livres, Leïla sortit pour aller se réfugier sur la dune. Elle se laissa aller dans le sable comme on entre dans la mer. Elle s’enroula en boule comme dans le giron d’une mère. Là, tout s’éteignait, les peines des hommes comme les dévastations de leur histoire.”
20. “Une fête, les vastes terres. Une danse cosmique, le mouvement des dunes par l’azur retenu. Un songe, l’amble des chameaux, Saâdia en était ivre. Oubliant toute prudence, elle s’éloigna de la ville, elle marcha longtemps, longtemps . . . Et, quand ses muscles, tétanisés par l’effort, devinrent douloureux et refusèrent d’obéir, Saâdia se laissa choir sur le sable et regarda avec extase la fuite des horizons.”
21. “deux or trois années de vie responsable lui avaient rendu son assurance.”
22. “ . . . il puisait dans sa piété et son endurance de nomade la force et la foi de son engagement . . . ”
23. “Je m’appelle Khadidja, de la tribu des Hamani. . . . J’ai cinq grands garçons et je ne suis pas peu fière d’être de nombreuses fois grand’mère.”
24. “Elle eut soixante-quinze ans pendant des années. En avait-elle dix, douze ou quinze de plus? Zohra n’en avait cure.”
25. “elle détient un pouvoir redoutable, celui des mots.”
26. “l’oracle était là”
27. “Les rochers surplombant la dune la relayaient, les amplifiaient et les propulsaient plus haut en un crescendo obsédant. Et ne voilà-t-il pas qu’atteinte par la même fièvre, l’aïeule s’y mettait aussi!”
28. “Sachez qu’un conteur est un être fantasque. Il se joue de tout. Même de sa propre histoire. Il la trafique, la refaçonne entre ses rêves et les pertitions de la

réalité. Il n'existe que dans cet entre-deux. Un "entre" sans cesse déplacé. Toujours réinventé."

See Yolande Helm's edited volume of essays (2000) for extensive analyses of the grandmother's powers of storytelling and the subsequent tensions between *parole* and *écriture* in Mokeddem's writings. Also refer to Mildred Mortimer (2001).

29. "Un langage nouveau. La liberté, la révolution de tous ces noms d'héroïnes, c'était merveilleux."
30. "Raconter? . . . Mais par où commencer? Il y avait tant à dire! Elle n'eut pas à chercher longtemps. Sa plume se mit à écrire avec fébrilité, comme sous la dictée de l'aïeule qui revivait en elle. Un souffle puissant dénoua ses entrailles et libéra enfin sa mémoire."
31. See Curtin Puffin's fascinating on-line study, "Bedouin Nomadology and Architecture." <http://puffin.curtin.edu.au/-cowan/nomad/6/>.
32. "La vie dans une maison, même avec une porte toujours ouverte, m'était très pénible. La seule présence des murs m'opressait. Dans une *kheïma*, un pan est si vite relevé et, sitôt fait, les yeux rencontrent des visages amis."
33. This situation parallels the manipulation and falsification of the *Hadith*, or teachings of the Prophet, by the male elite to serve as edicts of female oppression thereby obfuscating the Prophet's message of equal citizenship though a writing out of "his-story" in which women are silenced, excluded and secluded. In this way, women are caught between two conflicting spaces of Islam: on the one hand, the male-fabricated sociopolitical 'reality' aimed at restriction and privation and on the other, the religious, as articulated by the Prophet, based on an egalitarian vision in terms of gender. The noted Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi asserts: "Not only have sacred texts always been manipulated, but manipulation of them is a structural characteristic of the practice of power in Muslim societies. Since all power from the seventh century, was only legitimated by religion, political forces and economic interests pushed for the fabrication of false traditions" (1997, 8).
34. ". . . les hommes n'ont d'autre occupation, tandis que dans les *mechtas* leurs femmes s'affairent à de multiples tâches . . ."
35. "Ils ne me tueront pas, *Baba*, ni la laine ni les enfants, ni les hommes, ni tous ces objets sangsues collés aux doigts des femmes, ni même le fatalisme de celles-ci. Grâce à toi, j'ai échappé à une éducation de fille et de femme."
36. "Khadidja a sorti toute la tonte lavée, sonnait ainsi l'appel au labeur de la laine. Il y en a là un énorme monceau, une richesse, assurément. Une des brus reste seule, là-bas, à s'occuper de la préparation du pain et du déjeuner. Toutes les autres femmes: mères, tantes et cousines, auxquelles se joignent les fillettes, viennent à la rescousse. Yasmine s'émerveille autant de l'organisation que de la virtuosité de l'ouvrage."
37. "Khadidja, elle, de l'intérieur de la *kheïma* dont elle a relevé tous les pans, les doigts grisés par le contact de la trame de son métier à tisser, harpe démesurée, orchestre le ballet des femmes au rythme de son chant."

