

“Only Palm Trees Have Roots”: Nomadism in the Work of Malika Mokeddem

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ABSTRACT

“Only Palm Trees Have Roots”: *Nomadism in the Work of Malika Mokeddem* explores the thematic and textual repercussions of nomadism in Mokeddem’s work. In Chapter I, “Nomadism and the Creation of Transgressive Space: *Unheimlichkeit* and *Haram*,” I examine nomadism as a theme and explain how it produces novelistic space felicitous to transgression. Nomadic movement within certain landscapes forces protagonists toward the nomadic self, and I examine how space operates within the text and on these characters. In Chapter II, “Nomadic Texts: Movement and Form,” I explore the nomadic text’s themes and structures. These texts “move” via intertextuality, literary echoes, and writerly genealogies, across the Sahara and Mediterranean, and through time. In Chapter III, “The Nomadic Self,” explores this subversive identity of refusal of hegemonic power. I show how nomadic bodies resist limitations and enlarge the possibilities for identity.

Keywords: nomadism, Mokeddem, Algeria, geocriticism, feminist geography, heterotopia, rhizome

INTRODUCTION

Que sous le coup de l'effroi, devant l'effondrement de nos repères, nous nous trouvons parfois contraints de recourir aux béquilles de la littérature.

– Malika Mokeddem, *La Désirante*

NOMADE adj. et n. (1540, n.m. pl.) au latin impérial *nomas*, *nomadis* “membre d'une tribu de pasteurs itinérants,” surtout au pluriel *nomades* à propos des peuplades errantes d'Afrique du Nord. Le mot latin est emprunte au grec *nomas*, *-ados* “qui change de pâturages, qui erre à la façon des troupeaux d'un pâturage à l'autre,” employé comme nom propre pour désigner les Numides... En français, *nomade* est d'abord employé pour désigner un peuple qui n'a pas d'habitation fixe.

– *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*

Malika Mokeddem writes in *La Désirante*: “‘Who am I?’ Ni plainte ni pleur, mais la clameur de tout un monde en devenir qui s’élève au-dessus des mers, des terres, des frontières” (185). This quest to find out “Who am I?” runs throughout her work, and seas, lands, and borders are complicit in these journeys. A character with amnesia recovers her memory through sailing

on the Mediterranean. A formerly nomadic grandmother inspires her granddaughter to cross the sea and follow her dream of becoming a doctor. A man pursues his wife's murderer through the desert despite swarms of locusts and the enmity of French colonists. A young woman is raped and exiled outside her country, in a brothel, until she escapes. All these characters must leave home in order to create their own homes and lives. They risk violence, exile, and death in the search for home and personal truth. Mokeddem's body of work is marked by this restless movement, by both the emotional geographies and the physical landscapes that influence her style and her characters, and it is the questions brought about by this unique voice of a crossroads of the Mediterranean and Sahara, of global nomadism, that motivates my dissertation project.

In Mokeddem's texts, we readers become nomadic, reading intertexts, literary echoes, and learning the author's writerly genealogy. Her nomadic texts are smooth spaces that connect rhizomatically across the Sahara and throughout the Mediterranean, from sand to shore, linking Mokeddem's fiction and memoirs to other writers across space and time. In both her novels and memoirs, verdant spaces of storytelling provide felicitous spaces for writing and allow the author to move back and forth from Algeria to France, from past to present, between reality and fiction. Mokeddem likewise reads the space of her desert hometown through the work of Antoine de St-Exupéry and Isabelle Eberhardt, literary antecedents who also wrote about the same desert. Her protagonists experience echoes of Homer's Mediterranean while they sail that same literature-saturated space crowded with monstrous Gorgons and Sirens. We become nomad readers within her work as we read relevant intertextual tropes and images throughout her work and experience echoes of historical and fictive books on Algeria. Nomadism is furthermore apparent in the structure of her books, as we see how sandstorms sometimes serve as beginnings and endings, forming a circle much like the path that real nomads follow for grazing and trading. Mokeddem

uses all these tactics to create the nomadic self, a subversive identity of refusal for her protagonists. Her nomadic bodies subvert essentialism and binarism, enlarging the possibilities for identity. When characters move, that movement thus resists colonial forces, linear time, imposed identity, and terrorism—all forms of hegemonic control. Characters' memories remind us that alternative histories exist; their slippery or shifting identities contest control by the state, religion, or patriarchy.

Mokeddem has described herself as “une écrivaine nomade,” and when I interviewed her, she took me to the mezzanine level of her house to see the desk where she writes. Among nautical maps and maps of Algeria is her writing desk. Being in this literally in-between space, surrounded by *representations* of space seemed to be an illustration of her entire writing project. Her memoirs provide insight into her writing practice and show how she uses emotional geographies, landscapes of fear, verdant spaces of writing, and flight in order to write these stories of nomads and nomadism. Through the tropes and practices of nomadism in her work, we can see *her own* deterritorialization.

Mokeddem's distinctive idea of nomadism subverts traditional notions of nomadism, home, and place. Most definitions of “nomadism” link nomadic people(s) to land—be it through shepherding in pastureland, responding to growing seasons, or those who move across land in a particular manner. However, Jacques Attali, like Mokeddem, defines nomadism as being intrinsic to *movement*, not land. He expands the definition of “nomad” to include the following mobile groups:

[L]es humains les plus divers: peuples premiers, cueilleurs, chasseurs, bergers, agriculteurs itinérants, chevaliers, colons, marins, pèlerins, jongleurs, troubadours, compagnons, pirates, mendiants, exiles, marginaux, marchands, explorateurs, saisonniers,

sans-abri, cow-boys, travailleurs migrants, réfugiés politiques, prêcheurs, gens du voyage, artistes, hippies, cadres branches et même touristes, amateurs de jeux vidéo, utilisateurs de téléphones portables et de l'Internet. Ils ne sont pas tous nomades...[m]ais tous partagent l'éthique et la culture nomades: le voyage constitue l'essence de leur existence. (12)

As Attali points out, movement is integral to nomadism, yet his definition noticeably does not link nomadism to land. Instead, for him, nomadism is transgressive identity: it rejects any definition of the self as anchored in land, nation, ideology, tradition, or customary relationships. Like nomads, nomadic identity is marginal; with no anchors, it is constantly in motion. Thus, a moving self is a site of contestation: meaning and belonging slip away and refuse sedentarization or anchoring because they are anchored to nothing. Similarly, Mokeddem's protagonists become unanchored to one space—a home, village, or country—and begin movement; they find home within movement and identity in transgression.

TOWARDS AN ALGERIAN CANON: A LITERATURE OF THE DETERRITORIALIZED

In an interview, Christiane Chaulet-Achour records Mokeddem's words on her family's nomadic heritage: “[Ma grand-mère a dit, qu]’il n’y a que les palmiers qui ont des racines. Nous, nous sommes nomades. Nous avons une mémoire et des jambes pour marcher” (186). My project, whose title is inspired by this quote, begins with a genealogical footnote and pursues alternative ideas of nomadism, questioning its implications for literary tropes and structures, culminating in its consequences for critical literary theory and philosophy.

Mokeddem's body of work has become increasingly popular, and her novel, *L'Interdite* (1993), is a staple of Francophone Literature courses now. She enlarges the Algerian literary canon by adding several distinct perspectives to the polyphony of Algerian stories: she is a

female voice who stands firmly and militantly in opposition to the creeping influence of religio-political fundamentalism in Algeria. She is of both the Sahara and the Mediterranean, depicting the geographical crossroads of the coastal regions of northern Algeria, the Sahel, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe. Her background is very different from that of her author peers: she comes from a sedentarized nomadic family and grew up poor, at edge of the Sahara; she is trained as a kidney specialist and emigrated to France in the late 1970s. This unique background, emigration, and travels throughout the Mediterranean have informed her writing, inspiring tales of displaced characters struggling to break with anchors of home and tradition in both maritime and desert landscapes (which I discuss in Chapter One). Her work is informed by both her family history and her own displacements, and the movement of her characters makes us question the very idea of what “home” is and can possibly be: is it inside oneself or a place that can be found on a map? Is the movement of nomadism a home? Moreover, studying her work reveals new representations of nomadism and the creation of what I call the nomadic text (see Chapter Two), a novelistic form characterized by alternative memory, movement, and transgression.

Mokeddem’s themes of subversion and nomadism operate in works that use intertextuality, literary echoing, structural circularity, and fluctuation in perspective in order to create a structural mobility that scaffolds thematic mobility. My corpus consists of five of Mokeddem’s novels chosen because they are representative of the thematic range of her work – from the desert to the sea, from families to individuals, from fiction to autofiction – and because they demonstrate what I call a poetics of nomadism. These novels’ narrative techniques, structure, characters, rhythm, and use of multiple languages reflect nomadic movement and especially explore the nomadic self (see Chapter Three).

Before exploring nomadism further, I turn to its opposite: home. Home is a complicated concept. Avtar Brah writes that it is simultaneously a “site of everyday lived experience...[a] discourse of locality, the place where feelings of rootedness ensue from the mundane and unexpected of daily practice... [It] connotes our networks of family, kin, friends, colleagues..., [is the] social and psychic geography of space...[and is] a place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it. It is a sense of ‘feeling at home’” (4). In other words, home is usually understood as a place, people, and feeling. It is the familiar, the comfortable, the supportive, and is a cultivated intimacy that anchors us emotionally and physically. “Home” and the house thus take on significations of these values: “La maison en tant que topos se conçoit fréquemment comme un espace emblématique d'intériorité et d'intimité qui devient ‘la topographie de notre être intime.’...Une volonté de donner un sens au monde environnant, de le contrôler, pousse l'individu à délimiter l'espace qui l'entoure” (Kassab-Charfi and Bahi 163). For a postcolonial and decolonizing nation like Algeria, “home” is a fraught concept. After a hard-fought struggle for independence from France, the nation was confronted with the problem of what “home” was via questions of national identity: after colonization by the French, Ottomans, and Arabs, what did it actually mean to be Algerian? What did Algeria represent; what were its values? What were its national symbols? Literature has been especially fundamental in posing and wrestling with these questions in Algeria, and so situating Mokeddem within that canon is helpful in seeing her literary antecedents as well as the unique ways that she is expanding the canon.

By positioning Mokeddem's work within a wider Algerian canon, we can see the literary and political questions that have formed her own writing. I want to suggest we think of her work within a broader canon we might call “literature of the deterritorialized.” Algerian novelistic

structures and themes have been pushed and pulled among competing French, Berber, *pied noir*, and nationalist narratives as the nation is still preoccupied with identity, home, and belonging. Albert Camus' novels, for example, are thematically informed by *colonized* perspectives on societal problems surrounding French colonization of Algeria. Assia Djebar's novels, in another example, prioritize *Algerian* histories and perspectives over those of the colonizer. In contrast to both Camus and Djebar, Ahlam Mosteghanemi pointedly does *not* use French in her novels. In fact, during one speech, she acknowledged the "Algerian writers writing in Arabic who confront unarmed the onslaughts of Francophony [sic] and its diverse temptations" (cited in Tageldin 467). All of these are examples of how a colonized and decolonizing nation's novels reflect deterritorialization, a type of displacement and marginalization. Therefore, before outlining a short history of the Algerian novel and situating Mokeddem within that field, I would like to clarify my use of the phrase, "literature of the deterritorialized."

Charles Bonn notes that identity is normally linked to or dependent on a fixed place, but deterritorialization means that the displaced person must make his own home, and (formerly) colonized writers accomplish this through "paroles déplacées." "[S]i le roman est le genre obligé pour se faire lire dans un système éditorial aux mains de l'empire colonial [français], subvertir ce genre est revendication d'une voix propre, fondatrice elle-même d'une identité collective décoloniste" (Bonn, *Migrations...* 9). In other words, subverting novelistic forms creates a type of "home" in decolonizing societies. In the context of my project, then, refusal to mimic European forms of narrative and representation create specifically Algerian novels, texts that give voice to a people whose voices have been silenced. To return to my examples of Camus, Djebar, and Mosteghanemi, these writers insist on Algerian perspectives, and their novels reflect this. Camus' novels criticize French occupation of Algeria and the racism "necessary" to uphold

such a system. Djébar's rewriting of Algerian history through the use of silenced stories demonstrates an alternative to a French colonial "reading" of Algeria. Mosteghanemi's refusal of the language of the colonizer represents the claim that Algeria's voice is Arab and therefore its literature for Arabic speakers. These are deliberate strategies for destabilizing accepted and acceptable stories and perspectives, and they aim to actively create identities appropriate to and reflective of diverse representations of Algeria. Consequently, when deterritorialization is used as a textual strategy, the problems that "home" implies come to the forefront; we can see this in Mokeddem's themes and structures. Brah expands the idea of home and claims that identity (i.e., a sense of "home") can be found in difference, not just the familiar, accepting, and comfortable, as mentioned above. Since identities are context-specific and multiple, "the identity that is proclaimed is a *remaking*, a context-specific construction. The *proclamation* [of an identity] is a *political* process as distinct from identity as a process *in* and *of* subjectivity..." (124-125 original italics). In other words, as Mokeddem's protagonists learn, identity and home are constructed; identity is created through struggle and movement. Brah claims that, as a textual strategy, this implies that a text contains non-synchronous memory, multi-dimensional perception, multi-layered semiotic matrices, is multi-lingual, and is cross-cultural (204). Such strategies create an "outsideness" composed of oppositions. Mokeddem's nomadism is thus one example of deterritorialization and "outsideness" via themes and novelistic structure.

Christopher Miller considers this notion of home-versus-outside in his study of nationalism and nomads, focusing particularly on the ways that literatures of newly independent nations inform the national narrative. In contrast to Brah, he claims that the nomadic text "posits identity in a third space of negotiation between past and present, in between French and Maghrebian cultures and beyond colonial and postcolonial binaries" (Orlando 34). Valérie

Orlando shifts this idea into the field of Francophone Algerian women writers. The protagonists in novels by these authors seek smooth space, as Mokeddem's heroines do, and the "subject is 'multiply organized' across cultural boundaries" (Françoise Lionnet cited in Orlando 36).

The irony of the nomad, the multiple-selved woman, is that she becomes implicated in a larger sphere of discovery, while at the same time, she is alone, cut off from family and tribe, faced with the prejudice of others... Mokeddem scrutinizes patriarchy, Islamic fundamentalism, and civil war and how they have impacted her life, forcing her to live in exile because of her criticism of the hostile socio-cultural and political climate in Algeria. (38-40)

My conceptualization of the nomadic text differs from that of Miller and Orlando. While they treat a wide range of authors, and Miller especially focuses on how literature impacts on a nation-wide level, I focus on Mokeddem's work and how she has created a nomadic text particular to herself. My concern in this project is less on the broad political implications of the idea of nomadism and instead on the personal outcomes of nomadism: what does nomadism mean for a particular character? How does this impact the formation of the nomadic *self*? As far as the impact of nomadism on the Francophone Algerian text, instead of focusing on political outcomes, I prioritize nomadism's effects on the novel and the practice of writing. How is genre mixed or subverted to reflect deterritorialization? How do novelistic structures reflect deterritorialization? In addition, I especially attend to the impact of space on the nomadic text and how that affects nomadism.

MOKEDDEM'S LITERARY ANTECEDENTS

After having briefly outlined certain preoccupations that inform Mokeddem's work, it is important to situate Mokeddem in the Algerian canon to show where she is "from" as a writer,

and also to explain how her unique style and themes are influencing Francophone and Algerian literature. Bonn, Réda Bensmaïa, and Peter Dunwoodie, writing separately, divide the history of Francophone Algerian literature into several groupings, roughly chronologically and thematically. These categories include writers of the Orientalists and colonialist fiction in the 19th century. The 20th century ushered in the Algerianists, the École d'Alger, and the “littérature de la 2^{ème} génération de l’immigration” (Bonn “La littérature algérienne francophone serait-elle...,” Bensmaïa, and Dunwoodie).

Théophile Gautier, Eugène Fromentin, Pierre Loti, and Louis Bertrand are examples of the earliest Francophone writers of Algeria in the 19th century (the Orientalists), authors whose representations of the country foregrounded French and colonialist perspectives during a time that texts from the colonized world were read as ethnographic documents. These narratives justified colonization and set up a hierarchy between native Algerians and Europeans in Algeria. In the 1920s, the Algerianists, including Robert Randau and Louis Lecoq, created novels representing “Algerian-ness” as a unique way of being, situating Algeria as distinct from France. Their focus remained on European communities, however, neglecting Berber and Arab voices and stories, for example. Later, the École d'Alger of the 1930s, including Camus and Emmanuel Roblès, explored the idea of Mediterranean identity as being more apropos to Algeria’s cultural and historical situation.

Up to this point, France’s political stance on Algeria had been guided by principles of assimilation and coexistence, and Francophone literature from and about Algeria reflected those ideas. Yet the rumblings of independence became stronger and stronger, especially after the end of World War II. Frantz Fanon’s explorations into the colonized mind in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) and, later, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961) provided psychological insight into the

themes that writers were exploring, and he advocated for a new, decolonized consciousness. The concurrent generation of *écrivains engagés* in Algeria used their platforms to oppose colonialism, write about the Berber community, explore the consequences of emigration, or expound on themes of home versus deterritorialization. Bensmaïa states that this literature was conceived of in “experimental nations,” or:

...nations that writers have had to imagine or explore as if they were territories to rediscover and stake out, step by step, countries to invent and to draw while creating one’s language.... [Authors from these nations believed] in the possibility of a reterritorialization through folklore, the past tradition, or religion would mean believing in the *sub specie aeternitatis*¹ existence of a norm or an essence of an Algerian people on whom 135 years of colonialism had had absolutely no impact” (8, 13).

Certain writers publishing just before liberation echoed this, viewing assimilation as problematic, and they questioned the notion of a “French Algeria” as even possible, Bensmaïa notes. “La littérature algérienne de langue française, en tant qu’ensemble de textes et d’écrivains perçu comme tel, est née dans les années 50 avec l’événement historique de la décolonisation” (Bonn, *Lectures nouvelles...* 39).

Mokeddem, born in 1949, grew up during this volatile and stimulating time, reading colonial and French representations of her country and attending French schools, but also with these liberatory ideas afloat in her nearly independent country. Some examples of seminal authors of this generation include Mohamed Dib and Kateb Yacine. Dib’s Algerian trilogy—*La Grande Maison* (1952), *L’Incendie* (1954), and *Le Métier à tisser* (1957)—recounts this coming-to-consciousness of a nation, while Kateb’s *Nedjma* (1956) is another example of a specifically

¹ Latin for “under the aspect of eternity,” meaning what is universally, objectively true.

Algerian novel containing themes of awakening and independence. These novels are but a few illustrations of new themes and structures that stand in stark contrast to, for example, the Orientalism of Loti and Fromentin.

In the vacuum of power left after 1962, Arabization and the ideologies of political repression and religious fundamentalism were enforced to impose some order on a chaotic society. Rachid Boudjedra, author of the immensely successful and controversial novel, *La Répudiation* (1969), received death threats and had to flee to France and Morocco because his writing challenged conventional morality. Rachid Mimouni's realist work is especially critical of Algerian society and government, and his texts faced harsh censorship. He recounts:

Certains de mes personnages, par exemple, disaient 'merde.' Pour le censeur, le public algérien n'était pas prêt à lire ce mot ou d'autres ayant une connotation sexuelle ou érotique... [Un chapitre qui traite le coup d'État de 1965 a été coupé du livre.] Le censeur m'a expliqué: D'accord, il y a eu un coup d'État, mais est-il vraiment nécessaire d'en parler? (in Mounir 129)

The paucity of women writers in the above overview is evident relative to male writers such as Kateb, Dib, and Mimouni, for example. Djébar, Cixous, Taos Amrouche, Maïssa Bey, Fatma Aït Mansour, and Leïla Sebbar are some examples of prominent women writers, and Djébar has the distinction of being the first North African author elected to the Académie française.² These writers' perspectives as women and their inclusion of women's stories and voices in the Algerian canon are essential. This insistence on carving out a space within a male-dominated canon in a masculinist, patriarchal nation is a key literary preoccupation.

² Other contemporary women writers from Algeria and of Algerian origin include Nina Bouraoui, Ahlam Mosteghanemi (writing in Arabic), Latifa Ben Mansour, and Fatma Zohra Zamoum (who also works in film).

Postcolonial women writers' "subjectivities emerge from the problematic excessive positionality that women occupy in the modern patriarchal nation-state within the global capitalist social field...[T]he lives and bodies of postcolonial women turn into a site of contestation where this social hierarchy is reproduced and reaffirmed" (Khaled 7). Algerian women, especially during and after independence from France, came to be especially symbolic for politicians and writers; that is, their clothes, behavior, and speech all seemingly reflect the Algerian nation, its history and its hopes for the future. Women, in other words, came to symbolize the nation.

One example of this "excessive positionality" is the "discursive combat" over the veil (Shepard 192). On May 16, 1958, pro-French Algeria groups brought Muslim Algerians into Algiers, the capital, to demonstrate support against independence. Women were photographed in the act of unveiling, smiling for their "liberation" and chanting pro-French slogans. "Their chant made clear that they looked to French women to lead them from backward-thinking patriarchy to modernity: 'Kif kif les françaises' ('Let's be like French women')" (Shepard 189). In contrast, Fanon viewed the unveiling as pure propaganda. In "L'Algérie se dévoile" (1959), he encourages Algerian women to wear veils in order to hide behind them—essentially to hide the Algerian nation from the French gaze and to use that piece of clothing to transport bombs during the struggle for independence (*Sociologie d'une révolution*). Thus we see how both Fanon and the pro-French movement conflate women as embodying the nation and how both use the traditional white veil as a symbol and instrument of resistance. Another example of this "problematic excessive positionality" is the eponymous protagonist in *Nedjma* by Kateb. The novel tells the story of four young men who fall in love with Nedjma, a woman who is of mixed Algerian and French heritage. Critical readings of the novel often interpret Nedjma as the symbol of Algeria, a

contested “body” vied for by male forces, and Tahon notes that she is, moreover, mute. “There is ambiguity in women’s situation. In life. In literature Women are nowhere. Thus, they can be assigned to any ideal, especially if it is a particularly distant one. This relegation of ‘woman’ to symbol (liberation and independence twenty years ago, democracy today) ends up muzzling their speech” (Tahon 40). In sum, Nedjma comes to stand for more than merely a woman and can be read as a sort of *bildungsroman* for the newly independent nation, making the female body here “saturated” with meaning.

Many Algerian women writers consequently construct identity *within* contradiction, as Mokeddem does, in order to counter these essentialist representations. One strategy is that of unhomeing, in which these women authors “rewrite the traditional fabulations of home and culture in the language of contingent belonging [...in order to interrogate] dominant discourses of belonging” (Khader 10). Multiple and shifting subject positions and travel in the narrative belie a feeling of deterritorialization and status as outsider. Transnational alliances, another strategy, “construct alternative political discourses about agency and transformation” to underscore how they are doubly deterritorialized, as women and decolonizing subjects.

In narratives of displacing...postcolonial women writers unravel the dialectical conceptualization of the homely as both homely and unhomey, familiar and impenetrable, by placing the grammar of belonging under erasure... [H]ome/coming is impossible only in the sense that the experience of home, or the lack of it thereof, for many women in the postcolonial world has been mediated through material histories of colonial subjugation, patriarchal oppression, military conquest, internal displacement, forced relocation, house arrest, and capitalist exploitation. (Khader 12-14)

When read in comparison to the male canon, we notice the preoccupation of the-personal-as-political for many of these women writers.

In moving on to a chronology of these women writers, Aïcha Kassoul divides them into roughly the same “generations” as their male counterparts. The first generation (born between 1882-1928) includes Taos Amrouche, Djamilia Debèche, and Fatma Aït Mansour. This group moved from imitating the Orientalists and European novels to developing a more revolutionary body of work that reflected particularly Algerian concerns. The works of this first generation are mainly autobiographical and deal especially with themes of national independence, violence, and Berber society. In terms of genre, realism and autobiography are used to explore the conditions of women’s emancipation and the quest for the self, reflecting national questions of deterritorialized identity (67-68). Orlando notes that some of these works are “obscure and unobtainable” since they are out of print, and there is not much information or records available by these authors (42). Debèche is one of the more prominent authors of this group. She began publishing in the 1940s and is best remembered for her novels *Leïla, une fille algérienne* (1947) and *Aziza* (1955). These books detail the lives of young Algerian women who have assimilated to French culture but nevertheless begin to express discontent with French colonization. Amrouche’s novel, *Jacinthe noire* (1947), is based on the author’s mother’s life and tells the story of a young Algerian girl’s efforts to fit into a French boarding school. These themes of deterritorialization and nascent feminism laid the groundwork for later novels by Djébar and Mokeddem.

The second generation (born in the 1930s-1940s) includes Djébar, Zoubeïda Bittari, and Corinne Chevallier. “These authors’ novels delve into themes such as whether to use the French language or their native tongues, whether to espouse the French philosophical intellectual inquiry

they had learned when schooled in the French colonial education system, or espouse nationalist identity ideologies that rejected any colonialist purview” (Orlando 44). Djébar’s first novel, *La Soif* (1957), was the first by an Algerian woman to deal with the war for independence. She demonstrated how the realities of war and the literary consequences of it had social repercussions: “War changes [women’s] mode of living because it means the absence of men” (Tahon 43). In other words, women writers of this period wrote about war on a national scale as well as on the home front, as they dealt with the battle for independence and identity both on the personal and national levels.

Most female voices during nationalist independence movements throughout the Maghreb were overshadowed, or outright effaced. Moreover, while present in some feminine independence literature (the writing certainly of Assia Djébar, Djamila Dèbèche, and Aïcha Lesmine, who wrote promoting Algerian liberation), we cannot proclaim that women were well represented or even listened to within the highly masculinized, Marxist-socialist revolutionary rhetoric of these movements. (Orlando 36)

The “muting” of female voices in this period is underscored by the fact that many of these works were published in France rather than Algeria. Refusal of assimilation and refusal of servitude are major themes in these works, and they demonstrate a budding Algerian feminism distinct from that of French feminism (Kassoul 69). An example of this liberatory feminist theme is Bittari’s novel, *O mes sœurs musulmanes pleurez!* (1964). The autobiography condemns child marriage and is a foreshadowing of Nina Bouraoui’s *La Voyeuse interdite* (1991) and Leïla Marouane’s *La Fille de la Casbah* (1996), which “reveal the lack of human and civil rights that women endure in post-independence Algeria” (Orlando 45).

The third generation (born in the 1940s-1950s) includes Leïla Sebbar and Hafsa Zinai-Koudil, with publication again mainly from French houses. Mirroring Kateb's assertion that these authors are "passagers clandestins," this "problem" of so much Algerian writing being published in France by French publishing houses is both a blessing and a curse for women writers struggling to find their voices and to make them heard.

[L]a plupart de ces écrivaines ont réussi à se faire connaître grâce aux maisons d'édition françaises... La France s'est toujours montrée sensible en matière de défense des principes "humanitaires," surtout si ces principes correspondent à un discours orientaliste qui ne s'avoue plus à force d'avoir été intériorisé... [P]our paraphraser Kateb Yacine, autant se jeter dans la gueule du loup et montrer que l'on peut hurler à son tour. (Kassoul 71)

Hybridity and identity are thus recurring themes for this generation of authors, with *métissage* and exile, especially via language, being particularly important for writers of mixed heritage or who felt like exiles in both Algeria and France (69-70).

The fourth generation of Algerian women writers, according to Kassoul, is composed of women of Algerian origin born outside the country—deterritorialized physically and psychically. Bouraoui, Farida Belghoul, Ferrudja Kessas, Soraya Nini, and Leïla Houari are among these authors. None of the writers in this group writes about the war for independence; instead, their work is often autobiographical and the condition of women is addressed "par un discours agressif, introspection violent qui répond à une quête de soi" (71). These writers confront themes of alienation, as they are neither insiders nor outsiders in either of their two countries. They often describe grim lives in French *banlieus* marred by violence and poverty (Ireland). Independence of the nation and liberation of the self, as well as the quest for identity, are common themes with

all these writers: “having long had their identities contained in ideological straitjackets, the female narrators [in certain novels of this generation] signal the importance of finding their own *voie/voix* (way/voice) for future representation” (McIlvanney 139).

I referenced Mokeddem in the above timelines among her intellectual and artistic predecessors, and I now turn to look at her own biography and work in greater detail. Born October 5, 1949, she grew up in the town of Kénadsa, in western Algeria near the Moroccan border. She was one of thirteen children (eleven of whom survived) and very close to her grandmother, Zohra. She attended schools taught by French teachers and excelled in math, and she was the only girl in her class from *sixième* to *terminale*. She especially found refuge in reading, often escaping to the town’s neighboring dunes to find peace away from her numerous siblings and household chores and begging her teachers for summer reading to escape the desert heat and her family. She moved to Oran to begin her studies in nephrology, where she also had jobs as a substitute math teacher and *maîtresse d’internat* in her school. She finished her degree in Paris and then set up a medical practice in Montpellier in 1979 where she especially devoted her time to caring for fellow immigrants. In between patients, she began to write and published her first novel in 1990, at the beginning of *la décennie noire*. She was awarded two prizes for this, the Prix Littré and the Prix littéraire de la fondation Nourredine Aba, both prizes which recognize authors who demonstrate particular attention to ethics and humanism. For her second novel, *Le Siècle des sauterelles*, she was awarded the Prix Afrique-Méditerranée by the Association des Écrivains de langue française in 1992, and the Prix Méditerranée for *L’Interdite* in 1994. She has stopped practicing medicine, yet that motif remains present in her writing: “Entre la médecine et l’écriture... [I]es deux sont associées à la vie, à la mort” (Helm 8). This

placement in a canon of the deterritorialized situates her within an intellectual, literary, and political history where movement and destabilization paradoxically become anchors.

Mokeddem is distinct from her male and female peers not only in her themes but in her sociocultural background. Kassoul notes that the writers in her study come mainly from coastal cities and comfortable backgrounds. Mokeddem, on the other hand, is from the village of Kénadsa, in Béchar Province in western Algeria. In Fig. 1, an aerial view of Kénadsa, we can see the Saharan dunes that form one border to the village, and the coal mine (which Mokeddem mentions in her work) on another side. This is not the rich soil and good climate that French and European colonizers so prized near the Mediterranean coast. Instead, it is the edge of the desert. The village's coal mine and water tower were strategic military points during the war for independence, and the lure of employment in the coal mine helped sedentarize nomads from the surrounding areas with the promise of steady work and financial security. It was also a trading post for nomad caravans, and these caravans appear throughout Mokeddem's work. I mention this since it stands in stark opposition to the Mediterranean sun on the coast or the snow-covered Atlas Mountains in Kabylie which are more commonly backdrops in coastal authors' novels. Mokeddem's early work was situated in her home region, and the desert, its weather phenomena, and landscape set the scene for the physical and mental nomadism of the Sahara without which her work would be fundamentally different.



Fig. 1, Map of Kénadsa, Algeria

From the physical landscapes of Mokeddem's childhood, I now move to the scholarly landscape of her work. Four monographs have been written about Mokeddem's writing: *Malika Mokeddem: Envers et contre tout*, edited by Yolande Helm (2001); *Malika Mokeddem*, edited by Najib Redouane, Yvette Benayoun-Szmidt, and Robert Elbaz (2003); *Malika Mokeddem: Métissages*, by Christiane Chaulet-Achour (2007); and *Tactical Silence in the Novels of Malika Mokeddm*, by Jane E. Evans (2011). The first two are collections of essays, bibliographies, and summaries of Mokeddem's fiction, newspaper articles, and editorials. The third is a monograph that examines themes of *métissage* in Mokeddem's work via questions of language, femininity, and masculinity. Finally the last book explores motifs of silence as a literary and feminist strategy. Comparative studies of Mokeddem along with other Francophone writers from Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean have been published, but the number remains extremely small, including Chaulet-Achour's *Noûn: Algériennes dans l'écriture* (1998) and Pamela Pears' *Remnants of Empire in Algeria and Vietnam* (2004). Some other comparative examples include *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing*, by Brinda J. Mehta (2007);

Nouvelles romancières francophones du Maghreb, by Marta Segarra (2010); *Polygraphies: Francophone Women Writing Algeria*, by Alison Rice (2012); and *Front Cover Iconography and Algerian Women's Writing: Heuristic Implications of the Recto-Verso Effect*, by Pears (2015).

In addition, thirty-six doctoral dissertations study her work either exclusively or comparatively.³ Francophone Studies scholars are currently the main critics of her work, and my project seeks to connect Mokeddem, critically, to Mediterranean Studies, biopolitics, feminist geography, and geocriticism, as well as several theoretical approaches including rhizome theory, heterotopias, and nomad theory.

Scholarly inquiry on themes of hybridity, silence, exile, and violence in Mokeddem's novels is relatively abundant, as is noted above. Helm, in the first monograph mentioned above dedicated to Mokeddem attends to her physical and social hybridity, which is a touchstone of critical approaches to the author and to many writers from the decolonizing world. Helm describes the author as "fille du désert et de l'oralité, petite-fille d'une nomade bédouine, héritière du sang noir d'un ancêtre africain, son identité s'est aussi nourrie de la culture occidentale transmise par les lectures et l'écriture" (7). In line with the themes and motifs expressed by her generation of writers, much criticism of her work especially concentrates on questions of gender, memory, and the Algerian woman's identity. Therefore, the majority of

³ See *LIMAG* for more information. I include this list of selected doctoral dissertations to demonstrate the overarching critical approaches to Mokeddem's oeuvre: Meryem Ouedghiri Ben Ottmane, (2000) *The Palimpsestic Body in Arab Women's Writings*. Diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Anne Michelle Kerns, (2002) *La s'écriture chez les écrivaines francophones*. Diss. University of California-Davis. Tamara El-Hoss, (2005) *(En)Lever le voile: L'intersign langagier féminin dans la littérature du Maghreb*. Diss. University of Toronto. Christa Catherine Jones, (2006) *Le Moi multiple ou l'écriture de l'exil chez Assia Djébar, Leïla Sebbar et Malika Mokeddem*. Diss. Washington University. Allison Spellman Connolly, (2007) *Transculturality and the Francophone Mother*. Diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Kristi Lynn Shaw, (2006) *Re-Creating Identity in Exile: Hybridity and Gender in the Works of Assia Djébar, Leïla Sebbar, and Malika Mokeddem*. Diss. University of Alabama. Rachel Van Deventer, (2010) *L'Agentivité et la naissance de la femme-sujet dans la littérature algérienne contemporaine*. Diss. Université d'Ottawa. Mireille Reveiz, (2012) *Écritures féminines et guerres civiles en Algérie et au Liban*. Diss. Florida State University. It is also important to note here that most of these dissertations have yet to be published in monograph form, which would them more widely accessible.

criticism on her work thus far has been informed by postcolonial criticism, positioning her work in the in-between of France and Algeria and situating it chronologically within the timeline of French colonization and thus linking many of her themes to that 130-year “event.” Such criticism rightly interrogates her themes and motifs as products of a hybrid, decolonizing world: indeed, the effects of colonization and decolonization on the Algerian body, language in Algeria, and Algerian society and politics cannot be overstated.

Several studies have used geocritical perspectives to examine Mokeddem’s novels, and my work owes a debt to these foundational critical perspectives.⁴ They have, for example, explored deserts in opposition to urban space; examined how time, memory, and space work in tandem; shown how marginalization results from nomadism; or interrogated the “arabesques” created by movement between France and Algeria (Naudin in Helm). Building on this groundwork in dealing with how Mokeddem variously creates national memory, gives voice to the Algerian woman, or how space may be used in her artistic projects, for example, I am concerned primarily with the *outcomes* of movement in Mokeddem’s body of work, and I conceive of nomadism as the most accurate metaphor for better understanding that. Some scholarship on her work has indeed interrogated the trope of nomads, although from a

⁴ See Nicole Jaouich “L’Immobilité sédentaire et le nomadisme des mots: étude de deux romans de Malika Mokeddem” (Observatoire de l’imaginaire contemporaine); Brinda J. Mehta “Geographies of Space: Spatial Impositions, Circularity, and Memory in Malika Mokeddem’s *Les hommes qui marchent* and *Le siècle des sautertelles*” (*Meridians*); (Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi) “The Poetics of Exile and Errancy in *Le Baobab Fou* by Ken Bugul and *Ti Jean L’Horizon* by Simone Schwarz-Bart” (*Yale French Studies*); Stephanie Clare “Geopower: The Politics of Life and Land in Frantz Fanon’s Writing” (*diacritics*); Sébastien Caquard “Cartography I: Mappy Narrative Cartography” (*Progress in Human Geography*); David Cooper and Gary Priestnall “The Processual Intertextuality of Literary Cartographies: Critical and Digital Practices” (*The Cartographic Journal*); Florence Deprest “Using the Concept of *Genre de vie*: French Geographers and Colonial Algeria, c. 1880-1949” (*Journal of Historical Geography*); Seth Graebner, *History’s Place: Nostalgia and the Cith in French Algerian Literature*; Katharine Harrington, “Writing Between Borders: Nomadism and Its Implications for Contemporary French and Francophone Literature” (*Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*); Wolfgang Trautmann “The Nomads of Algeria Under French Rule: a Study of Social and Economic Change” (*Journal of Historical Geography*); and Urs Urban “The Mediterranean as a Geopolitical and Geopoetic Border Region: Possible Worlds Beyond the Border in Fiction” (*Neohelicon*).

sociological perspective or as a utilitarian plot device. *Les hommes bleus* or the traveling woman in Mokeddem's novels do indeed move the plot along with their own movement, yet it is the wider implications of nomadism that interest me. Postcolonial criticism has produced a great number of resources on the writers, practices, and works of writers who are displaced, in exile, or travel frequently. Examples of these nomadic, usually bilingual writers include J.-M. G. Le Clézio, Nancy Huston, Abdourahman Waberi, Dany Laferrière, Amin Maalouf, and Marguerite Yourcenar, to name only a few. From a critical standpoint, these authors have been understood by their movement, but that movement is interpreted as the search for home, for belonging. In contrast, I am most interested in Mokeddem's *refusal* of home. That is, departure and refusal of traditional anchors are hallmarks of her work, and I view her themes as oppositional to belonging. The literary and critical implications of reconceptualizing nomadism—that is, taking it out of a physically-situated and sociological context—allow us not only to better understand Mokeddem's work but also to recognize the new directions of Francophone literature through her novels and memoirs. Movement is a key idea in my project, and her use of nomadism—that is, physical *and* textual movement—deterritorializes identity in a new way that builds on rhizome theory and the poetics of relation. In short, Mokeddem as a “woman writer” and her treatment of the desert are the main critical approaches to her work. My project has a dual goal: 1) to spotlight Mokeddem alone rather than read her comparatively, and 2) to focus on the literary and philosophical outcomes of her nomadism. She is indeed *envers et contre tout*⁵ because of her nomadic family background, and her gender. However, her treatment of space and place situate her within several disciplinary landscapes and make her work especially timely in the light of contemporary interest in the spatial turn and the growth of geocriticism.

⁵ Malika Mokeddem, *Des rêves et des assassins*, 1998.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Several interrelated critical theories provide perspectives that enlarge the implications of Mokeddem's themes and the structures of her novels. Geocriticism, biopolitics, and nomadic theory are used throughout my project and to give insight into textual strategies that deterritorialize and refuse belonging. Each of my subsequent chapters' themes engages with these critical perspectives, and I provide here an overview of them.

Geocriticism is, simply put, the study of place in literature. This field of critical analysis poses questions about literary topography, characters' interaction with space, the meaning of space in texts, and devices which create spatial systems (Bourneuf in Mortimer 97). There are many ways to "read" space, and thus many categories of it, including absolute, abstract, capitalist, dominated, familial, historical, imagined, masculine, neutral, political, possible, traditional, urban, and women's space (Dear cited in Soja, *Thirdspace* 59). This list is far from exhaustive, but it provides a tiny sampling of ways that space can be interpreted in relation to humans' interactions with it and comprehension of it.

Here, since I am especially interested in how space operates in Mokeddem's novels it is helpful to remember, "Peu d'hectares de notre planète sont vierges de littérature" (Westphal, *La Géocritique: mode d'emploi* 36). Indeed, the Algerian desert – its wind, eternal sands, angry storms, infiniteness, solitude, silence, and power – plays a central role in Mokeddem's early work, and the Mediterranean is both a setting and quasi-character in her more recent work. I approach Mokeddem's work from a geocritical perspective and note that the landscapes, including the Sahara and the Mediterranean, serve as essential elements in her novels. They are the physical intersections of these critical perspectives, and I turn to geocriticism to better "read" them. I confront questions of nomadism, narrative, and subversion with space especially in mind

since violence “takes place” in the space of Mokeddem’s novels and space is deployed as protection against violence and repression. Space can likewise embody those same forces. I therefore deploy geocritical readings of Mokeddem’s representations of space to explain how space relates to the pursuit of the nomadic self. She creates spaces that welcome or harass characters, and characters’ interactions with these spaces propel the narrative. Moreover, characters are created and developed by the spaces around them. Landscapes are therefore akin to the motors which help propel these characters towards their goal. Mokeddem uses landscape to push narratives forward: seas and deserts churn to provoke character movement; they isolate or connect; and they halt or goad plot.

As mentioned above, we can “read” space as masculine or feminine, and feminist geography provides useful perspectives on Mokeddem’s female characters in space. Gillian Rose argues that women have historically been underrepresented as producers and subjects of geographical knowledge, and she asserts that the female body’s presence in and reclamation of space (as breastfeeding mothers, working women, or queer women, for example) is a key feminist project.