38. "Yasmine se détourne des femmes et, index au sol, retrouve le fil de son propre métier, l'écrit sur le sable."
39. "Je la veux tissée d'écrits, métissée dans sa mémoire par toutes ses admirations et par l'oralité. Je la veux mosaïque, scintillante de différences"
40. "Ses premiers mots avaient été jetés, isolés, sur le sable tels des cris de délivrance, tels le langage haché des primitives."
41. "Au son des mots, à la façon dont leurs échos éprouvent ses propres résonances, ce n'est pas seulement d'une teinte adéquate que Yasmine les habille: elle leur trouve aussi une odeur, une saveur, un poids et une vitesse. Ils sont vivants."
42. "Mais elle ne se commande pas, cette voix-là. Elle est irrépessible. Elle ne peut guère que la moduler.—Oummi, oummi, reprend-elle dans un chuchotement à la fois ivre et égaré."
43. "elle veut autre chose."
44. "Les sables sont écrits d'éternité. La parole, elle est une mémoire vivante. Elle tisse les chaînons brûlants des regards, au fil des générations."
45. "Alors ces mots non dits creusèrent le fond de sa poitrine, lourds et amers. Hanna, le poids des mots. Surtout les mots mort-nés."
46. "avec ses ressacs incessants de contes et d'histoires, avec des vagues de lumière."
47. "Celle qui, la première, avait sensibilisé son ouïe à la sonorité des mots."
48. "avait repris sa marche vers Bouhaloufa, vers l'aïeule Zohra . . . vers les phares qui balisèrent le rivage houleux de l'erg."
49. "Raconte-moi, kebdi, et marche, car les déserts sont des grands larges au bord desquels l'immobilité est une hérésie."
50. "Les hadras sont des réunions de femmes autour de la célébration d'Allah et de son prophète."
51. "Meurtrissures à fleur de voix, d'étranges grondements aux limbes de la conscience et la sensibilité exacerbée par le vibrato des chœurs, chaque femme attendait Son Chant. Un rythme et des mots à la mesure de son désarroi."
52. "Tranes orchestrées par le lyrisme des incantations et les battements puissants des bendirs. Dance-délivrance des tensions accumulées."
53. "Avec la beauté d'une fureur déchaînée, hélas! transitoire, la femme soumise accouchait d'une déesse digne des mythologies."
54. "Youyou, vertige voluptueux du sanglot, cri de l'indicible lancé vers les cieux."
55. "Leïla repensa à ces youyous qui laissaient dans son oreille leurs déchirures. Dorenavant, son ouïe s'exercera à en discerner toutes les subtilités. Elle en découvrira une gamme si riche que son esprit qualifiera ces virtuoses vocalises d'éclats musicien, poète et dramaturge."
56. "Un regain de courage pour ne pas lâcher le fil de la vie? Elle mangeaient des braises, les femmes, jusqu'à la brûlure de l'inconscient, jusqu'à l'irréel."
57. "Le youyou est aux femmes tout ce qui manque à leur lot. Le youyou est l'étincelance, la fulgurance dont sont privés les mots."
58. "Leurs mots étaient fièvre, feu et sang. La tourmente des voix montait, semblable à l'ivresse des sables dans le vent du désert."

59. Definition provided in the on-line feature, "Maze and Labyrinth." k/schoolof <http://www.adh.brighton.ac.uk/schoolof design/MA.COURSE/Lmaze.html>. See Umberto Eco (1983).
60. "Djelloul allait souvent musarder dans les ruelles de la médina et dans le souk. Les murailles roses et crénelées enserrant les jardins attisaient sa curiosité. Il s'en exhalait des effluves quiamnaient ses sens. Partout, lui semblait-il, régnait un parfum de femme inconnue."
61. "Chaque passante cachée derrière son voile, était une énigme exaltante. La médina foisonnait des frôlements de leurs haïks. Ses ombres l'aimaient. Les assauts du désir taraudaient son jeune corps."
62. The following stories are pertinent to Borges' idea of the labyrinth: "The Library of Babel," "The Circular Ruins," "The Garden of the Forking Paths."
63. "jamais la poésie arabe n'avait été aussi riche et délirante."
64. "Djelloul s'était plongé avec bonheur dans la liberté de ces poètes qui célébraient les nuits d'amour et de toutes les extases."
65. "Dans le labyrinthe des ruelles, l'odeur de la terre que les femmes arrosaient et balayaient. Les senteurs de cannelle, cumin, gingembre, coriandre, menthe, carvi . . . atteignaient ses narines comme de capiteux embruns. Les couleurs des épices, juxtaposées en gros tas, et la terre sombre des murs . . . succession de teinte à ravir les yeux. Le gazouillis des enfants. L'appel du muezzin qui remuait les entrailles."
66. "Plus rien de tout cela. A leur place, une immense bâtisse qui pourrait bien abriter toute une tribu. Par son volume, par trop de blancheur, par le riant de ses volets et même par son esthétique, elle blessait sa vue, agressait son passé."
67. The exception to the introversion of form is represented by the phallic construction of the mosque's minaret from where the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer. The reference to the 'phallic monotheism of form' as a certain commonality of expression between the minaret and the church steeple could, in fact, explain the collusion between colonialist and indigenous patriarchal ideology in the marginalization of women as represented in Mokeddem's novels.
68. "Hélas! dilemme de l'enfance de Leïla, aucune des trois communautés n'avait le monopole du racisme. Sa mère, Yamina, était aussi virulente que Mme Fernandez dans ce domaine."
69. "Rencognée contre un pilier, elle roulait de grands yeux inquiets. Derrière les grilles refermés . . ."
70. "Leïla se sentait encore handicapée par son milieu, par des préoccupations différentes, par la misère . . . en un mot étrangère parmi les écolières pieds-noirs."
71. "ces mots couchés sur le papier n'ont pas l'air de te rendre heureuse. Ils t'emportent ailleurs, dans un ailleurs qui n'est pas le nôtre."
72. "Pour la première fois, Leïla se sentit seule face à une famille soudée par la tradition."
73. "une femme d'espaces et de marches"