Feminist geography is, then, resistance by women against patriarchal, primarily masculine spaces, and Mokeddem is especially concerned with navigation through and around “woman-unfriendly” spaces in spite of limitations. For Mokeddem, the struggle for women’s autonomy, agency, and independence is central to her work, and autonomy of the female body—its freedom to move and act in space—is essential to these struggles since characters must move in order to achieve these goals. Her characters’ bodies move from one mental or emotional state to another, from desert to town, throughout the Sahara and Mediterranean. They reject control by the family, tradition, fundamentalist Muslim men, and governments, to name a few examples. As

characters reject these modes of control, freedom ultimately comes to rest solely within the solitary and moving body. Thus we see how space is multi-dimensional and that a feminist understanding of it is a threshold breached (Orlando in Helm 109). By understanding why Mokeddem's female characters must *struggle* to move, we better understand the stakes of their not moving. Not moving and thus not reclaiming space for the female body means surrendering to controlling forces.

Complementing this insistence on movement and reclamation of space, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of rhizomes helps us understand space differently.⁶ This theory has become indispensable in understanding the collapse of traditional centers, be they political (empires, for example), ideological (gender hierarchies), or literary (traditional canons). The theory approaches systems of knowledge from a horizontal, interconnected viewpoint rather than hierarchically, a difference comparable to the distinction between roots and trees, according to Deleuze and Guattari. The authors explain, "Un rhizome ne commence et n'aboutit pas, il est toujours milieu, entre les choses, inter-être, *intermezzo*. L'arbre est filiation mais le rhizome est alliance, uniquement d'alliance" (36). They describe the rhizome as connection, porosity, fragmentation, multiple, rupture, non-hierarchical, and a-centered. Likewise, all rhizomatic points are connected, establishing multiple relations.

As Deleuze and Guattari expand the implications of this type of thinking, they develop a theory of nomadology to work against state control (and, by extension, any form of control). This approach views the world as full of either smooth or striated spaces, essentially spaces that allow for freedom or ones that help maintain some type of control. Smooth space is associated with movement and nomadism; the desert and sea are examples of this. Smooth space furthermore

⁶ For an extended explanation of the rhizome as an anti-arboreal, sourceless, non-hierarchical assemblage of points and plateaus, see the chapter "Introduction: Rhizome" in *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*.

helps to deterritorialize, allowing for freedom and change; it is resistant to control. Striated space, on the other hand, leads to sedentarization and is characterized by perpendicularity, walls, and enclosures, literal or metaphorical. Striated space essentially controls and hinders freedom.

Deleuze and Guattari state that nomads have their own geography, meaning that they view the world through the lens of nomadology and seek the smooth spaces that provide resistance against control. In the same way, Mokeddem's characters chisel out their own geographies of resistance via these smooth spaces. This is very similar to Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation, in which he advocates for a similar approach to prevent rigidly ideological thinking. Glissant instead advocates for "relational" thinking that prioritizes connection rather than hierarchy or difference. In his *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), Glissant opens with the image of a slave ship which connects Africa and the New World. This "barque ouverte"⁷ is a rhizomatic point of connection on a smooth space (to employ Deleuze and Guattari's terms). "Cette barque est une matrice, le gouffre-matrice. Génératrice de ta clameur. Productrice aussi de toute unanimité à venir... Les peuples qui ont fréquenté le gouffre... vivent la Relation, qu'ils défrichent, à mesure que l'oubli du gouffre leur vient et qu'aussi bien leur mémoire se renforce" (18, 20). The ship is a rhizome, a singular rhizomatic point in the greater history of Afro-Caribbean society and becomes rhizomatic when reconceptualized as Relation. Thinking of this greater history as interconnected, fragmented, and arboreal—that is, not as History told by the powerful—opens up possibilities of reinterpretation that respond to the Caribbean's particular story.

⁷ The connection between Glissant's *barque ouverte* with Mokeddem's Mediterranean boats will be explored in Chapter Three.

Rosi Braidotti's concept of nomadic theory similarly examines how nomadism is used to resist control, especially from a feminist viewpoint: "The radical nomadic epistemology that Deleuze and Guattari propose is a form of resistance to microdespotism in that it focuses on the need for a qualitative shift away from hegemony" (*Nomadic Subjects* 26). The way in which she articulates the concept of the nomad recalls the articulation of nomadic essence in the later chapters of Deleuze and Guattari, and Glissant since they are also multilayered, non-unitary, and dynamic.

The point of nomadic subjectivity is to identify lines of flight,⁸ that is to say, a creative alternative space of becoming that would fall not between the mobile/immobile, the resident/the foreigner distinction, but within all these categories. The point is neither to dismiss nor to glorify the status of marginal, alien others, but to find a more accurate, complex location for a transformation of the very terms of the specification and of our political interaction. (7)

All these critics essentially argue for a slipperiness of identity as a more accurate depiction of a nomadic subjectivity that withstands hegemony. Braidotti understands space in a similar manner as Deleuze and Guattari. She then focuses on powers that affect the nomad, reminding us of *potestas* and *potentia*, that is, the restrictive versus the empowering and affirmative. To achieve subjectivity, active power, or *potentia*, must be used with reactive power, *potestas*. The two forces are dynamic in a similar way that Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology and Glissant's idea of *relation* produce a subjectivity constantly in motion. From this theorization of space and moving bodies within it, I now move to biopolitics and the problem of power acting on bodies.

⁸ "Ligne de fuite" is Deleuze and Guattari's original phrase in French, and refers to planes of possibility, deterritorialization, escape, or creativity. This term is discussed in each chapter, and particular attention is paid to the double meaning of "fuite" in English, which can be translated as "flight" or "leak."

The first outlines of biopolitics were developed in 19th-century Germany and France, yet the theory became an immediate concern simultaneous to the rise of the Third Reich.⁹ As National Socialism began to take root in Germany, the idea of a state that ruled as a collectivist *body* was exerted to forcefully weed out those not “biologically valuable” (Lemke). The Nazi policy of *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) linked national territory to a people’s blood. Here we see how space, bodies, and power may be explicitly wedded. Meanwhile the strategy of *Lebensraum* prioritized land for purposes of national development, legalizing eugenic projects to push *Untermenschen* off certain land, to deterritorialize them. I mention these details because, much like post-colonial Arabization in Algeria forced “impure” groups such as Jews, Berbers, and those of European origin out of Algerian power or territory, these Nazi principles similarly wielded state power against bodies within a certain space.

Judith Butler’s essay, “Precarious Life,” in the book (2004) of the same name, “approaches the question of a non-violent ethics, one that is based upon an understanding of how easily human life is annulled... [D]ominant forms of representation can and must be disrupted for something about the precariousness of life to be apprehended” (xviii). Butler focuses on those with no voice, those effaced from history, and I employ her term to underscore Mokeddem’s preoccupation with unwanted migrant bodies as well as to highlight the fragility of the coming-to-fruit of the nomadic subject. Feminist biopolitics is helpful in “reading” these precarious lives by bringing us closer to Mokeddem’s exploration of the nomadic self since it helps us

⁹ Developments in early biopolitics were especially influenced by the genocidal events perpetrated during the Third Reich. Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) examines the ways in which persecuted bodies were moved outside the law, leading to the Holocaust: “The official SS newspaper, the *Schwarze Korps*, stated explicitly in 1938 that if the world was not yet convinced that the Jews were the scum of the earth, it soon would be when unidentifiable beggars, without nationality, without money, and without passports crossed their frontiers. And it is true that this kind of factual propaganda worked better than Goebbels’ rhetoric” (269). In the context of my project, we can understand how essential narrative was here in justifying genocide. Propagandistic anti-Semitic narratives were effective in that they convinced people to rationalize and sustain genocide and the “purification” of society.

understand the implications of being a female body in a very traditional, patriarchal society. Mokeddem frequently shows her readers how such bodies are precariously positioned and thus uses fictional narrative to illustrate these urgent questions in biopolitics.

The relatively new field of feminist biopolitics, then, examines the ways that the female body is “read” as being innately tied to the very flesh and bone that comprises a body. Elizabeth Grosz explains the impact of such a discourse and politics on the body in this way:

The body is, so to speak, organically, biologically “incomplete”; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering, and long-term “administration.” The body becomes a human body, a body that coincides with the “shape” and space of a psyche, a body that defines the limits of experience and subjectivity only through the intervention of the (m)other and, ultimately, the Other (the language- and rule-governed social order). (*Volatile Bodies* 104)

This definition recalls Braidotti’s *potestas* (reactive, restrictive, negative power) and Deleuze and Guattari’s striated space as examples of forces that act upon the female body in particular. Hegemonic, striating forces narrow the possibilities of female and nomadic subjectivity, in an attempt to “sedentarize” and purify these beings whose smooth, *potentia*-saturated existence actively subverts their power. The signification of the precarious body is thus in a sort of striated, restricted space beholden to the discourses which act on it and prevent authenticity and subjectivity. In essence, power imposes, and the nomad must resist.

Understanding of female bodies has traditionally been bound to the physical, Grosz states, because of their capacity for child-birth. Such difference places them apart from male bodies, which are normalized as not being tied to a physical “marker” and are thus freed from the body-as-marker. Grosz elaborates, “The coding of femininity with corporeality in effect leaves

men free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order” (14). In essence, menstruation, childbearing, and lactation have, in the past, made the link between the female and the female body inextricable since female bodies are tied innately to reproduction, to bodies producing and nurturing other bodies. Family, language, sexuality, religion, and means of production are just a few of the exterior forces attempting to shape the female body through concepts such as female modesty, the notion of virginity, legislation of the female body vis-à-vis dowries, abortion legislation, and laws dealing with female clothing and head coverings, to name but a few examples. Grosz argues that the female body is thus a site of volatile contestation. She summarizes, “Civilization carves meanings onto and out of bodies” (*Space, Time, Perversion* 34).

Mokeddem consistently demonstrates, through her female nomadic characters, the need for resistance to the relegation of female life to the bodily and the homed or sedentarized, tied to reproductive and sexual capacity within a religious, repressive patriarchal system. One *must* flee in these instances, insist Deleuze and Guattari: “A chaque moment, qu’est-ce qui fuit dans une société? C’est sur les lignes de fuite qu’on invente des armes nouvelles, pour les opposer aux grosses armes...” (250). As an example of the necessity of flight, the author describes her own mother as “dévorerée” by thirteen pregnancies (see Appendix). In fictionalizing this aspect of her life, Mokeddem describes the protagonist Leïla’s disgust with “[l]es bercements, biberons, soupes, pipis, défécations multiples, toilettes même sommaires... ‘Tu n’es qu’une usine d’enfants!’” one character shouts at her mother (*Les Hommes qui marchent* 115-116). She has no choice but to flee this fate. Mokeddem’s nomadic protagonists flee such striating forces in order to resist control and hegemony. “[A] nomadic body is a threshold of transformations. It is the complex interplay of the highly constructed social and symbolic forces. The body is a surface of

intensities and an affective field,” Braidotti states (*Nomadic Subjects* 25). She here reflects Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of smoothness being tied to “hécécités”¹⁰ and the “haptique” (598).

The nomadic bodies of Mokeddem’s characters therefore must move to or through smooth space in order to contest and subvert this imposed biopower. They move in resistance and consequently repel suffocating hegemonizing narratives, insisting on life lived in subversion of such striating powers. I thus propose that Mokeddem’s nomadic bodies are, in fact, heterotopias per Michel Foucault’s theory in “Des espaces autres” (1967). Foucault’s theory of heterotopias¹¹, which I examine in detail in Chapter Two, is also particularly fruitful in rethinking movement, geography, the body, and the self. Foucault states that heterotopias are real places that are fundamentally important to every society. They are outside of all places, “une espèce de contestation à la fois mythique et réelle de l’espace où nous vivons” (4). He offers the example of a boat as a heterotopia *par excellence*: “c’est un morceau flottant d’espace, un lieu sans lieu, qui vit par lui-même, qui est fermé sur soi et qui est livré en même temps à l’infini de la mer” (9). I thus argue that Mokeddem’s protagonists circulate in deserts and on seas, and these bodies in movement define the self.

Foucault furthermore asserts that the real and non-real meet in two sites, utopias and heterotopias, sites “qui ont la curieuse propriété d’être en rapport avec tous les autres emplacements, mais sur un mode tel qu’ils suspendent, neutralisent ou inversent l’ensemble des rapports qui se trouvent, par eux, désignés, reflétés ou réfléchis” (3). Whereas utopias are not real, heterotopias *do* exist, yet they *contest reality* in a society. Some examples of this include

¹⁰ The “essentialness” of a thing, according to Merriam-Webster.

¹¹ It is important to recognize that heterotopias are “sites” rather than “places” or “spaces” because they are not necessarily what is considered geographical space. They are sometimes an activity or, as I argue, a body.

mirrors, cinema, festivals, prisons, museums, honeymoons, brothels, colonies, and cemeteries. Furthermore, Mokeddem's nomadic bodies follow Foucault's six principles of heterotopias as laid out in "Des espaces autres." First, "[h]étérotopies de crise" or "de déviation" are set apart or forbidden, just as Mokeddem's nomadic bodies are separated from society due to their subversive actions or contestatory nature (5). Second, their functions are determined by society, and nomadic bodies' role is like that of a mirror, held up to contest and subvert the status quo. Third, "[l]'hétérotopie a le pouvoir de juxtaposer en un seul lieu réel plusieurs espaces, plusieurs emplacements qui sont en eux-mêmes incompatibles" (6). Bedouins, fleeing Jewish classmates, and stateless protagonists in Mokeddem's novels contest master narratives of homing. Fourth, heterotopias cause "une sorte de rupture absolue avec leur temps traditionnel" (6). That is, certain narrators in Mokeddem's work cause the reader to experience time differently, their narratives a break in "hétérochronies" of traditional chronological narratives. Fifth, "[l]es hétérotopies supposent toujours un système d'ouverture et de fermeture qui, à la fois, les isole et les rend pénétrables" (7). Movement resists placement—nomadic bodies are acted upon by the space they happen to be in. Winds and waves, for example, make these bodies penetrable and vulnerable, yet these same forces push the bodies further in their quest against biopower. Lastly, "elles ont, par rapport à l'espace restant, une fonction" (8). In sum, all of Mokeddem's nomadic bodies reject certain types of biopower, and their rejection-via-movement is a contestatory mirror held up to society and the State in heterotopic form. Thus theorizing the nomadic body through the lenses of biopolitics and heterotopias helps us better read these bodies and their journey to selfhood free of bodily and spiritual constraints. We see how their rejection of control as well as their flight lays the groundwork for cultivation of nomadic subjectivity.

In the context of this project, then, I argue that as nomadic bodies reject the reality of imposed biopower, heterotopias exist to counter reality and provide smooth, felicitous space to cultivate a nomadic self. I propose that Mokeddem's nomadic bodies are heterotopias in that they can be understood as self-contained spaces with changing functions. In other terms, Mokeddem's nomadic subjects *counter* the imposed reality of hegemonic narratives and are thus heterotopias in their resistance and transgression.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Chapter I, "Nomadism and the Creation of Transgressive Space: *Unheimlichkeit*¹² and *Haram*," explores physical movement and characters' interaction with space in Mokeddem's texts, specifically the unhoming forces of landscapes and the *vent de sable*. I read these spaces with the aid of geocriticism and feminist geography to better understand textual strategies of space and how space operates on characters and within Mokeddem's wider oeuvre. This creates what I call "nomadic movement" that is deployed in the quest for the nomadic self. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory and smooth/striated space are key to understanding the importance of *Unheimlichkeit* and *haram* in the texts I discuss in this chapter since they are striating forces which provoke movement and cause characters to engage in movement out of transgression.

Chapter II, "Nomadic Texts: Movement and Form," continues to explore the idea of nomadism, focusing on what I call the "nomadic text," its themes, and structures. I explain how writing is a smooth space where intertextuality, literary echoes, and writerly genealogies create the nomadic text, one which moves and connects rhizomatically across the Sahara and Mediterranean, linking Mokeddem's fiction and memoirs to other writers.

¹² Uncanniness, eeriness.

Finally, Chapter III, “The Nomadic Self,” examines the outcome of these two previous elements, namely, the “nomadic self.” This is a subversive identity of refusal, the nomad *par excellence*. I demonstrate that nomadic bodies subvert essentialism and binarism, enlarging the possibilities for identity. A heterotopic body who resists hegemonic narratives and moves to seek out smooth, welcoming space creates the alterity that is the nomadic self.

CHAPTER I

NOMADISM AND THE CREATION OF TRANSGRESSIVE SPACE:

UNHEIMLICHKEIT AND HARAM

All limits call for a crossing.

- Bertrand Westphal

INTRODUCTION

“Avec un caractère aussi réfractaire que le mien, j'étais toujours survoltée. Les gestes les plus anodins du quotidien devenaient usants et personne ne me retenait. . . J'ai quitté l'Algérie en 1977. J'ignorais alors que je partais pour toujours,” Malika Mokeddem states in an interview in *Le Monde* (2011). A similar rebelliousness and fevered movement characterize the author's fiction work. Characters move despite borders, mores, gender-based limitations, and geographical conditions, and it is transgressive spaces—ones that facilitate the pursuit of liberty—that enable nomadism in her work.

In Mokeddem's oeuvre, bodies carry stories. *Ceux qui marchent* take their stories across landscapes, transforming those spaces into settings for and means of transgression and freedom. They do not *wander*; on the contrary, they employ nomadism to contravene, to transgress. On foot, in vehicles, and by marine navigation, characters escape locusts, colonizers, Islamists, moral censure, and violence. Mokeddem's nomadic subjects move by lines of flight¹³ in pursuit of their own felicitous space¹⁴ and eventual liberation. The creation of this subversive space is

¹³ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* (1980) and Rosi Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjects* (2011).

¹⁴ See Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace* (1958) and Mildred Mortimer, *Writing from the Hearth: Public, Domestic and Imaginative Space in Francophone Women's Fiction of Africa and the Caribbean* (2007).

key in linking movement as a trope and plot device, as characters move in resistance to imposed geographical and even chronological boundaries.

Mokeddem deploys space as a plot device; textual nomadism in her oeuvre resists boundaries and in turn changes space from a landscape of limits into a landscape of desire by providing the physical space necessary for characters to transgress the moral limits in which they are bound. Landscapes become characters that conspire; they facilitate freedom as human characters interact with “geographic characters,” i.e., the Sahara and Mediterranean.

Transgressive, felicitous space provides lines of flight that open the way for authentic, nomadic subjectivity. I turn to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s theory of smooth and striated space (see Introduction) to better define the types of space and movement that make nomadism possible and lead to nomadic subjectivity.

In this chapter, I define nomadic movement as non-linear mobility caused by external and internal forces, and I posit that these forces produce subversive space that drives characters physically and psychically to move toward felicitous spaces of liberation. The author rereads Algerian landscapes through the lens of desire (for love, justice, knowledge, for example) and in doing so deploys space as a means of resistance. *Les Hommes qui marchent* (1990) (*HQM*), *Le Siècle des sauterelles* (1992) (*SdS*), *N’Zid* (2001), and *La Désirante* (2011) are the works I concentrate on here since they are the ones that best illustrate nomadic movement in Mokeddem’s oeuvre by presenting exterior and interior manifestations of nomadic movement. I examine the ways in which certain characters move through different spaces within these novels, being unsettled, pushed, or homed by both felicitous and dangerous forces, both interior and exterior. Character movement is spurred by and continued through transgression, ultimately leading to the creation of felicitous spaces which allow characters the freedom they seek.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how space, movement, and transgression interact in Mokeddem's novels. First, I examine the making of novelistic space, showing how Mokeddem creates emotional geographies and rhizomatic spaces that are felicitous to her nomadic subjects. The next half of the chapter is devoted to transgressive movement, specifically, the exterior and interior forces that encourage this type of movement that support the coming-to-being of nomadic subjectivity.

SYNOPSIS

HQM recounts the history of the Ajalli family, sedentarized Algerian nomads, or *ceux qui ne marchent plus*. The matriarch Zohra is the center of the novel, both thematically and as a main narrator, a tattooed woman whose body and headscarf are in constant movement that reflects her nomadic past. She tells the family's history while recounting tales of nomadic life, Tuareg salt caravans, and life under colonial French rule. Leïla, Zohra's granddaughter, listens and eventually takes up the nomadic mantle, leaving her village by the dune to begin her own form of nomadic journey across the Mediterranean. I concentrate in this chapter on the narrative and spiritual connection between Zohra and Leïla, as well as two subplots dealing with Djelloul (nicknamed Bouhaloufa) and Saâdia Ajalli, two characters forced into nomadic movement as counterpoints to Zohra's sedentarization.

Djelloul becomes fascinated with books after being introduced to the tales in *One Thousand and One Nights*. When he goes to school in the city, he becomes further alienated from his nomadic tribe until they finally order him to return from this sinful place. On the way back, he rescues a boar and becomes inseparable from this *haram*¹⁵ animal, estranging himself to the point that he eventually moves to Morocco and cuts ties with his family and tribe. The second

¹⁵ Unclean, sinful, forbidden by Allah and Islamic law.

subplot of *HQM*, that of Saâdia, is the story of her rebellion, subsequent rape, and flight from her family and home. By daring to traverse physical space, she sets herself apart and leaves the protection and safety of the home and tribe, and she is physically and emotionally violated. She is banished to a brothel for years until her eventual reunification with the Ajallis, all the while moving between felicitous spaces and landscapes of fear.

The novelistic space in this book is enlarged as Djelloul and Saâdia stake a claim in Moroccan land, national borders and deserts ensuring separation from the tribe but also providing a space that makes transgressive growth possible. Such a separation fosters self-knowledge and strength that cannot blossom within the confines of the home. In addition, Zohra and Leïla's contrapuntal immobility and movement, respectively, provide thematic contrasts that anchor the novel with Zohra in the family home but incite plot movement via Leïla's continuing the family tradition of nomadism when she emigrates.

The second novel I examine, *SdS*, is set in Algeria as well. Mahmoud and his daughter, Yasmine, attempt to cope after the rape and murder of his wife, Nedjma. Yasmine is rendered mute by the trauma, yet she learns to write, eventually composing a family history. Mahmoud pursues the murderer, El-Majnoun, and in the process burns a French family's farm and becomes himself an outlaw. Throughout the novel, plagues of locusts swarm the landscape, and this image invites comparisons to the colonial settlers and madmen who torment Mahmoud and Yasmine. Strong winds rising up at key points in the narrative reflect the confusion and distress of the two protagonists as well as of the Algerian people during colonization. The desert, shaped by these winds, reflects all these tumultuous events, and the Sahara and its *vents de sable* reflect exterior forces that push characters into transgressive, transformative action.

N'Zid, the third novel studied in this chapter, is a quasi-mystery, quasi-epic set on the Mediterranean. The maritime setting is a contrast to the Sahara, which is where much of Mokeddem's early work is situated. A woman wakes up bruised and battered on a boat in the middle of the Mediterranean and must find out who she is and what has happened. The woman learns that she is of Algerian and Irish ancestry, her name is Nora Carson, she is aboard a boat whose name has been changed from *Tramontane* to *L'Aimée*, and her companion has been kidnapped by terrorists. As this modern-day Odysseus sails the Mediterranean, that sea becomes a felicitous space that allows her to regain her memory and thus her past. Movement in this novel, as in *HQM* and *SdS*, facilitates transgression and self-knowledge, and the tumultuous sea is finally benevolent to Nora.

La Désirante is also set on the Mediterranean, and nomadic, rhizomatic movement throughout that sea and cultural landscape serve as intrinsic plot and critical elements. In this novel, Shamsa takes to the sea for the first time by herself to search for her missing love, Léo, relying on scraps of information and clues from their past in order to find him. Chapters vacillate between those entitled and centering on Lou (Shamsa's pet name for Léo), and the couple's past, and the events of Shamsa's quest throughout the Mediterranean to find him. The novel is informed by the true story of Abou Haidara, or Abderrazak el Para, a double agent of the Algerian government who infiltrated a terrorist group. El Para was found responsible for the kidnapping of European tourists in Algeria in 2003 and his identity as a double agent made public several years later. As in *N'Zid*, the sea sparks memory, and movement through space begets movement in time, as in *HQM* and *SdS*.

In these four novels, banished women, Tuaregs, nomad caravans, fugitives, and sailors emerge from storms, battle waves, and trek in the wilderness, their progression a quest for

freedom or love aided by spaces favorable to these transgressive characters. Their nomadic movement manifests *interior* unsettling in response to *exterior* prohibitions; exterior geographic forces cultivate spaces that nourish inner transgression and transgressive physical movement. In these examples, space is a trope that shapes both the narrative and the characters.

Throughout the next sections, then, I examine how textual space creates character movement and development, and I outline the characteristics of transgressive movement within these spaces. The last sections are devoted to outcomes of the interaction of space and transgressive movement, or how exterior and interior forces engender transgression in Mokeddem's oeuvre.

SPACE AND THE NOVEL

To more thoroughly understand the importance of space in the novel, I turn to the concepts of emotional geographies and rhizomes, ideas that help us examine how Mokeddem uses space as a trope and textual device. The field of Geocriticism in literature has grown enormously in the last two decades, and critics such as Bertrand Westphal, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Gillian Rose, Franco Moretti, Gaston Bachelard, and Michel de Certeau¹⁶ examine how space interacts with humanity, fiction, capital, women, and imagination. In *La Géocritique: réel, fiction, espace*, Westphal points out, "L'espace—et le monde qui se déploie en lui—sont le fruit d'une symbolique, d'une spéculation, qui est aussi miroitement de l'au-delà, et, osons le mot, d'un imaginaire" (10). In essence, space is filled by the imaginary; it is not emptiness or

¹⁶ For further reading, see Bertrand Westphal, *La Géocritique: Réel, Fiction, Espace* (2007) and *La Géocritique: Mode d'emploi* (2000); Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989) and *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996); Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace* (1974); Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien* (1980); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994); Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (eds.), *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (1994); Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (1994); Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800-1900* (1998); Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality* (1999); Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan (eds.) *Postcolonial Geographies* (2002); Michel Butor, *Mobile: étude pour une représentation des États-Unis* (1962); and Umberto Eco, *The Book of Legendary Lands* (2013).

void. Space is, rather, constructed. In a house, for example, rooms are named and furnished according to their social function: a kitchen, living room, or bedroom contain different types of furniture that fit their function and reflect the homemaker's imaginary for that room; different activities "take place" in each space. As for public space, city planners and architects design—literally create—public spaces for recreation, business, and housing. In addition, historical monuments link the past and present of sites significant to local or national memory. In sum, physical space reflects mental and lived space.

EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES

Besides furnishings and decorations, we also fill space by affect, and we see this phenomenon in emotional geographies, that is, how humans interact emotionally with spaces around them. Kay Anderson and Susan J. Smith, in their theory of emotional geographies and their importance in understanding space, state:

[E]motional relations tend to be regarded as something apart from the economic and/or as something that is essentially private, and [do] not substantially infuse the public/policy sphere. In some senses, moreover, this is reinforced by the most obvious route into emotional geographies, which is gained through *settings where the emotional is routinely heightened*, for example in musical performance, film and theater, spaces of mourning, and so on... At particular times and in particular places, there are moments *where lives are so explicitly lived* through pain, bereavement, elation, anger, love, and so on that the power of emotional relations cannot be ignored (and can readily be appreciated). (7, my italics)

Space thus becomes laden with meaning that is created through social interaction. In

Geographical Imaginations, Derek Gregory explains Anderson and Smith's concept as the

spaces where lives are emotionally formed, especially by hurt, loss, shame, apology, reparation, and/or reconciliation. Spaces are subjectively understood and do indeed have emotional resonance with people.

In a literary context, according to Gregory, such spaces are a) intertextual in that their present is a palimpsest of multiple texts still present, and b) grafted onto the space-time which is represented in that text. I have already noted the intertextuality between Homer's *Odyssey* and Mokeddem's *N'Zid*, and Gregory's examples include Fyodor Dostoyevsky's St. Petersburg, James Joyce's Dublin, Franz Kafka's Prague, and Paul Bowles' Tangiers. In other words, authors transform landscapes into emotional geographies which frame and drive the action of texts by these spaces' interaction with characters, space becoming a sort of character in itself.

Mokeddem has produced an emotional geography of the Sahara and Mediterranean in her novels, and these spaces can be read through the action situated there: desert winds that blind and drive characters through the sands, choppy seas that push sailors throughout the Mediterranean world, cities that corrupt. Westphal explains this textual production of space, stating that words create representations of space, narrative therefore creating place (*La Géocritique: réel. . . 77, 80*).

L'espace oscille entre réel et fiction, sans que les niveaux soient vraiment discernables.

Selon certains, la fiction prend même le dessus sur le réel. Mais il s'agit d'une aporie. Le réel absorbe toutes les configurations de la représentation... À ce stade, il paraît nécessaire de sonder ce qui assure une des transitions entre réel et représentation, à savoir la narrativité. (150)

In other words, landscapes are made readable through our storytelling of these places and at the same time, the discourse created around these spaces deepens understanding, both textually and in real life, of these spaces.

I return again to Odysseus, whom Westphal offers as an example of this phenomenon. His *fictional* exploits paved the way for *real* explorers by warning them of dangers throughout the Mediterranean. Denis Cosgrove offers yet another illustration: Alexander the Great modeled his quest on that of Hercules' and even slept with a copy of the *Iliad* annotated by Aristotle at his side (43). Tourists can now visit “Hemingway’s” Paris or “Hemingway’s” Key West, for example. Until 2013, one could participate in Dublin’s annual Bloomsday events on June 16, the day that James Joyce’s *Ulysses* takes place. Fans could enjoy a free Irish breakfast, listen to readings of the novel, watch dramatizations of it around the city, and dress up in period costumes. Today, although Dublin’s Bloomsday festival has been cancelled, celebrations still take place all around the world, and there is a global challenge to retweet the novel every year.

In an example more apropos to Mokeddem’s world, the figure of Isabelle Eberhardt¹⁷, as an author and character, shows how emotion, space, and literature interact. Eberhardt, a European immigrant to Algeria and author, is mentioned throughout Mokeddem’s body of work. The place where she died, Kénadsa, is also Mokeddem’s hometown, making that real space one also “literature-saturated”¹⁸ by the palimpsestic literary imaginings fashioned by these two

¹⁷ (1877-1904) After a turbulent childhood, Eberhardt moved to Algeria at age 20 and converted to Islam. In order to enjoy greater mobility and social freedom, she dressed as a man and used the name Si Mahmoud Saadi. As she became more firmly entrenched in native-Algerian life, she ran increasingly afoul of the French colonial administration. She died in a flash flood in Kénadsa. Along with her letters and diaries, her publications include *Dans l'ombre chaude de l'Islam* (1906), *Au Pays des sables* (1914), *Contes et paysages* (1925), and *Écrits sur le sable* (1988).

¹⁸ For more examples of the importance of Eberhardt in the Algerian and French imaginary, see Leïla Sebbar, *Isabelle l'Algérien* (2005) and Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Nomade, j'étais: les années africaines d'Isabelle Eberhardt, 1899-1904* (1997). Notably, Kénadsa is also the birthplace of writers Yasmina Khadra and Pierre Rabhi.

authors linked across time by this space. Mokeddem's exposure to Eberhardt's Sahara marked her: the fascination Eberhardt evidenced for the desert spoke to Mokeddem's own imaginative Sahara. She read her living space differently because of the imaginative/emotional geography created in a text, illustrating Westphal's notion of oscillating textual-real space. Furthermore, Mokeddem deploys spaces such as the Sahara and Mediterranean as major tropes in each of her works, and readers' imaginative geographies of these spaces are shifted as we track character movement, creating mental maps imprinted with Mokeddem's world and the events that take place there.

To return to Westphal's theory, we now see that when the imaginary interacts with space, a connection is forged: the space is read via the author's imagination, and the text about that space makes the space readable for an audience. Narrative, then, is the link between physical space and emotional, imaginative geographies created by that space.

Mokeddem thus transforms a desert and sea into much more than just sand and water: through the interaction of the imaginary with space, characters travel through emotional geographies in which movement takes on psychic, spiritual significance. Movement thus becomes defiance, i.e., transgression, of the world-as-it-is; writers and readers reclaim the world and transform it. We see the Sahara of Eberhardt reflected in that of Mokeddem, palimpsestic emotional geographies separated by decades. We read Homer's Mediterranean occupied by Mokeddem's sailors, separated by over a millennium. Characters use felicitous space opened up through the transgressing of boundaries to move towards possibility opened up by novelistic space.

It is thus in Mokeddem's novels that striated spaces are made smooth (to reference Deleuze and Guattari's theory laid out in the Introduction) for multiple transgressive lines of

flight. Space, as noted above, is an integral aspect of Mokeddem's oeuvre. Her characters rely on the infinite possibility that space provides in order to follow their own "lines of flight," another aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome.

Quant aux lignes de fuite, elles ne consistent jamais à fuir le monde, mais plutôt à le faire fuir, comme on crève un tuyau, et il n'y a pas de système social qui ne fuie pas tous les bouts, même si ses segments ne cessent de se durcir pas tous les bouts, même si ses segments ne cessent de se durcir pour colmater les lignes de fuite. Rien d'imaginaire, ni de symbolique, dans une ligne de fuite. Rien de plus actif qu'une ligne de fuite. (249-250)

Lines of flight, according to Deleuze and Guattari, are neither imaginary nor symbolic: "Les lignes de fuite sont des réalités; c'est très dangereux pour les sociétés." Lines of flight open up concrete avenues (literal paths) of possibility for those whose selfhood and activities work against hegemonic, striating forces. They offer means of resistance, in other words, to transgress and even subvert striating/striated spaces and forces. Such an infinitude of possibilities relates to the next significant metaphor for conceptualizing space in the novel, that of rhizomes.

RHIZOMES

Just as Zohra and Leïla, Odysseus and Nora, Mokeddem and Eberhardt are connected, "[u]n rhizome ne cesserait de connecter" (Deleuze and Guattari 14). Deleuze and Guattari's theory of rhizomes¹⁹ has become indispensable in understanding the collapse of traditional centers, be they political (empires, for example), ideological (gender hierarchies), or literary (traditional canons). This theory approaches systems of knowledge from a horizontal, interconnected viewpoint rather than hierarchically, a difference comparable to the distinction between roots and trees, according to Deleuze and Guattari. The authors explain, "Un rhizome ne

¹⁹ For an extended explanation of the rhizome as an anti-arboreal, sourceless, non-hierarchical assemblage of points and plateaus, see the chapter "Introduction: Rhizome" in *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* (1980).

commence et n'aboutit pas, il est toujours milieu, entre les choses, inter-être, *intermezzo*. L'arbre est filiation mais le rhizome est alliance, uniquement d'alliance" (36).

Applying this idea to the structure of Mokeddem's texts, we can see how they become both wide and deep, making fictional space differently readable: the novels' space is extended multidirectionally, akin to Deleuze and Guattari's multi-holed leaking pipe. This arborescence also mirrors the way that emotional geographies extend the sense of a place, which Westphal explains thus: "le récit n'avance plus par continuité, mais par contiguïté" (*La Géocritique: mode* . . . 47). The relationships of textual elements thus serve to extend textual *sense*, spurring, for example, interplay between *representations* of space and *absolute* space, again as with emotional geographies, where the real and fictional create imaginative palimpsests to "saturate" a space. Charles Bonn goes even further with this idea, stating that the text "*produit l'espace par sa propre spatialité . . . Cette spatialité syntagmatique est la condition nécessaire de la multiplication des ambiguïtés signifiantes*" (84, my italics).

The two perspectives discussed above, those of emotional geographies and rhizomes, point out how texts multiply the possibility of meanings and significations within, showing how they explode the sense of a work horizontally (i.e., the advancement of the plot) and vertically (i.e., the "syntagmatic spatiality" through which we interpret the text).

Possibility created by felicitous winds and waves over deserts and seas open up literal lines of flight, "rien d'imaginaire," as Deleuze and Guattari insist. These are means of escape for characters. Lines of flight also open avenues for the creation of a different subjectivity, i.e., different ways of thinking, different behavior, and different ways of being-in-the-world. Such movement is not usually welcome. It is, more often, serious transgression of moral and geographical boundaries, those striating, hegemonic forces mentioned above.

TRANSGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

Movement is usually associated with transgression in Mokeddem's novels, and emotional geography plays a key role in the action that "takes place" in a certain space. Characters who dare to stray outside boundaries established by tradition or gender hierarchies inevitably face retribution for their alleged sins. Saâdia walks slightly too far away from her home and is raped; Djelloul leaves his family in the desert and is corrupted by poetry in the city; Nora evades police in order to protect herself and solve the mystery of her identity; Shamsa's voyage takes her to a parallel Mediterranean of clandestine migrants and terror cells. These characters' physical displacement, while trying and even dangerous, does lead to transgression that is ultimately benevolent.

Westphal points out that transgression²⁰ is "coextensive with mobility," and we see that Djelloul's and Saâdia's *haram* transgressions, i.e., those that are sinful and forbidden, are firmly linked to physical movement (45). In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, these physical displacements are lines of flight. Examining the Latin roots and connotations of the word *transgredi*, Westphal notes its several implications: physical movement from one space to another, such as crossing a river; rhetorical distancing; overflowing; and overstepping bounds out of hubris. In Romance languages, the definition evolved to connote the violation of morality.

Pour [les Romains], comme pour les Grecs avant eux, on transgressait dans l'espace... Au fil des siècles le sens de la *transgressio* s'est précisé [pour signifier] violer une limite morale davantage que physique... [I]l se serait agi d'examiner ce qui se déploie au-delà du seuil, encore que le seuil lui-même fût perçu selon deux angles différents: il était

²⁰ For further background on the etymology of this term, see Chapter 2, "Transgressivité" in *La Géocritique: réel, fiction, espace* (2007).

limes-ligne d'arrêt, mais aussi *limen*-frontière poreuse destinée à être franchie. (72, original italics)

For this reason, borders become porous in the face of transgressors like the above characters; they are meant to be crossed purposefully.

I employ these ideas of transgression within the context of Rosi Braidotti's theory of the nomadic subject, who is "nonunitary and multilayered...a dynamic and changing entity" (5). Her articulation of the nomadic subject embraces difference as do Mokeddem's nomadic characters who dare to rebel. "In this perspective, 'subjectivity' names the process that consists in stringing the reactive [i.e., restrictive; power as negative] (*potestas*) and the active instances of power [i.e., affirmative, productive] (*potentia*) together under the fictional unity of a grammatical 'I.' The subject is a process" (18). I return to Braidotti's idea in detail in Chapter Three. In the context of this chapter, however, I focus on the initial step in gaining nomadic subjectivity, that of the physical rejection of restrictive power through bodily movement in space. Transgression of the *potestas*, then, leads to movement cooperative with the *potentia* of nomadic subjectivity. "The point of nomadic subjectivity is to identify lines of flight," Braidotti insists, echoing Deleuze and Guattari's idea of means of resistance (7).

We see the complicity of space and bodies in Mokeddem's work, where space collaborates with rebellious, dissatisfied nomadic characters in favor of transgression. Shamsa, Nora, Mahmoud, Yasmine, Djelloul, and Saâdia appropriate agency by moving through spaces felicitous to liberation. Tailwinds and favorable currents are geographic phenomena that aid these nomadic subjects, and they create conditions advantageous to fulfillment of the true nomadic self. Characters take hold of their desire and create their own paths via felicitous spaces, and these spaces, winds, and waves serve as a compass against landscapes of fear that contain

them, their desire, and their agency. They dare to cross borders and penetrate the unknown; sands, wind, and waves machinate to forcefully steer them. Thus, through transgressive movement—that is, by seizing agency and daring to be unsettled—Mokeddem’s characters choose their own paths: the Sahara and Mediterranean are transformed by these actions from unhoming obstacles into felicitous spaces. Interior transgression, then, creates emotional geography, natural forces, and geographic spaces felicitous to transgressive movement.

In Chapter Three, I examine the intersection of space, movement, and subjectivity in the figure of the nomadic subject, but in this chapter I lay the groundwork for understanding the coming-to-being of that nomadic self through more deeply examining the rhizomatic, literature-saturated space that “sprouts” such a subject.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to exterior and interior forces that generate nomadic movement. Exterior forces act on characters to create a sense of alienation from the familiar and homely. This sense of unhoming, named *Uheimlichkeit*, will be defined in the next section. With this sense of unfamiliarity comes inner change that pushes characters toward the *haram*. Unsettling shifts the grounding (sometimes literally, as happens on sand and sea) for characters, pushing them towards transgression and, ultimately, freedom.

EXTERIOR FORCES

I begin by focusing on the transgressive unsettling that an important “character” in Mokeddem’s body of work, the wind, accomplishes in the following passage:

Les trajets en autobus étaient une fête! Et les tempêtes de vent de sable à travers les grandes vitres du bus aussi. Chez elle, il n’y avait aucune vitre, seulement des volets mal joints. Aussi, quand le vent de sable se levait, les Ajalli fermaient tout, mais ne parvenaient qu’à cacher le spectacle de la furie du vent. Car le sable entraînait partout et

saupoudrait jusqu'aux plus intimes parties du corps. Leïla ne supportait pas les volets fermés. Alors, le vent de sable à travers l'écran des vitres, c'était un peu comme un cinéma. À l'intérieur du bus, Leïla se sentait comme au cœur du vent et l'admirait du dedans, ce vent quinteux, violent et âcre. Il y avait le vent et dans le vent, les griffes du sable. Et c'était comme une joute oratoire entre le sable et le vent. Un souffle cosmique râlait, broyait le sable en poussière, cinglait les dunes, raclait regs et hamadas. Le sable crissait, crépitait, dévorait toutes les surfaces, éteignait les infinis, les cieux et les yeux. Ils explosaient leur tumulte dans l'oreille hallucinée. Terrible colère ou joie démente? Sublime! (*HQM* 244)

Protected from the dust and wind by the shell of the bus, the girl from a nomadic family, Leïla Ajalli, experiences a new form of desert movement. In the bus, she has found the situation she desires: she is within the storm yet shielded from it. She watches the spectacle as she would a film, through the “screen” of the bus window, while at the same time feeling the peace of movement that soothes her nomadic soul. The wind, “un souffle cosmique,” is personified and brings to mind a crazed demon or banshee, gasping and thrashing. Sand is ground into dust by the force of the “vent de sable,” being whipped into dunes, scraping clean the *regs* and *hamadas* as an animal's claws scrape bones clean. Driven by demonic winds, the sand takes on its own voice: it screeches, battering everything in its path. Leïla delights in its “terrible colère” and “joie démente.” This power is “sublime.”