74. "un pas, deux pas, n'était-ce pas Zohra qui avait enfin retrouvé ses chemins."
75. "devant la porte d'entrée, une dune naissait. Le désert avait pris possession de son passé."

#### WORKS CITED

- Abou-Youssef Hayward, Maysa. 2001. "Communities at the margins: Arab Poetry of the Desert." *Aridlands Newsletter: The Desert in Literature* 2 (50). Retrieved 28 July 2002 on the World Wide Web: <http://ag.arizona.edu/OALS/aln50/hayward.html>.
- AlSayyad, Nezar, ed. 1992. *Forms of Dominance: On The Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise*. Brookfield, Avebury.
- Blunt, Alison, and Gillian Rose, eds. 1994. *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. 1988. *Labyrinths*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- de Vitray-Meyerovitch. 1987. *Rumi and Sufism*. Translated from French by Simone Fattal. Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dykgraaf, Christine Jo. 2001. "Metaphorical and Literal Depictions of the Desert in the Qu'ran." *Aridlands Newsletter: The Desert in Literature* 2 (50). Retrieved 28 July 2002 on the World Wide Web: <http://ag.arizona.edu/OALS/ALN/aln50/dykgraaf.html>.
- Eco, Umberto. 1983. *Reflections on the Name of the Rose*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1981. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum.
- Gates, Henry Louis. Jr. 1989. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Helm, Yolande, ed. 2000. *Malika Mokeddem: Envers et contre tout*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- hooks, bell. 1991. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. London: Turnaround.
- Howard, Jean. 1991. "Feminism and the Question of History: Resituating the Debate." *Women's Studies* 19: 149–59.
- Jalal al-Din Rumi, Maulana. 1995. *The Essential Rumi*. Translated by Coleman Barks with John Moyne, A.J. Arberry and Reynold Nicholson. San Francisco: Harper-Collins.
- Khatibi, Abdelkebir. 1993. "A Colonial Labyrinth." *Post/Colonial Conditions* 2. Edited by Françoise Lionnet and Ronnie Scharfman and translated by Catherine Lehman, 5–11.
- Masud, Taj, H. 2001. "The Kaaba: Guarding the Centre, Generating the Circumference." *The Hindu* (23 September). Retrieved 1 August 2002 on the World Wide Web: <http://www.hinduonnet.com/folio/foorog/01090320.htm>.
- McGuinness, Justin. 1996. "Neighbourhood Notes: Texture and Streetscape in the Médina of Tunis." *The Journal of North African Studies* 5 (4): 97–120.
- Memmi, Albert. 1965. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. New York: The Orion Press.

- Mernissi, Fatima. 1997. *The Veil and the Male Elite*. Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Mokeddem, Malika. 1992. *Le Siècle des sauterelles*. [The Century of Locusts]. Paris: Ramsay.
- . 1997. [1990] *Les hommes qui marchent*. [The Men Who Walk]. Tunis: Editions Cérés.
- Mortimer, Mildred. 2001. "Transforming the Word: The Storyteller in Works of Calixthe Beyala, Malika Mokeddem, and Assia Djebar." *Nottingham French Studies* 40.1 (spring): 86–92.
- Puffin, Curtin. n.d. "Bedouin Nomadology and Architecture." Retrieved 1 July 2002 on the World Wide Web: <http://puffin.curtin.edu.au/~cowan/nomad/6/>.
- Raybaud, Antoine. 1993. "Nomadism between the Archaic and the Modern." In *Post/colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations and Nomadisms*. Translated by Ronnie Scharfman and edited by Françoise Lionnet and Ronnie Scharfman. Yale French Studies 1 & 2.
- Rice Laura. 2001. "The Maghreb of the Mind in Mustapha Tlili, Brick Oussaïd and Malika Mokeddem." In *Maghrebian Mosaic: A Literature in Transition*, ed. Mildred Mortimer, 119–47. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Sari, Djilali. 1996. "The Role of the Medinas in the Reconstruction of Algerian Culture and Identity." Translated by Justin Mc Guinness. *The Journal of North African Studies* 5 (4): 68–80.
- Vandenbroeck, Paul. 2001. *Azetta: L'art des femmes berbères*. Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles. Ludion: Flammarion.