This passage exemplifies Mokeddem's fascination with wind, a powerful force in the Maghreb that shapes the landscape. Several winds appear throughout her works as weather phenomena²¹, intertextual “characters,” and psychological mirrors. These winds connote

²¹ I include wind under the umbrella of weather phenomena, landscape, or geography.

movement, re-creation, shifting, and impermanence, both physically and metaphorically. Wind physically shapes the desert, producing a landscape in constant flux.

Wind is also the strongest natural force in Mokeddem's fictional worlds. Specifically, winds put her landscapes in flux by erasing and recreating lines in the sand, remaking the landscape. The wind forces psychological and textual disturbances that allow for the transgression and unhoming of the subject—it creates smooth spaces for lines of flight by erasing striation, in other words. Wind also embodies movement, and such *perpetuum mobile*, according to Westphal, engenders transgression. Wind provokes circular (i.e., nomadic and rhizomatic) movement and either drives the action ahead, announces change (“winds of change”), or forces characters to become stronger by struggling against it.

I have chosen two novels that treat wind in desert and maritime settings in order, first of all, to demonstrate Mokeddem's change of focus. (Her work has moved from an early focus on Algeria and the desert to, more recently, a focus on the Mediterranean). Second, this trope demonstrates Mokeddem's reclamation of geography in the service of plot and the making of emotional geographies, deepening and widening our reading of wind. In *La Désirante* and *SdS*, Shamsa's and Mahmoud's nomadic movement through ports of call and the Algerian desert, respectively, destabilize the reader. It is difficult to follow their passage since landmarks blend and become confused, finally leaving only a shifting desert and undulating sea as the sole geographical certainties in the texts. The text sheds linear movement except in service of the hero(ine)'s quest. Moreover, Mahmoud's daughter, Yasmine, is associated with several winds, including the sirocco. She also embodies the strongest wind of all, the hurricane, intimating that she is stronger than any malevolent forces that stand in her path. These forces deterritorialize her,

just as the space of *Unheimlichkeit* acts on characters to destabilize them, pushing them to transgression.

UNHEIMLICHKEIT

Unheimlichkeit has several English translations, including “uncanny,” “unhomely,” “eerie,” or “unintelligible.” It can furthermore connote unease, invasion, or the threat of disturbance (Ashcroft 22). The idea derives from German philosophy and psychoanalysis, and Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger are generally credited with developing thinking on the subject. In a Postcolonial Studies context, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin translate the term as “ambivalent site,” linking the concept to spatiality (82). These scholars situate postcolonial literature as a periphery resisting and subverting a centralized, imperialist canon, making it an *Unheimlich* force, similar in this respect to a rhizome or heterotopia. Accordingly, the *Unheimlichkeit* “re-replaces the text” (80). “[T]he alienating process which initially served to relegate the post-colonial world to the ‘margin’ turned upon itself and acted to push that world through a kind of mental barrier into a position from which all experience could be viewed as uncentered, pluralistic, and multifarious. Marginality thus becomes an unprecedented source of creative energy” (12). Geocriticism prioritizes place(ment), and if we understand *Unheimlichkeit* through this lens, we see the essential role that space plays in deterritorialization.

The *vent de sable* is an exterior force that brings about *Unheimlichkeit*. It is a felicitous force in Mokeddem’s work that pushes protagonists into spaces that are more apposite to their transgressing restrictions that prevent becoming. Exterior powers in *SdS* act upon Algeria, the family, and the body, and violent winds reflect this unsettling in a colonial Algerian context: “colère du vent,” “souffle tyrannique du vent,” and “démences du vent” (156, 191) are just

several descriptions demonstrating multi-layered implications of this meteorological event.

Several winds, in fact, appear in this novel²², and they operate textually to reflect violence, create landscapes, and mirror psychological states. Mokeddem thus juxtaposes felicitous spaces with landscapes of fear ravaged by plague-like violence and disorder personified, for example, by the swarms of locusts in *SdS*. She highlights the fragility of interior space when faced with such unhoming exterior forces.

In *La Désirante*, space is felicitous and felicitous forces such as wind and water act upon and push the characters, offering lines of flight. For example, Shamsa sets out on her own across the Mediterranean. “La fille du désert,” “pour la première fois, [prend] la mer sans toi [Léo]” in a boat christened *Vent de sable* (13, 11). She breaks with her former habits and places herself as an individual in a space formerly reserved for her only as part of a couple. This aptly named vessel “est devenu le lieu du huis-clos amoureux à l’épreuve de l’infini” (28). Mokeddem here combines wind and water with past and present, as we learn the history of both the boat and the couple. The boat was so named because of the role of the *vent de sable* in both Shamsa’s and Léo’s lives, which Shamsa recounts. Before his disappearance, Léo has a car accident during a trip to the Algerian desert that leaves him injured and stranded for several days. After nearly a week of exposure to the elements, he sees an approaching sandstorm and thinks he will soon die. Instead, the storm brings salvation in the form of nomads, *ceux qui marchent*, who rescue him:

²² In Mokeddem’s Mediterranean-themed novels, several different winds also appear. The tramontane, mentioned in *N’Zid* and *La Transe des insoumis*, is a northern wind from Italy which blows across mountains and onto the Mediterranean Sea. The phrase “perdre la tramontane” means “to lose the North Star or become disoriented,” connoting the importance in human geography of meteorological phenomena and reflecting the textual imaginaries that complement the real. The meltem (which means “breeze” in Turkish), is a dry, northwesterly wind, also called the Etesian wind, which affects the eastern Mediterranean during the summer; it is alluded to in *N’Zid*. The sirocco, referenced briefly in *Des rêves et des assassins*, is a dry, dusty wind originating in the Maghrebi desert and traveling over the Mediterranean, where it reaches hurricane speeds, pounding southern Europe and producing warm, wet weather. It is attributed to various health problems as well as high tides which affect water levels in Venice. The phrase “vent de sable” appears in all of Mokeddem’s novels.

Ce fut dans les plus fortes rafales de la tempête que tu entendis des voix. Tu avais d’abord cru à des hallucinations, jusqu’à ce que des mains expertes en premiers soins te touchent, celles de caravaniers. Ils avaient aperçu la carcasse de ta voiture, juste avant que la tourmente n’efface tout, et s’étaient précipités dans ta direction. Au lieu de t’achever, le vent de sable t’avait secouru. (46-47)

For Shamsa’s part, as an infant, she is abandoned on a truck traveling from Aïn Dakhla to Oran, with a note reading, “Elle est née dans la nuit. Sauvez-la s’il vous plaît” (47). The drivers unknowingly leave camp with the baby in the rear of the truck, traveling through “un épouvantable vent de sable . . . durant toute la traversée du désert” (47). The loaded truck struggles against the *vent de sable*, and the drivers stop for a tea break before entering the dangerous roads in the Atlas Mountains. They suddenly hear wailing and discover the child, whom they leave in the care of nuns at a nearby convent.

Complètement recouvert de sable, le couffin ressemblait au tumulus d’une petite tombe de laquelle seul émergeait mon visage. Est-ce la clémence ou les superstitions engendrées par cette chose surréelle—ainsi transportée par un jour de grand vent à travers le désert, les steppes des Hauts Plateaux et les flancs abrupts de l’Atlas—qui guidèrent ces hommes vers une communauté de sœurs blanches dont ils connaissaient l’existence à Misserghine, près d’Oran? Ils s’y étaient rendus expressément. (48)

Mokeddem, in these two passages, juxtaposes life and death using the *vent de sable* events. Within the disequilibrium brought about in the violence and blindness of the storm, there exists as well life, highlighting the binary nature of the *vent de sable* that is repeated throughout her work.

The entropy of the *vent de sable*, moreover, engenders disruption. The storms in Léo's and Shamsa's lives threaten death, yet that same chaos leads to their salvation and eventually, the *Vent de sable* boat, which is the mobile site that makes possible the deepening of their love through travel on the sea. It again serves in Léo's second salvation when Shamsa uses the ship in order to save him from the terrorists who have kidnapped him. Moreover, the boat provides freedom to transgress political boundaries on the Mediterranean, since Shamsa is able to safely circulate in the boat for the sake of love, while she knows that political and economic refugees who do not have the shelter of the *Vent de sable* die on the sea or are stranded on Lampedusa, an island infamous as a transit point between Africa and Europe where numerous refugees, exiles, and immigrants become stranded.

“[J]e me trouvais à bord d'un voilier en partance pour ce Sud qu'ils fuyaient. . . Eux ils s'étaient échoués là, pleins de détresse et de lassitude. À mi-chemin d'une survie besogneuse, de fantasmes tant de fois rabâchés qu'ils en avaient perdu les contours” (121). Two lines of flight coincide here. The *vent de sable* as a force and *Vent de sable* as a transgressive space operate to support transgression, in the Latin sense of the word (*transgredi*), because their significations are permanently in flux; they continuously move from one physical and metaphorical place to another, exceeding any single meaning (Westphal, *La Géocritique: réel . . .* 41). In the face of loss, violence, and unhoming, the *V(v)ent de sable* serve as singularly felicitous spaces/forces within landscapes of fear, havens for the nomadic subject on a quest.

The *Vent de sable* even transgresses textual boundaries. Mokeddem notes that she and her partner often sailed on a boat of the same name (*La Transe des insoumis* 45, *Mes hommes* 134). A similar example comes from *La Désirante*, when Shamsa compares the immigration disasters which she witnesses to stories of Charybdis and Scylla from the *Odyssey*. The two immortal

monsters devour sailors in the Strait of Messina in the same manner in which contemporary migrants and refugees are literally swallowed by the sea. “Charbyde étend son empire à toutes les côtes du sud. . . Les gouvernements du Nord adoptent les pratiques de Scylla. Ils ponctionnent et rançonnent à leur gré ces vagues de migrants. La Méditerranée, elle, est comme toutes les mères. Elle porte ceux qui ont ses faveurs dans la joie et la sérénité et noie, de mille manières, les indésirables” (123-4). The *Vent de sable* is thus comparable to Odysseus’ ship on a modern quest against the monsters of terrorism, war, and economic disaster.

Wind is not always a felicitous force however. In *SdS*, a north wind brings swarms of locusts: “il amassait les nuées de sauterelles en tornades compactes et, d’un soufflet rageur, les propulsait au loin. Maudits insectes, fanatiques de la mandibule!” (115) Just as characters and the Algerian landscape struggle under the onslaught of these insects, Mahmoud struggles against the French colonists in the desert who pursue him, as well as against El-Majnoun, whose name means “demented” and who is “le pirate, mieux encore, le roi du désert” (220). El-Majnoun, we learn, murdered Nedjma, Mahmoud’s wife, in front of their daughter Yasmine, leading to the death of the newborn infant whom Nedjma had been nursing. Mahmoud’s life is radically unsettled by these devastating events, transforming the emotional geography of his desert from a site of love to one of loss and revenge, the *Unheimlichkeit* made manifest. Throughout the text, the wind announces the coming of these disasters.

Yasmine is doubly terrorized by witnessing this murder and by the loss of her mother, and we see a furious incarnation of her fear and rage as she is “de-personified” as a hurricane of silence, Mokeddem’s ironic imagining of the most destructive type of wind. At the beginning of the novel, she is rendered mute from the trauma of her mother’s murder and spends the rest of the time in near total silence: “Elle se représente si bien par la hargne des éléments, Yasmine. . .

Son ouragan à elle, c'est le silence" (157). When her father leaves her with a sedentary family in order to pursue El-Majnoun, she speaks only to utter a primal scream when she sees the murderer in the market. Eventually she recovers her voice, then spends years with the family and finally refuses an arranged marriage, a transgression of social norms yet one that also saves her life.

Witnessing her adopted sister's death after a forced marriage, she realizes that as a woman, flight is her only option because "elles [les Algériennes] sont saturées de lait amer, cassées, arrachées par les crues, courbées par tous les vents, malmenées par tous les temps. On les croirait calcinées, mortes!" (258) Transgressing traditional expectations and ready to embrace her *Unheimlich* situation, she sets off independently, once again mobile, to find her father, when the sirocco wind meets her. "Le vent la gifle. Le vent la griffe et siffle son fouet à ses oreilles. Chauffe, cuit sa peau aux cardes des sables. Râpe son gosier, abrasé par la poussière, colle son palais, crissent ses dents. Yasmine a si soif. . . Partir, voilà tout. Elle n'a à boire que le souffle torride du vent" (271). Despite her newfound mobility and voice, she still must fight the violence wielded against her because of her transgression of gender boundaries, represented by this contrary wind.

Years earlier, before Mahmoud leaves in pursuit of El-Majnoun, he charges Yasmine with the task of writing her family history in hopes of helping her regain speech. She has been struck mute by violence; its memory has marked her just as violent winds have shaped the Sahara. "Les sables ne gardent mémoire que des vents," and Yasmine is compared to these sands whose landscape is created by violent exterior forces (225). As nomads have "une seule volonté: prouver à la mort" by their movement, a "cursive écriture" in the desert, so must Yasmine produce her own writing to combat the death of her voice (137).

Mokeddem gives Yasmine a felicitous wind at another turning point in the novel. When Yasmine finds out that gendarmes have killed her father, she screams, “Baba habibi!” again and again (275). The sirocco engulfs her cries.

Il assèche ses larmes au seuil des paupières. Il les sculpte en cernes de sable. Et la souffrance ne verra jamais ses prunelles mouillées. . . Yasmine s’immobilise, tout à coup attentive à ce corps à corps, douleur à douleur avec le sirocco. Le vent pleure *pour elle*, fulmine *pour elle*, accuse à sa place. *Il est l’interprète de sa tempête intérieure.* (275, my italics)

This time, the wind comes to her aid and melds with her, creating an emotional geography reflective of her sorrow. It dries her tears and will eventually make a line of flight away from this *Unheimlich* emotional landscape saturated with loss.

By the end of the novel, several winds have brought psychic disturbance and disequilibrium, yet they ultimately propel Yasmine from a state of silence to one of speech and mobility. “Elle va d’où vient le vent” (271). She leaves the sedentary family and sets off on her own quest towards nomadic subjectivity.

The novel’s final pages provide no fewer than twenty possible endings. As she sets out on the train, “habillée en garçon” as Eberhardt was, she rejects “sa plus grande terreur, l’immobilité” (276, 279). Some form of “on dit que” is repeated, along with fantastical imagined futures for Yasmine. These words from anonymous mouths provide no clear conclusion to the story, and instead leave any conclusion possible. Words, we learn, are “oraisons du vent” and “les odysées de l’imagination” (279). The imaginary here makes Yasmine’s salvation possible, just as space and wind have done, as it explodes the sense of Yasmine’s story and leaves the reader with a rhizomatic conclusion.

Unsettling, then, literally *makes* room for movement and, most importantly, redemption of the nomadic subject in this novel. The winds in every work by Mokeddem either aid movement or challenge it. Characters ultimately pursue love and freedom against the winds of resistance, fortifying themselves even further. Wind thus provokes liberatory movement, transgression of boundaries, and endless possibilities. Exterior forces aid in creating transgressive *space*, yet psychic transformation, or interior movement, must ultimately provoke transgressive *movement* in characters.

INTERIOR FORCES

In turning to interior forces that provoke transgression, I argue that Mokeddem uses *haram*, i.e., that which is forbidden, within moral geographies and landscapes of fear to create space ripe for transgression. Djelloul and Saâdia provoke nomadism by their offenses against cultural systems, rejecting mores and replacing them with their own lines of flight. In reading their transgressions through the lens of this chapter, I concentrate on the ways that space is integral to their moral trespasses.

HARAM AND TRANSGRESSION

Djelloul Ajalli, better known as Bouhaloufa²³, “l’homme au cochon,” functions, along with the character of Saâdia, as an example of another type of nomadism in *HQM* (13). Through the progression of his life story, we can see how he transgresses little by little, and how space is linked to his *haram* activities.

From childhood, Djelloul stands apart from other children because of his imagination and propensity to be a solitary dreamer.

²³ “Bou” in Arabic means “father of; “halouf” means “pig.”

Mais dans ce désert, on a une telle peur de l'imagination! Oui, dans ce Sahara où les horizontalités tissent à l'infini des mirages propices aux songes hantés, où l'esprit a un besoin vital d'extravagance pour habiller les aridités, rêver, c'est faire montre d'un manque de bravoure et de virilité. Pire encore. C'est s'exposer à la tentation des djinns. De là à devenir soi-même un djinn, il n'y a pas un empan. (13)

The expansiveness of the desert, which should have inspired dreaming, is instead dangerous and flat, literally and metaphorically. Worse, one risks loss of the soul through dreaming, the (lines of) flights of fancy that inspire desire. Mokeddem explains here how the desert acts upon the soul, that it creates fallow ground in which stories can take root in order to produce *haram* thoughts and actions that then force Djelloul's physical and spiritual movement, making a space felicitous for transgression.

One day, a *taleb*²⁴ joins the caravan on his way to Mauritania and introduces Djelloul to the wonder of the written word, specifically *A Thousand and One Nights*. The boy begins to crave the hour that the caravan will stop to set up camp so that he can spend time with the *taleb*. “Djelloul découvrait un monde de palais. Un monde jusqu'alors inconnu de lui. Il était ensorcelé par l'astuce de cette femme. Par la découverte du pouvoir et de la ruse des mots... Un voyage exceptionnel” (14). However, the visitor eventually leaves the caravan and takes Scheherazade along with him. Suddenly the voyage within a voyage is ripped from the boy, yet the seed of imagination has been planted.

Scheherazade's stories, which had preserved her life, had also been preserving his, yet without the book, Djelloul feels “un vide insupportable, un marasme mortel...Sable, solitude, et soleil, jusqu'à la suffocation. . . Les mots écrits l'avaient marqué de leurs arabesques” (15).

²⁴ Mokeddem's footnote describes this person as a “maître, désigne habituellement le maître d'école coranique” (13).

Mokeddem's alliteration of the consonant "s" in this passage echoes the desert winds which travel the Sahara, as Djelloul and his family do. *Sable, solitude, soleil, and suffocation* weigh upon the boy's spirit just as the words of the *taleb's* book weigh on him and will eventually separate him from his family. This emotional and intellectual separation is the first in an increasingly longer and starker series of separations from his family and the first indication of his eventual displacement.

In an attempt to quench his thirst, he spends more time alone: "Il passait de longues heures à plat ventre sur le sable à dessiner, essayant de reproduire les signes conteurs de fables" (16). This desert writing is the first writing in the family. Storytelling and *hadiths*, verses from the Qur'an for prayer, have thus far been the main means of transmission of memory and history for the tribe and family. This type of memory effectively doubles back on itself, with *hadiths* and verses being repeated for prayers, and storytelling having been handed down through generations, the repetition of both perpetuating their own existence and giving the tribe its own narrative. In other words, bodies carry stories and bodies repeating these stories stay safely within accepted moral confines of the tribe and religious tradition, a circular, self-repeating system antithetical to rhizomatic imaginings. Djelloul's mother scoffs at his desire for schooling and reiterates the importance of the spoken word within the nomadic tradition. "Lire et écrire? Au sein du monde de l'oralité, pure extravagance. Depuis des siècles, personne dans le clan n'avait eu recours à l'écriture. . . Notre histoire ne se couche pas entre l'encre et le papier. Elle fouille sans cesse nos mémoires et habite nos voix" (16). Djelloul has broken emotionally and intellectually from physical nomadism and an oral storytelling tradition. He has entered into a new kind of nomadism that will lead him into cities, schools, and away from the family's striated space.

The tribe eventually allows Djelloul to go to Tlemcen, to a madrasa, yet after ten years at the school, Djelloul “s’adonnait à la jouissance et se passionnait même pour la poésie du ‘Jahili,’ l’ère d’avant l’Islam. . . Voilà bien l’effet de ces cités fermées sur leurs hontes” (19). The family promptly removes him from the school because knowledge and writing have created a resistance in Djelloul. He has separated from the family and must be physically, intellectually, and spiritually rejoined with the tribe, their geography, and their religious mores. They create physical distance between him and the *haram* in order to save him from moral ruin.

On the way back to the encampment, the group passes a young boar in their path. Djelloul saves the animal from being killed, so the motherless boar follows him home. “[I]l regagna ainsi sa famille avec ses livres et son cochon. Et dans la tête, les braillements de l’interdite poésie” (20). He brings back the poetry that nourishes him and the young boar that he nourishes. Both these things are *haram* and have set him apart yet link him to his former life, one devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and pleasure, interior impetuses that provoke transgression. He has contravened the boundaries of his tribe and their way of life, that is, tradition, dust, heat, emptiness, silence. Djelloul is even nicknamed “Bouhaloufa, ‘l’homme au cochon’” and thereby his identity rests on his transgression of accepted cultural, religious, and tribal practice (22).

Finally, the recalcitrant Djelloul is banished from the tribe, and he gathers his belongings and his boar and departs. Several years later, a Moroccan caravan tells the Ajallis that Djelloul is in Morocco working as a public writer and poet. “Il allait de ville en ville, nomade des cités à la poursuite d’autres félicités. Il butinait du plaisir et en nourrissait sa poésie” (22). He has moved from being a *lecteur nomade* to an *écrivain nomade*. By separating from his family into the world of cities, the written word, pleasure, and poetry, Djelloul leaves behind a world of tradition

and orality for a world of knowledge and writing, albeit one that pushes the boundaries of propriety.

What is more, he has embedded his former identity into the boar's history: "Djelloul disait: 'Par Allah, cette bête que vous voyez là était un noble cheikh nomade de la tribu des Ajalli. Il s'appelait Djelloul. La malédiction des siens le transformait, un soir de pleine lune, en halouf'" (23). Two *haram* beings' identities are merged, an example of the convergence of the *Unheimlich*, transgression, and the nomadic subject. When the boar finally dies, Djelloul gives him a proper Muslim funeral and buries "Si Halouf Ajalli,"²⁵ giving him a human identity and a resting place in hallowed ground. "Pour venger l'animal du tort que le Coran infligeait à sa race, il en fit réciter des versets par une meute de talebs, à la mosquée, la nuit même. Personne dans la ville ne sut jamais que, parmi les corps humains, ou ce qu'il restait de le décomposition, reposait celui d'un animal honni: 'Si Halouf Ajalli,' béni par son maître et même par la mosquée" (23-24). Djelloul thereby buries his old identity completely, giving himself over to being unhomed and set apart, fully embracing his nomadic subjectivity. His identity is now built firmly on the consequences of his intellectual and physical movement—his line of flight—, the path that started with the *taleb's* book.

In addition, Djelloul's burial of Si Halouf accomplishes a transgression that marks the local religious landscape. This *haram* act turns the cemetery, a space of consecration, into one of desecration, yet Djelloul claims to be righting a wrong, to be transgressing for good, according to his heart and mind rather than for socially imposed reasons. His own tribe cursed him and rejected him because of the words he had grown to love. Similarly, the *halouf* was cursed by the words of Allah. Both man and boar were cursed by words and texts, yet Djelloul reclaims the

²⁵ "Mr. Pig Ajalli"

cemetery as a space consonant with his own moral and emotional geography, deploying *haram* transgression in the service of salvation and redemption.

Afterwards, Djelloul wanders the Middle East for twenty years, and when he finally returns home, he is a rich man. He buys land, perhaps the first from his tribe to do so, and settles down on a farm in Oujda, Morocco, near the Algerian border. He marries and has two sons, Mohamed and Hamza.

Il leur parlait souvent de sa famille, là-bas dans le désert. “Des gens droits et généreux, mais si fiers et durs! Ce sont des hommes qui marchent. Ils marchent tant que la vie marche trop vite en eux. Ils sont, sans doute, à la recherche de quelque chose. Ils ne savent pas quoi et pressentent même qu’ils ne le trouveront jamais... Peut-être ont-ils l’intelligence des premiers humains qui comprirent que la survie était dans le déplacement... [J]e crois que leur marche est une certaine conception de la liberté.” (24-25)

As Zohra recounts this story, we note that part of the Ajalli family has crossed a physical and metaphysical border. Transgression has been good to Djelloul, and were it not for these *haram* transgressions, he would have suffered *sable, solitude, soleil, and suffocation*.

TRANSGRESSION: MORAL GEOGRAPHIES AND LANDSCAPES OF FEAR

I now move to the interior force of fear, which creates another emotional geography. In contrast to the smooth spaces discussed above, striated spaces full of straight lines, perpendicular angles, and moral control restrain those seeking nomadic subjectivity, and the relative lack of these in Mokeddem’s work demonstrate her rejection of those spaces as felicitous emotional geographies for her protagonists. Cities and walled-in spaces seldom figure in her novels, Djelloul’s Tlemcen being one of the few, yet when she does move action into these spaces, they

are usually portrayed as “landscapes of fear.” Boundaries constructed through mores and physical walls, according to Yi Fu Tuan’s theory²⁶, are attempts to protect from natural and human chaos, from wild animals, drought, dirt, disease, insanity, and mobs, among many examples. Other types of protections include houses with locked doors, garden fences, quarantine, tribes, and gallows. These attempts at control demonstrate that exile and confinement are means of separating people from existential threats, specifically death and the will toward evil (Tuan 5-7).

“Mad people are those whose minds wander,” Tuan claims (88). Unanchored bodies—the stateless, homeless, migrants, gender fluid, and so on—are problematic to rigid systems and must turn to lines of flight for salvation. Djelloul’s and Saâdia’s stories reflect the dread of these landscapes of fear, and we learn the consequences for bringing existential fears to the doorstep of a family and community. According to the Ajallis and the village populace, the self-proclaimed arbiters of morality, these transgressors are mad, dangerous people who risk contaminating others.

Along with Djelloul, Saâdia commits moral transgression in the eyes of society after she is raped, exiling and unhoming her in a sort of sexual asylum: the brothel. “On l’enferma donc au bordel. Elle n’avait pas treize ans. . . Lieux d’incarcération du plaisir, tombeaux du désir. . . Le moindre écart à la rigidité coutumière leur semblait un péril collectif” (57). She, too, breaks with the Ajalli family, wanders, flees, tells stories, and sets out on her own path. Such offences set her apart but also ultimately allow her a nomadic subjectivity which, like Djelloul, she never would have had within the tribe and family. She instead becomes a sort of nomadic tribe unto herself. Likewise with Djelloul, she forms part of a family mythology of transgression that will

²⁶ See *Landscapes of Fear* (1979).

eventually be key to Leïla's gaining freedom through breaking boundaries. This *perpetuum mobile* reflects Saâdia's inner nomadism: she contrasts her present home life with the stories of her family's past, her actual entrapment versus the nomadic freedom of which she dreams. She dreams across borders, moreover, looking toward Algeria and creating her own fiction of *les hommes bleus*, her family past, and her own future.

Daughter of "the second Bouhaloufa," Mohamed, Saâdia, whose name means "lucky," was a "maudite enfant... Au fur et à mesure qu'elle grandissait, elle devenait une enfant taciturne, fuyait la maison et passait de longues journées à errer dans la campagne loin de cette ferme hantée... Parfois, elle prenait la petite route qui lézardait, comme elle, à travers champs" (42). She, like Leïla eventually will, exploits the felicitous desert landscape, wandering to flee a suffocating family life. She is targeted by her stepmother, Aïcha, for her difference and refusal to be a traditional girl who can be trained to keep house and keep silent. "Elle épousait le trajet de ses rêves," sometimes fantasizing about the caravans of *les hommes bleus*.

Mais au-delà de ces arbres aux fleurs carminées, il y avait l'Algérie, le désert, un tribu: la famille de son grand-père Bouhaloufa, l'homme au cochon. Le monde nomade, Saâdia ne le connaissait que par les histoires. Celle de Bouhaloufa non seulement la fascinait mais l'apaisait tout autant. . . Parfois, Saâdia avait l'impression que, traversant le désert, ce regard [de son grand-père] venait se poser sur elle, parce qu'il la reconnaissait. . . Plus tard, quand elle serait grande, elle le suivrait. Il la guiderait vers les terres nues. Vers les hommes qui marchent dans le silence. (43-44)

Mokeddem explicitly links two generations and landscapes, allowing Zohra to narrate in one of the novel's presents. Thus, the reader is pulled among several decades and plot lines within a

single passage and reminded of a genealogy of transgression and nomadism within the Ajalli family.

On the fateful day that sets the rest of her life in motion, Saâdia stumbles and breaks her stepmother's water pitcher. Fearing Aïcha's anger, she flees. "Je m'étais arrêtée à l'ombre d'un bosquet. . . Soudain, je vis surgir un homme" (44). The man attacks her and she is paralyzed by fear, too afraid to move and too far away from the village to shout for help in an *Unheimlich* desert. "J'étais trop loin. J'ai toujours été trop loin de tout. Il me viola" (45). She finally escapes, and thus is her wandering transformed into flight: "Boitant et grimaçant de douleur, je marchais droit devant moi. J'ignorais où j'étais et où j'allais. Je voulais seulement continuer à fuir. . . Vers le néant," the *néant* which is outside the family who both protects and suffocates her (46). This line of flight serves to move her onto the path of nomadic subjectivity.

Moral geography, akin to Tuan's articulation of landscapes of fear specifically, confronts Saâdia as she flees with the aid of a kind stranger, Mahfoud, and the two debate what to do next. "Elle risquait la mort si elle demandait à Mahfoud de la ramener à la ferme [de la famille de Saâdia]... La virginité des filles, au soir de leurs noces, était un précepte absolu de la tradition. Celle qui le trahissaient se condamnaient à la répudiation immédiate, souvent à l'assassinat par le mâle 'le plus courageux' de leur famille" (50-51). These moral borders have been set by tradition and religion, and the rest of Saâdia's community exists within these confines, safe from the *Unheimlich*. Movement outside, into the literal and moral wilderness beyond her village, has led her directly to the path that could end in repudiation and even death. Saâdia had *chosen* movement, and this, in the minds of the moral judges of the village, makes her responsible for sullyng their own spiritual life. Mahfoud refuses this moral geography, so he takes her to his hometown in Algeria, between Oran and Tlemcen, where he claims to his neighbors that she is

his cousin whom he intends to marry. When Mahfoud leaves on business, Saâdia is confronted by suspicious neighbors.

“Tandis que le soleil fanfaronne et règne en despote, les gens s’espionnent et s’emprisonnent dans des archaïsmes promus en coutumes pour se protéger des mœurs de l’envahisseur” (55). The blistering sun in this passage reflects the heat of scrutiny that Saâdia feels, trapped in a foreign village in a delicate, possibly deadly situation. Like the despotic sun described above, the villagers finally attack: “‘Cahba²⁷. . . à enfermer au bordel. . . ’ Les regards des hommes ne la lâchaient pas. Gras, rosses, ou chassieux, ils ne pouvaient la meurtrir davantage. Saâdia était déjà brisée” (56). Mahfoud, whose name means “protected,” is found dead by the roadside, and his murder never solved. Saâdia is banished from the village for her transgression, as Djelloul was banished from his family. She has transgressed the boundaries of accepted feminine behavior, as Djelloul transgressed the boundaries of tribal knowledge and Islam. They crossed boundaries and paid a price for doing so.

In examining the moral geography Mokeddem sets up through Saâdia’s story, we see another way that space is socially created. “Les filles de famille sont jalousement enfermées. Grand-mères, mères, tantes, cousines . . . forment le premier rempart contre tout tentation de transgression” (56). This wall inversely mirrors the wall around Tlemcen, where Djelloul attended the madrasa. Whereas the wall around the city was a border *within* which poetry and various other sins reigned freely, the women in Mahfoud’s village form the first line of defense to keep sin *out* of their village; men form the second line, employing violence when necessary in order to sanitize their patriarchal space. “Cette avant-garde féminin est elle-même harcelée,

²⁷ Mokeddem’s footnote: “putain.”

suspectée, et surveillée de près par les hommes . . . [qui] tous veillent à écarter le péché et le déshonneur. . . Ils n’allaient pas la laisser contaminer le douar”²⁸ (56).

The walls of morality represented by the *douar*’s residents exemplify, then, Tuan’s landscape of fear. The villagers exile the moral contamination in their midst, i.e., Saâdia, and quarantine her with other women who have transgressed moral boundaries in order to exile the *Unheimlich*. Mokeddem describes the brothel as a space of “incarcération du plaisir” and a “tombeau du désir,” and in doing so, she invokes Tuan’s landscapes of fear as a reflection of the existential fear of death and the will to evil of human beings. Saâdia’s physical transgression of the boundaries of the home has led, at least in the minds of the men in her family, to her rape and present situation: she dared seek pleasure and therefore upended moral law. “Elle l’avait mérité. . . Elle était condamnée au péché à perpétuité” (57). Like Dante’s version of hell, Saâdia’s transgression must be repeated over and over in the brothel as punishment for her “sin.”

Over the dozen years that she spends in a brothel, she makes friends with one client, Kaddour. “Un jour, Saâdia se laissa aller à lui conter son histoire. Quelques mois plus tard, Kaddour lui annonça qu’il se rendait à Oujda. Oujda!” (58). Storytelling has once again played an important role in her life. With a narrative, she stops the life imposed on her by *potestas* and moves toward *potentia*, the creation of her own life through a line of flight toward freedom. Through Kaddour she contacts her sister, Zina, in Oujda. “Au bout de quatorze ans d’enfermement, Saâdia retrouva l’aire libre. . .” (65). This time, in opposition to her flight after breaking the water pitcher, her line of flight is purposeful. She leaves the culturally-created space for transgressors (and of transgression) and returns to her family to live independently, in her own felicitous space.

²⁸ “Village”

When she leaves to go back to her family, “elle s’éloigna de la ville. Elle marcha longtemps, longtemps. Elle marcha pour éprouver charnellement, à chaque foulée, sa liberté” (66). Her mental need for freedom is physically accomplished through this long physical walk to freedom. Moreover, she serves as a model of nomadic subjectivity for the young Leïla, one of the protagonists who will eventually take up the mantle of nomadism in the Ajalli family:

Assise à même le sol, son superbe corps à l’abandon du repos, Saadia plongeait une main entre ses seins et en retirait un paquet de cigarettes... C’était indécent. Saâdia, elle, dégustait ses cigarettes sans honte ni ostentation. Elle n’avait pas le plaisir offensant. Et les volutes de la fumée semblaient auréoler sa méditation. Elle était si différente des autres femmes... La fierté de son regard désarçonnait les coutumes et forçait les hommes à baisser les yeux. (91-92)

Saâdia deliberately acts against landscapes of fear by bringing the *Unheimlichkeit* into the space of the family. Through her actions, she changes little Leïla’s ideas about womanhood, creating the possibility of freedom for her niece, the rhizomes of possibility. “Lumineuse révélation! Le mythe de l’uniformité de la soumission féminine était brisé” (92). Saâdia breached moral codes, yet her transgressions led to the independence that she craved and planted the seeds of independence that lead to Leïla’s later salvation through transgressive movement outside Algeria in protest of the increasingly striated space that it became after independence.

Et si Zohra symbolisait la parole libre et la tolérance, Bouhaloufa et Saâdia qui, eux, s’étaient construit des vies divergentes et singulières, l’incarnaient au plus profond de leur chair. Leïla devrait trouver son chemin. Il serait solitaire. Elle le savait... Elle avait repris sa marche vers Bouhaloufa, vers l’aïeule Zohra, vers Saadia, Emna, Ben Soussan, La Bernard, vers les phares qui blaisèrent le rivage houleux de l’erg. (310, 321)

These nomadic subjects served as models for the young protagonist's own nomadic subjectivity. They, as well, took solitary paths into smooth, felicitous, unknown spaces.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that rhizomes and the *Unheimlichkeit* in Mokeddem's work pave the way for lines of flight toward transgressive spaces for her protagonists, and these spaces can be reclaimed as emotional geographies of liberation for her nomadic subjects. Mokeddem's disenfranchised are pushed by interior and exterior forces to create space for the self, for desire, spaces felicitous to the eventual creation of nomadic subjectivity.

Space has served not merely as a backdrop for understanding movement in this chapter, but more precisely as a producer of plot, even as a character that opens the space of transgressive possibility through the *Unheimlich* and lines of flight. More importantly, the production of space creates textual landscape throughout these novels, and deterritorialization paradoxically creates felicitous space.

The rebelliousness and fevered movement mentioned in this chapter's introduction, as we have seen, lead the hero(ine) on the quest for freedom; *Unheimlich* forces spur the deterritorialization of characters in these three novels, and upheaval produces movement which resists emotional and moral geographies contrary to characters' personal freedom. Saâdia, Djelloul, Leïla, Shamsa, Mahmoud, and Yasmine create, through their transgression of boundaries, landscapes that subvert fear into desire.

"The poetics of hope is one of imagined *homeliness*, a way of creating in the space of writing a home for not only the characters, but above all for the writer" (Miller 53). Mokeddem insists on the creation of felicitous space as a means of subversion and effective transgression of power structures, and she insists that home and deterritorialization can work in tandem in the

interest of liberation. In Chapter Two I examine the nomadic texts that help create such felicitous spaces that support nomadic subjectivity. These nomadic texts encourage movement through their own structural mobility, echoing, grafting, interacting, and circling back within themselves and extending to other texts, especially throughout the Mediterranean world.

CHAPTER II
NOMADIC TEXTS:
MOVEMENT AND FORM

Je dis la folie des vents contraires...

- Frankétienne

INTRODUCTION

“[J]e pressens avec une exaltation un peu douloureuse qu’il n’y aura pas de retour possible. Que le prix du voyage sera exorbitant” (*La Transe des insoumis* 129). This fulfillment of desire at the cost of security is the fraught question that develops the nomadic soul, that forces one to choose a space or, perhaps more fittingly here, a path of liberation or stasis. Malika Mokeddem’s protagonists, as I discussed in Chapter One, choose self-knowledge and fulfillment over stability, and take to the sea or set out across the desert to achieve their emancipation. I demonstrated that these geographical spaces were favorable to nomadic movement in Mokeddem’s work, as Homeric characters, Joycean themes, and intertextual references intermingle with tales of nomads who are forcibly uprooted—i.e., migrants, exiles, the disowned and shunned, and political refugees. In this chapter, my focus moves from theme to form as I examine how the author destabilizes genres, structure, language, and themes to create texts that depend on vacillation, volatility, and uncertainty to create what I posit are “nomadic texts.”

Constant inversion of the *ici* and *là-bas* and of the past and present make textual space in her novels a space of trafficking—of texts, bodies, and identities—where constant movement produces continual displacement, the remembrance of the past while moving forward, an overturning of time while traversing space. Readers, along with characters, circulate like nomads

through the desert; we crisscross the Mediterranean through texts as do the existential refugees in her oeuvre. Chronological time is confused by flashbacks; the reader can never quite get a sense of place as s/he is moved from one island, oasis, or *douar*²⁹ to another. We furthermore see the rhizomatic connections produced through literature in the Mediterranean world as Mokeddem demonstrates how North African and European writers exchange tales about the sea and Sahara, making these spaces saturated with literature and producing literary geographies in constant movement. The real and fictive interact and are woven together to create an endless stream of stories that make the Mediterranean world one in constant flux. By mixing the real and fictional, blurring the lines between the two, we see how understanding of the world is shaped by the telling of it. The seizing of narrative by subversive writers such as Mokeddem is essential for undermining controlling, striating forces who seek to hegemonize narratives and thus nomadic subjectivity.

In Chapter One, I discussed Mokeddem's use of transgression in the service of nomadic movement: unhoming induces movement, which creates a larger rhizomatic space from which characters can move into felicitous spaces in order to move toward nomadic subjectivity. I move into a further exploration of nomadism in Mokeddem's work in this chapter, concentrating on how her texts themselves move in space and time. Whereas in the first chapter I read nomadism as a *trope* in her work, this chapter examines the structural mobility in her writing and in her writing practice itself that produces the nomadic text.

First, I discuss writing as a moveable space that produces the smooth space necessary for writing. Next, I examine textual trafficking through intertextuality and literary echoes in her work and demonstrate why this is important in making the Sahara and Mediterranean literature-

²⁹ "Village"

saturated spaces. This movement furthermore establishes a writerly genealogy of the Mediterranean and shows how literature moves to produce nomadic texts. Finally, I show how fluctuation in perspective, structural circularity, and the grafting of the real and fictional create structural mobility in Mokeddem's texts.

SYNOPSIS

In this chapter, I focus mainly on three nomadic texts, two novels set on the Mediterranean and the other a memoir. *N'Zid* (2001) reimagines Homer's *Odyssey* from the point of view of a woman who awakens on a boat in the middle of the Mediterranean with no idea who she is or how she ended up there. The intertextual novel begins with movement from the very first sentence ("Elle bascule," 11) and ends with the protagonist setting out on yet another Mediterranean voyage. We learn that the woman's name is Nora, her partner has been kidnapped by terrorists, and she must simultaneously find herself and save her partner.

La Désirante (2011) is the story of Shamsa as she searches the Mediterranean in her boat, *Vent de sable*, for her missing love, Léo/Lou. Chapter structure is contrapuntal, with chapters entitled "Lou" serving as the axis around which plots pushing the narrative revolve. Readers are thus pulled back and forth between the couple's history and Shamsa's present search for him. Furthermore, the novel is partly based on a true story, demonstrating how Mokeddem has grafted the real and fictional to be both novel and social commentary on migration politics.

La Transe des insoumis (2003) (*Transe*) utilizes autofiction and memoir to give a glimpse into the author's writing practice and to contextualize several of her novels in the aftermath of the end of a long-term relationship. *Transe* begins with a solitary woman: "Il est parti ce matin. Je suis seule dans le lit" (15). Once again, as in the aforementioned books, a man has disappeared from a female life and the text jumps from the present to the past in order to situate the story of

the author's break-up within a wider storyline, that of her medical and artistic career, and her experiences in France and Algeria. In this text, unlike the two mentioned above, the narrator returns to Algeria and is successfully reunited and reconciled with another man, her father. The text, like *N'Zid* and *La Désirante*, ends with a woman on the move, as the author says her final goodbyes to her father and prepares to go back to France. In these three texts, then, I concentrate on movement through time and space that is accomplished not as a plot point, but through the very construction of these works.

MOVEABLE SPACES OF WRITING

Through Mokeddem's writing, and especially in her memoirs, we read her nomadism, being pulled back and forth between two continents, across an ocean and through the desert, between the past and present. In effect, her metaphysical and literal nomadism are reflected in her oeuvre. In *Transe*, Mokeddem mentions the physical places of writing, and she describes all of them as in-between places. "Dans l'endroit suspendu de l'écriture" (16); in her Montpellier house, "la mezzanine, l'endroit de l'écriture, demeure un havre" (27). "Maintenant, de quelque côté que je sois, je nomme immédiatement l'autre. Maintenant, j'ai deux bords... Je suis entière par ce duo en moi" (229), she writes. Her *metaphysical* in-betweenness is thus expressed as a *place* of writing: *l'endroit suspendu, la mezzanine, entre deux bords*. It is the physical in-between where she can express her psychic in-betweenness, the nomadic subjectivity of which Rosi Braidotti writes (which will be explored in depth in Chapter Three). Two sides of the writer which were shaped by place—Algeria and France—can co-exist in writing, in this verdant space for cultivation of imagination.

VERDANT SPACES

Transe links the bed and literature, two spaces that are concomitant with storytelling and writing for Mokeddem, forming what I term a “verdant space” for nomadic writing.

Mokeddem’s first memoir³⁰ begins with male movement and the female narrator anchored in the bed: “Il est parti ce matin. Je suis seule dans le lit” (15).

The first section of the memoir, entitled “Le lit debout,” vacillates between chapters entitled “Ici” and “Là-bas,” moving the reader in two ways: back and forth in time between the memoir’s present and Mokeddem’s past, and north to south from France to Algeria. Within this part of the memoir, place is especially prioritized, as demonstrated by the aforementioned chapter titles, and we read of the places that are shaping the author’s present as well as the places that marked her childhood.

Chapters concentrating on the author’s youth speak of emotional suffocation³¹ and thirst for knowledge, the imagery of sleeping in a suffocating communal bed under a heavy blanket as a child in her family’s home serving as a striking introductory metaphor for her need for breath and freedom:

Trop raide, trop épaisse, elle m’écrase, me donne des cauchemars d’étouffement..., cet étouffe-musulmans. Est-ce là que s’enracinent les insomnies qui vont déclarer leur règne dès la puberté? Dans cet éteignoir tissé maison, avec la rigidité de la tradition ? Dans ce sommeil où s’encastrent les différentes chairs? Une hydre dont les grommellements, les

³⁰ Her second is *Mes hommes* (2005). She has stated that *Les Hommes qui marchent* is also a memoir, yet it has also been marketed and continues to be read as both fiction and autofiction.

³¹ The theme of suffocation is present throughout Mokeddem’s work. For more information, see Appendix interview and *Je dois tout à ton oubli* (2008), a novel inspired by the true story of Mokeddem’s mother suffocating a child born out of wedlock. Also note the importance of suffocation to Djelloul’s story, detailed in Chapter One.

éructations nocturnes prolongent les *interdits* de la journée *réduisant* chacun à un membre, une fonction? (20, my italics)

This passage presents a syntax of constraint and discomfort, a space of negativity that stifles growth and intimates the restriction of any line of flight. This suffocation physically drives the author from this *étouffe-musulmans*, a striated space, and into a more felicitous smooth space, that of her grandmother's bed in the kitchen.

Mokeddem usually escaped this nighttime prison to go sleep in her grandmother's bed, and this physical bed cultivated a future writer, as her grandmother would spin tales of nomads, recalling *les hommes bleus* and the landscape of western Algeria and the Atlas Mountains.

Elle m'ouvre des bras habitués et roucoule quelques *paroles de réconfort*... Avec des *rires* attendris, elle me *murmure* des contes, des récits nomades. Grand-mère est toujours très en verbe la nuit. Peut-être a-t-elle des angoisses elle aussi... Exilée de sa vie nomade à un âge tardif, elle n'a plus que les mots pour fuir l'immobilité sédentaire et retrouver ses départs et ses arrivées... *Elle raconte. Je vois.* (21, my italics)

This passage speaks of comfort and reassurance. The grandmother's bed is a felicitous space for Mokeddem-the-girl and Mokeddem-the-writer. Furthermore, the grandmother's stories bring the narrator's nomadic genealogy to life, developing another kind of genealogy, that of storytelling. This second space, in contrast to the family bed, is one of comfort and relief where the seeds of nomadic subjectivity are planted.

Deleuze and Guattari point out that smooth spaces such as the grandmother's bed are "occupé[s] par des événements ou heccéités"³² (598) and are the setting for haptic events that encourage nomadism. "C'est pourquoi ce qui occupe l'espace lisse, ce sont les intensités, *les*

³² Merriam Webster defines this as "the status of being an individual or a particular nature... what makes something to be an ultimate reality different from any other."

vents et les bruits, les forces et les qualités tactiles et sonores, comme dans le désert, la steppe ou les glaces” (my italics). Winds and storms, as discussed in Chapter One, clear a path for the making of smooth space and thus the coming-to-being of the nomad. Furthermore, the physical comforts of the grandmother’s bed prepare the body and mind for flight to freedom.

In returning to the grandmother’s bed, such childhood experiences encouraged Mokeddem’s own storytelling and love of literature, making the bed the first verdant space for stories. This space of safety and warmth eventually produced a writer who is a nomadic subject and who produces texts that reflect that movement of her nomadic ancestors. The nomadism embodied in her grandmother came to life through stories, reconnecting the young Mokeddem to smooth spaces and lines of flight out of a suffocating environment. Her texts furthermore explode the lines of flight possible for her readers, continuing an emotional geography worldwide through the dissemination of her works, all thanks to the verdant storytelling space of her grandmother’s bed.

Exploring this metaphor further, the bed’s signification changes in Mokeddem’s adult life in the “Ici” chapters in *Transe*, set in France, transforming into a space soured by memories of the partner who recently left her, a place which she must escape in order to recover and live. This is a major contrast to her grandmother’s bed but also a space, “occupé par des événements ou heccéitiés,” as Deleuze and Guattari explain. The second bed is a space now saturated by the past, one physically sickening for the author.

In the memoir’s present, as the author recovers from her break-up, she is immobilized by grief, chained to her bed and the memories it holds: “l’odeur est bien là, dans la fibre du tissu. Dans la mémoire du lit” (15). As she listens to the tramontane roar outside, she finally arises.

The haptic force of the wind pushes her out of a suffocating space and into movement toward the in-between space where she writes.

Je m'arrache à l'odeur, au lit, claque la porte, traverse la maison vers l'aile opposée...
 Une grande mezzanine au-dessus du salon me tient lieu de bureau. C'est là que j'écris.
 J'ai commencé à écrire là. L'Algérie. Bien sûr... J'ai écrit le pays après des années de
 rupture. Dans l'endroit suspendu de l'écriture. (16)

As the grandmother in the previous passage spoke her nomadic past into existence (“Elle raconte. Je vois.”), the narrator here writes her Algeria into existence—she begins to pen her own emotional geography due to the *Unheimlich* force of the break-up. This physical movement leads from an “Ici” chapter set in France to one “Là-bas,” set in Algeria, where she struggled to sleep, much less alone. Her refusal of sedentariness leads, in her memory and writing, back to her grandmother’s safe bed where storytelling comforts. This physical, textual, and time shift show the narrator using space to her advantage, escaping when necessary. Her happiness depends on her ability to move.

On the other hand, she admits to paying a heavy price for this freedom. “Je sais depuis toujours le prix de la liberté. Je sais ce que je dois aux livres. L'énormité de ce qui m'échappe aussi... Toutes ces *ruptures*, ces *amputations* pour *arracher* d'abord, pour sauvegarder ensuite le droit de décider pour moi-même” (25, my italics). The violence and pain of the language in this passage contrast with the image of coziness associated with her grandmother’s bed where “elle se met à me conter des féeries de tapis. L'une d'elles m'enchante: ‘Hagitec-magitec, il était une fois...’” (39). Conjuring through storytelling, her grandmother helped her forget the French

soldiers who harass them, and she instead fed little Malika's need for escape and intellectual stimulation³³.

WEAVING

Mokeddem then goes on to explicitly link the bed and the loom, which she calls "le lit debout," this also being the title of the memoir's first section. The author thus pushes the symbolism of the bed even further, connecting the childhood and adult beds to "le lit debout" of a fairytale, her grandmother's tale of the weaver and rug.

According to the fairytale, a man becomes entranced by a beautifully woven rug and must find the person who made it. He learns that the weaver is married to a boor who has taken a second wife and ignores the beautiful rug-maker. The man sneaks into the weaver's house and finally meets the woman, with whom he has regular nocturnal rendezvous behind the loom. "On dit que depuis, ces deux-là s'adonnaient toutes les nuits à d'étranges arabesques debout derrière la trame du métier. On dit que c'est pour ça qu'on a appelé le métier à tisser de la belle 'le lit debout'" (40).

Besides *Transe*'s first section being entitled "Le lit debout," the theme of weaving forms the center of this first section. Moreover, weaving-as-trope has a long literary legacy. The English word "text" even derives from the Latin "texere," or "to weave," and Mokeddem weaves fairytale and autofiction together here, as well as weaving vignettes from *HQM* into *Transe*. Deleuze and Guattari, in fact, use weaving as a metaphor for creating smooth spaces from striated ones, stating, "les deux sortes d'éléments n'ont pas la même fonction; les uns sont fixes, et les autres mobiles, passant dessus et dessous les fixes" (593).

³³ The family lived near a water tower, a strategic spot for both the French army and FLN militants, and so soldiers on both sides fought over the spot.

Throughout literature, the connection between weaving and storytelling is detailed again and again. In one of the most famous literary weaving stories and one germane to Mokeddem's Homeric intertextuality, Penelope weaved over the course of the twenty years Odysseus spent on his Mediterranean quest. As she worked and secretly undid her weaving at night to keep suitors away, so Mokeddem's grandmother used nighttime "weaving" to keep away the terrors of the war for Algerian independence. "Les militaires s'amuse à nous harceler de différentes manières. Tantôt en escouade hachant la nuit, martelant le sol. Tantôt, surgissant comme des démons sans que nous ayons rien perçu... [D]'une voix étouffée, elle se met à me conter des féeries de tapis... 'Hagitec-magitec, il était une fois...'" (39). Penelope's weaving protected her, just as Mokeddem's grandmother's fantastical weaving (in a space used for fabric weaving) to bring protection to the young writer.

Mokeddem would also watch her mother and grandmother weave. "Elles ont passé l'après-midi à dresser un métier à tisser dans la cuisine, à y fixer la trame d'un tapis. L'aïeule a mis un point d'honneur à enseigner à sa nièce et belle-fille l'art, fastidieux certes mais si noble, de la laine... Prêts au plus ardu: transformer la besogne en œuvre" (37). The women laboriously cobbled together a weaving, as Mokeddem herself would later transform tragedy into literature in her own bed when she finally came to writing.

The linking of the bed and the loom in this book thus joins two spaces of creation and two physical objects of creation in a gynocentric space, producing associations across time and a kind of continuance of the writer's genealogy. In other words, both the bed and the loom in the fairytale and in Mokeddem's memoir are spaces of female creativity, where women create and transmit stories. These are spaces of escape, where women can move, through imagination, to other worlds.

Returning to the memoir's present in the aftermath of a break-up, Mokeddem rejects the emotional geography attached to the conjugal bed, so she destroys it, creating a line of flight away from her former life as part of a couple: "Le samedi après-midi, je démonte le lit, le sors de ma chambre, le disloque, disjoints les lattes, les attaque ensuite à la hache. Les planches se brisent avec un bruit d'os" (51). The space is reclaimed for the single female, alone. When Mokeddem hacks it to pieces and replaces it with a new bed and sheets, the space becomes verdant and produces writing. As Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi, and Mick Smith theorize, the bed's emotional geography has been altered (*Emotional Geographies*). Thus by erasing the palimpsests of the past, a new emotional geography prioritizes literature: "[L]es livres sont mes lits debout entre moi et le monde, des mondes où les mots se couchent au bord de l'infini" (55, my italics).

In this uniquely feminine space of weaving and storytelling, the bed (-as-metaphor and -literal-place), Mokeddem learned the art of storytelling and found a refuge from family and political turmoil. These sites gave her stories, thus making them verdant spaces of escape that nurtured her and set her free to leave Algeria and to write. Her grandmother's stories planted the seeds for her novels, and her comforting bed and women's weaving were spaces that cultivated her own love of stories. In the next section, I move from the above verdant spaces of literary creation to intertextuality in Mokeddem's work, demonstrating another type of textual movement that produces nomadic texts.

INTERTEXTUALITY IN NOMADIC TEXTS

Authors have always quoted each other and read each other's work, therefore, in this second section on nomadic texts, I consider intertextuality as another form of movement in Mokeddem's oeuvre, that of intertextuality within her own body of work as well as intertextuality in her writerly genealogy. As discussed in the previous section, Mokeddem's

grandmother encouraged storytelling just as Zohra did so for Leïla in *HQM*. Mokeddem herself devoured books while growing up, and the shadows of these literary influences are found throughout her work. Words, phrases, and tropes make links across all of her work, and readers and scholars also find echoes of other Francophone authors, especially those whose work deals with Algeria. The nomadic texts that contain this sort of trafficking allow one to cross time, the Mediterranean, or the Sahara by way of stories.

Mokeddem reclaims Homer's work from an Algerian point of view; she demonstrates how Eberhardt made the north-south journey into North Africa (as opposed to today's migrants moving in the opposite direction). Texts crisscross the Mediterranean world in an endless circularity. Works travel, creating a literary Mediterranean world.

INTERTEXTUALITY IN MOKEDDEM'S OEUVRE

The most basic instances of intertextuality in Mokeddem's work come from *Transe*, where the narrator mentions her previous publications: *HQM*, *L'Interdite*, *Des Rêves et des assassins*, *Le Siècle des sauterelles*, *N'Zid*, and *La Nuit de la lézarde* are all cited. References to these works within her memoir situate the books in a personal and political context, allowing for a palimpsestic reading of her body of work. In the incipit "Avertissement" to *Transe*, she writes, "Dans ce livre, j'essaie d'en remonter les méandres, d'en songer les opacités. J'entreprends d'y fouiller les angoisses, la fantasmagorie, les réminiscences, les luttes, les rébellions, les transgressions dont les nuits blanches sont le creuset" (11). As a memoir, the book reveals the author's practice of trafficking texts. Trafficking can imply exchanging, negotiating, bargaining with, and/or interacting with, and Mokeddem does so with several texts and authors. She employs *la langue traversière*, digesting these texts filtered through her particular experience, as if establishing an intellectual genealogy and answering from her own particular viewpoint. The author lays bare her literary practice most completely in this book, showing readers how texts

moved her and are moved by her. The narrator details her literary influences, from childhood reading to adult friendships with fellow writers, and these literary peregrinations demonstrate how texts as well as writers cross the Mediterranean and Sahara, how text leads on to text in an endless fugue. Therefore, I first examine intertextuality as a strategy of movement.

The image of the *tatouage vert* is found in both *HQM* and *N'Zid* and is a significant trope³⁴ that travels and changes meaning between two texts. *HQM* opens with a description of Zohra, the former nomad who is now sedentarized yet whose body and veil are in constant movement. “C’était un petit bout de femme à la peau brune et tatouée. *Des tatouages vert sombre, elle en avait partout: des croix sur les pommettes, une branche sur le front entre ses sourcils arqués et fins comme deux croissants de lune, trois traits sur le menton*” (9, my italics). In comparison, Nora has a large bruise on her face throughout *N'Zid* from being attacked before she lost her memory. Over the course of the book, the bruise slowly heals until it has become a green mark by the last sentence: “D’une main lasse, elle caresse *le tatouage vert* de l’hématome qui souligne la racine de ses cheveux” (214 my italics).

This small but important image of the *tatouage vert* is a trope that travels between these two works, published over a decade apart, and the signification of the *tatouage* changes between the two books. Zohra represents the tribal nomad linked to Algerian land; Nora represents the cosmopolitan Algerian in the in-between. Both women’s bodies are marked, yet the reasons for this are different: Zohra’s tattoos were gotten voluntarily as a marker of her identity; Nora’s “tattoo” was made through violence.

³⁴ The green tattoo is only one example of many reoccurring tropes—including the *vent de sable*, the giant albatross, “hagitec-magitec,” sailing, the Mediterranean, the Sahara, and exile—that travel across Mokeddem’s work.

Moreover, Zohra does not seem to be emotionally attached to her tattoos, but the verb “caresser” rather than “toucher” is used with Nora’s “tattoo.” The bruise seems to be a badge of honor, although one that has been hard-won and painful in several ways. In addition, her links with her heritage will fade in time, as will the bruise.

Furthermore, comparing and contrasting *le tatouage vert* is useful in following the development of the female archetype in Mokeddem’s work. Zohra’s tattoos situate her geographically as an Algerian female nomad, and chronologically as someone visibly linked to the past. Nora’s bruise, on the other hand, marks her because it is an undesired signifier of violence that propels her Mediterranean quest. Moreover, she is linked with Algeria through her mother and her dark skin, but this mark that Algerian fundamentalism caused on her face will fade as Mokeddem hopes that the influence of fundamentalists in Algeria will do.

This is but one example of intertextuality within Mokeddem’s own oeuvre, not to mention the repetition and reinterpretation of vignettes in her memoirs (*HQM*, *Transe*, and *Mes hommes*). When the author’s work is studied as a whole, these literary recurrences serve to transform the reader’s understanding of these intertexts. We can re-read stories involving the narrator and her father, the story of the stolen bicycle money, the mob who attacks two girls for not veiling, the long-term relationship with Jean-Louis, and so on. In addition, as we reinterpret *le tatouage vert* across the aforementioned novels, we witness how the author reframes this image and reinterprets it. Finally, we can re-read these intertextual stories to reveal more about each one through comparison and contrast.

Intertextuality, in sum, demonstrates how interpretation *moves*. The movement of stories within Mokeddem’s oeuvre and the reader’s subsequent “readerly nomadism” between and

among texts underscores how the nomadic text can operate rhizomatically. Movement is, once again, key in experiencing the nomadic text.

WRITERLY GENEALOGY

We see further evidence of intertextuality through Mokeddem's literary echoes. In several books, she writes of her textual encounter with Saint-Exupéry and *Le Petit Prince*. The young Mokeddem reads that the Little Prince asks the rose where to find nomads. She does not know, the rose responds. "Le vent les promène. Ils manquent de racines" (St-Exupéry cited in *Transe* 101). She reacts: "J'ai bondi, failli jeter le livre. Grand-mère m'a toujours convaincue du contraire: 'Nous ne sommes pas des palmiers pour avoir besoin de racines. Nous nous avons des jambes pour marcher et une immense mémoire!'" (101) St-Exupéry, the writer/pilot who had an intimate relationship with the Sahara, reached Mokeddem across time and also connected to her grandmother's stories, producing a physical reaction in the young reader. Thus we see how storytelling and print, literature and family history, fantasy and reality meet in this passage. In addition, *Transe* recounts Mokeddem's progression as a reader, making her way from Saint-Exupéry to Eberhardt. We then witness her movement from reader to writer, her memoir detailing the trajectory of her publishing history. Going even further, we see her movement within literary circles as she befriends fellow writers and cites their work, linking their writerly experiences together across space and time.

Such encounters reverberate throughout Mokeddem's work, establishing a writerly genealogy spread throughout the Mediterranean world. These literary echoes compel us to read back and forth across this region, tracing textual movement by following tropes, characters, themes, and forms in the literature produced from the region's verdant literary space. In addition, textual movement illustrates how stories are reiterated, answered, and repeated; they are echoed

around this region. The Mediterranean then comes to serve as a moveable space of writing akin to Mokeddem's mezzanine, mentioned above. As sound echoes, so the Mediterranean's stories reverberate and continue textual trafficking in the region, weaving an ever more complex literary space.

Even a single word can carry great rhetorical weight with its intertextual links, and I concentrate for the moment on one such word, "gangrène." Readers familiar with Franco-Algerian history associate this word with Benjamin Stora's historical study of the memory of the Algerian war, *La Gangrène et l'oubli* (1991). Other notable intertextual examples of the word include Jerome Lindon's *La Gangrène* (1959), confronting the use of torture in French prisons in Algeria; and *Djamila Boupacha* (1962) by Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi, accusing French soldiers of raping and torturing the young girl of the eponymous title. This evocative word may conjure other books dealing with the "gangrène" of human rights violations during the Algerian War, including Henri Alleg's infamous book *La Question* (1958), a banned book detailing the torture of Alleg at the hands of French authorities; and General Paul Aussaresses' *Services spéciaux, Algérie 1955-1957* (2001), in which he admitted to torturing and killing Algerian prisoners of war. Following the publication of his memoir, he was stripped of his rank and Légion d'honneur.

As a trope throughout Mokeddem's own work, she writes of "la gangrène de ce pays [Algeria]... Le mal était protéiforme qui finissait par n'épargner personne. Par nous atteindre, nous annihiler de diverses façons" (*La Désirante* 81-82). The character Sultana rails several times in *L'Interdite* against the "gangrène" of misogyny in Algeria: "Nous n'avons cessé de tuer l'Algérie à petit feu, femme par femme... la gangrène des mentalités" (51-52). Mokeddem's

memoir, published in the middle of *la décennie noire*, also notes “la gangrène affective... [L]a nuit revient avec le désespoir d’un pays” (*Transe* 23).

Using this word across Algero-centric texts over the course of six decades reinforces its rhetorical power in telling the story of Algeria. With the word being used in an influential text by Lindon to criticize French war crimes, the word carries an increasing amount of “weight” as it is further trafficked in journalistic, academic, fiction, and non-fiction texts in the ensuing decades.

When Mokeddem uses it in a memoir and fiction novel, she reclaims the word from a different perspective, that of a secular Algerian female. As Stora’s book title warns, she does not permit *la gangrène* or *l’oubli*. Instead, she carries this word through texts across decades, repeating a word that invokes disgust, reminding readers of the festering wound that still, even after the French exit, threatens the life of the Algerian people. This trafficking seizes a rhetorically weighty word and situates it in a particular literary space that highlights a subversive perspective, that of the Algerian woman critiquing a society and political regime that is repressive to the body, soul, and intellect. She wields the word, using narrative as a weapon and fighting the silence so often imposed on secular Algerian women.

In another example of intertextuality, Mokeddem establishes her own literary genealogy. She makes her literary “kinships” most clear in *Transe*, echoing Francophone and Anglophone writers. She sprinkles throughout her memoir the names of authors she has read: Henri Alleg, Marguerite Duras, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Isabelle Eberhardt, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, William Faulkner, Simone de Beauvoir, Tahar Djaout, Montaigne, and Rachid Mimouni are some of the authors who have influenced her. She cites these authors throughout her body of work, but one resonates as a character, author, and spiritual touchstone

throughout Mokeddem's oeuvre: Eberhardt. "J'y côtoie Isabelle Eberhardt.³⁵ Cela me bouleverse" (*Transe* 253).

References to Eberhardt occur throughout Mokeddem's writing, and she explains in *Transe*,

J'avais vaguement entendu parler de la *roumia*³⁶ Isabelle. Ses propres mots l'ont aussitôt incarnée, lui conférant du mystère, du caractère. Des mots de l'autre langue qui décrivent non seulement le désert mais mon village et surtout ma dune. Ça m'a renversée...

Isabelle, elle, est arrivée à dos de chameau en longeant la dune. Elle ne vient pas des cioux [comme le Petit Prince]. Elle est arrivée en traversant des regs et des sables avec les mêmes mots que nous. Son désert me paraît une version écrite des récits de grand-mère...

J'ai lu son texte écrit ici, à Kénadsa. Elle dit : *Le ksar me semble bâti pour mes yeux, j'en aime la teinte.* (101-102, repeated on 247, original italics)

Through Eberhardt's writing, Mokeddem experienced her own world in print, as a story by a *roumia* who dressed as a man, converted to Islam, and traveled the Maghreb, in love with the geography and nomads from which Mokeddem came. Eberhardt was an *étrangère* in both senses of the French word, just as Mokeddem the writer and her characters are outsiders and/or foreigners. Eberhardt's identity was constantly in flux, and she crossed the Mediterranean and wrote just as Mokeddem would eight decades after Eberhardt's death, making Kénadsa a smooth space of literary echoes for outsiders like these two.

³⁵ Born in Switzerland in 1877, Eberhardt moved from Europe to Algeria in 1897 and converted to Islam. Living as a man named Si Mahmoud Saadi, she traveled throughout the Maghreb and was involved in anti-French activities, espionage, and several love affairs. She died in 1904 in a flash flood in Aïn Séfra, near Mokeddem's birthplace. Her posthumous publications include *Dans l'ombre chaude de l'Islam* (1905), *Notes de route: Maroc-Algérie-Tunisie* (1908), and *Contes et Paysages* (1925). "Mahmoud," Eberhardt's male Muslim name, is also the name of a main character in *Le Siècle des sauterelles*.

³⁶ According to the book's footnote, "Romaine puis par extension chrétienne."

Echoes of Assia Djébar's work also resound in Mokeddem's. Her mention of cavalcades and fantasias in *Transe* (238) inevitably recall Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), even more so for English readers, for whom the title is translated *Love, An Algerian Cavalcade*. "D'autres voix qui m'assiègent" (*Transe* 232) is a phrase that recalls Djébar's collection of a similar name, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent* (1999), a series of essays and poems reflecting on her writing and history on the margins of Francophonie. Such connections serve as tributes to Djébar's work, demonstrating how her reinterpretations of Algerian history through the eyes of women and the colonized resonated with Mokeddem. As Djébar reclaims history for the silenced³⁷, so Mokeddem reclaims a voice for the repressed.

A final example of this practice of intertextuality through writerly genealogy comes from *Transe* when we learn of writers besides Mokeddem and Eberhardt who are connected through Kénadsa. Upon her return to Algeria after decades in France, her father tells her that she is featured in a film, *Les Plumes du désert*, "retraçant les trajectoires de trois enfants de Kénadsa, Mohamed Moulessehouli alias Yasmina Khadra, Pierre Rabhi, et moi" (244). She is connected via space and literature to these writers and to her hometown. Whereas she was once chased through the streets for being a subversive and not wearing a headscarf, she returns and is ironically celebrated for her subversive literature.

Mokeddem's intellectual relationships to Eberhardt, Saint-Exupéry, Djaout, Djébar, Khadra, and Rabhi as well as to historians of Algeria form a textual thread, a smooth space where boundaries of time, political borders, genre, and gender are transgressed. This

³⁷ Another example of literary echoes is through the recurring appearances in Mokeddem's work of Tahar Djaout, to whom *L'Interdite* is dedicated. They were jointly awarded a literary prize to expedite the translation of novels into Arabic or French in order to promote an easier movement of texts between the two languages and with the aim of promoting peace in Algeria during *la décennie noire*. *L'Interdite*, Mokeddem has stated, was written quickly as an urgent response to Djaout's assassination and the increasing violence in Algeria.

interweaving of minds and texts creates a literal movement of ideas, words, and stories, putting them in perpetual motion.

STRUCTURAL MOBILITY IN NOMADIC TEXTS

Moving on from intertextuality, I now turn to the relationship between structure, genre, and mobility. Mokeddem primarily employs fiction and memoir in her work, although some of her novels blur the generic line into autofiction, a mix of the two³⁸. Her particular style of writing is a melding together of these genres in a way that particularly fits her own history and nomadic subjectivity. *HQM* is an example of such a text. Mokeddem has stated that the novel was based on her family history, especially the stories of her grandmother. “I sought to reconstruct her flamboyant metaphors, the serenity of her faith, the sting of her words” (Mokeddem “Geography...” 173). *Des Rêves et des assassins* (1995) is another example, based on one of Mokeddem’s patient’s stories. *Mes Hommes* (2005) and *Transe* are books that Mokeddem has dubbed memoirs: “Dans ce livre, j’essaie d’en remonter les méandres, d’en sonder les opacités. J’entreprends d’y fouiller les angoisses, la fantasmagorie, les réminiscences, les luttes, les rebellions, les transgressions dont les nuits blanches sont le creuset” (*Transe* 11). Borrowing from real-life stories, however, is not my focus in this final section of my examination of nomadic texts. Instead, I focus on how this mode of intertextuality gives texts mobility.

MIXING REALITY AND FICTION: GRAFTING

La Désirante blends the real and fictional together. The novel, according to Mokeddem, was partially inspired by the story of Abderrazak el Para, the *Odyssey*, and the migrant *harragas*

³⁸ For further reading on autobiography and autofiction, see Phillippe Lejeune’s *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975), Georges Gusdorf’s *Auto-bio-graphie* (1991), Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes (1975), Marie Darrieussecq’s “Fiction in the First Person, or Immoral Writing” (in *L’Esprit Créateur* 2010), and Chloé Delaume’s *La Règle du Je* (2010).

(or “path-burners”) who burn their identity cards and shed themselves of any identifying information in hopes of a better chance for passage to Europe.

“Shamsa est tout le contraire de Pénélope. Elle est Ulysse, au féminin” (interview in *El Moudjahid*). She is on a quest fraught with danger, yet the dangers are in the form of contemporary monsters such as terrorists and immigration police sailing the ocean. In the same interview, she continues:

J’avais envie d’évoquer les trafics qui *gangrènent* le Sahel. Les connections entre les milieux mafieux, les intégristes et des éléments véreux de l’armée. L’histoire d’Abderrazak el Para, encore opaque, est éminemment romanesque. J’avais écrit de longs développements sur le sujet que j’ai réduit au fur et à mesure des relectures... En tant que journaliste, elle [Shamsa, le protagoniste du roman] a rencontré des femmes dont le fils ou le mari a disparu dans des conditions troublées et encore les familles de Harragas [sic] dont on avait perdu la trace. (My italics)

To better understand the implications of these real and fictional characters, it is necessary to know that El Para allegedly headed the kidnapping of thirty-two European tourists in Algeria in 2003. Mokeddem weaves this story into *La Désirante*: “Lou, les derniers des otages de 2003 n’ont été libérés qu’après sept mois de captivité et le versement d’une rançon de cinq millions d’euros. Pourtant ce fieffé Para s’était surpassé en coups d’éclat propres à mettre sur les dents toutes les armées des pays frontaliers du Sahel et asseoir sa notoriété” (169). El Para had claimed to be a former military agent who then became second-in-command of the terrorist group, Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat. He was eventually captured in Chad and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Algerian government in 2005. However, later that year, *Le*

*Monde diplomatique*³⁹ published an investigation proving that the Algerian government actually staged the kidnapping in order to gain American and Sahel political and military support.



Fig. 2 View of the Strait of Messina from a NASA photograph

Mokeddem's novel mirrors this true but murky tale of political intrigue, kidnapping, and double agents in a country where the state and paramilitary fundamentalists battle for control. In the novel, Léo has disappeared and Shamsa must use clues to find him. Mokeddem seizes this story and combines it with Homer's ancient epic. She intermingles fictional tropes with real-life spaces and stories to traffic readers back and forth between the real and fictional, causing us to

³⁹ For more information, see the article at: <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2005/02/MELLAH/11905>

question how these two worlds interact. More importantly, she reclaims the story to shift the focus from hegemonizing political forces to that of a nomadic subject on a quest of the heart.

Pushing the idea of intertextuality further, we can see the example of the Strait of Messina and the Gorgons makes this intertextuality most clear. In his history, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, Thucydides described the Strait of Messina (which also appears in *N'Zid* and *La Désirante*):

The strait is the water between Rhegium and Messina, where Sicily comes closest to the mainland, and is the location of the place called Charybdis, which Odysseus was supposed to have sailed through. Because of its narrowness and because the water rushes into it from two great seas, the Tyrrhenian and the Sicilian, and generates such strong currents, the strait was understandably regarded as dangerous. (249)

Travelers there note that the strait is unique not only because the current changes direction with the tides, but because the mixture of warm water with colder, more saline water causes “all kinds of subversions, upwellings, and swirls when the waters slop back and forth four times a day” (Huler 206). Furthermore, the Strait of Messina (see Fig. 2), mentioned by name in *N'Zid* and described in the *Odyssey*, is designated in both works as the home of the Gorgons (see Fig. 3) and is characterized as a windy, rocky area dangerous for sailors. Mokeddem blends the real and fictional in her imagining of this strait and the Gorgons who inhabit it. Intertextual links here tie together an ancient epic with a contemporary tragedy/detective novel, *La Désirante*, both in the same geographic space.



Fig. 3 *The Gorgons, from Homer's Odyssey*

Reading this space as an emotional geography, we see how Mokeddem expands the *idea* of the Strait of Messina so that the Mediterranean's entire south becomes beholden to the forces working against the south-north Mediterranean migrant, i.e., the terrible *modern* Gorgons akin to the ancient ones who terrorized Homer's sailors:

Depuis la nuit des temps, les hommes se sont raconté des récits fantasmagoriques où interviennent des dieux, les tout-puissants et les déçus: démons et autres monstres. Et pour que ces histoires survivent à leur condition de mortels, les conteurs les ancrent dans des contrées propices à entretenir les imaginaires. Les générations suivantes peuvent s'y référer, les déployer en un florilège de mythes...En ces temps prétendus modernes, Charybde et Scylla ont déserté l'entrée du détroit de Messine—où plus aucun navire ne risque rien—pour des rivages bien plus vastes. Charybde étend son empire à toutes les côtes du sud où le despotisme et la férocité des régimes briment, affament, dans tous les sens du terme, de populations entières et jettent à la mer des flots de fuyards...Sur cette Méditerranée où la beauté est plus tragique encore que dans les temps anciens, j'apprends

le sens de la disparition. Mes traversées sont celles d'un Ulysse sans Ithaque. Ulysse, quand les cris de milliers de naufragés remplacent le chant des sirènes. (120, 123-124)

The rage of demons is substituted with the rage and greed of dictators and religious extremists, and deadly European immigration policies and politics. In this way, Homer's epic informs the reading of Mokeddem's novel, and the text demands that the reader recognize the link between past and present, both real and fictional, and that readers acknowledge how the fictional is grafted onto the real.

Immigrants, the *genti di mare* and *harragas*, are being physically moved⁴⁰ out of Africa, across the Mediterranean, and into Europe in real life as well as in *La Désirante* and in *N'Zid* (see Fig. 4). Therefore Mokeddem specifically compares these bodies to mythic figures; present-day states, arms- and drug traffickers to mythical gods. The Gorgons are trafficked across time into Mokeddem's novels and come to stand for the powder-keg zone from the southern Sahel to the shores of southern Europe.

⁴⁰ The Mediterranean crossing has been called "the world's deadliest" by Amnesty International. For more statistics and information, see <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/Refugees%2C-migrants-and-asylum> and <http://www.unhcr.org/print/55e06a5b6.html>.

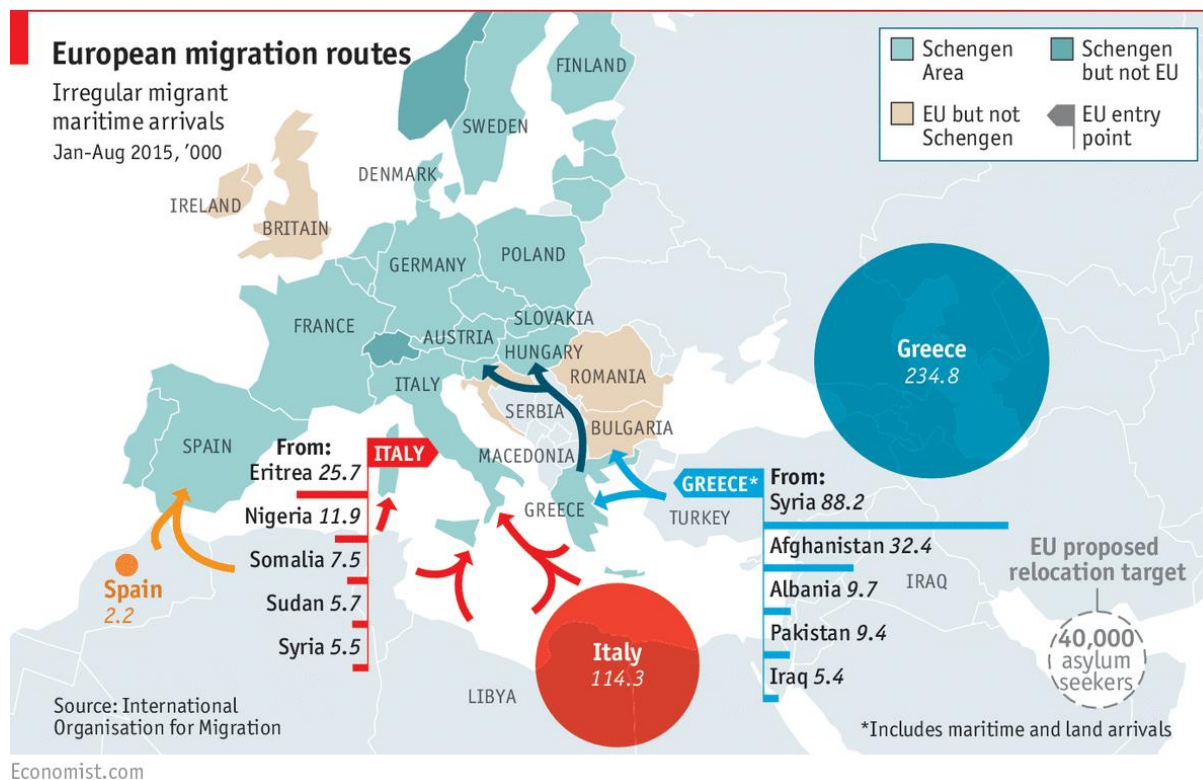


Fig. 4 European Migration Routes

Un no man's land... les guérillas contre des régimes vérolés, le repli du terrorisme, leurs trafics d'armes, de cannabis...Même les drogues dures de la mafia sud-américaine transitent souvent par le Sahel, l'accès à l'Europe devenant de plus en plus difficile par les voies classiques. GPS et téléphones portables contribuent à cet essor à travers des déserts auparavant infranchissables. La jeunesse désœuvrée et miséreuse de ces contrées est une proie facile que les émirs autoproclamés, les trafiquants, les mercenaires, les dealers, asservissent à merci. Sans compter ceux qui spéculent sur les contingents d'immigrants. (*La Désirante* 168)

As Westphal notes, narrative and space interact, and with this grafting of the real and fictional, Mokeddem holds a mirror to Europe as judgment for its role in the death of these migrants.

PERSPECTIVES IN FLUX: CIRCULARITY AND PLURALITY

In continuing to examine structural mobility in Mokeddem's nomadic texts, I now turn to fluctuating temporal and spatial mapping in her work. This preoccupation with flux, circularity, and plurality reflects oral storytelling forms, once again echoing Mokeddem's grandmother's tales and the characters who eschew linear storytelling for another form where divergence and ellipsis are critical to the telling. Novels begin *in medias res*; they vacillate between present and past and among many settings; stories are bookended by the *vent de sable*. Vacillation through space and time thus work to unsettle the reader—one is sometimes lost in the wilderness of a tale that may jump from Algeria to Morocco, from the time when a couple was happy to seventeen years later in the miserable aftermath of a break-up, from southern Europe to North Africa, all without markers of time or place. Perspective fluctuates as well, and I concentrate now on how we see this technique in *La Désirante* through the eyes of Shamsa.

She was an orphan in Algeria who left for Europe, and now she is a Europeanized Algerian looking with fresh eyes at her homeland from the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, most definitely a nomadic subject. She sees herself from both a subjective and objective point of view, as an individual yet one reduced to her origin story. Moreover she is marked by her history and appearance but also privileged by movement in her boat, able to sail freely. She reflects on her first time in Lampedusa, the Italian island that has become the symbol of south-north migration in the Mediterranean and a synecdoche for the Mediterranean migrant crisis.

Ce choc que j'avais eu en découvrant ces Nord-Africains errant en groupes dans les rues de l'île ou agglutinés sur ces rochers volcaniques. *Ils* tournaient résolument le dos au vent mauvais du sud. Ces solitudes *juxtaposées* faisaient masse...*J'étais* une basanée, de surcroît cuite et recuite par la mer, comme *ces hommes-là*. *J'avais été balayée plusieurs*

fois, moi aussi, par ce vent de la misère et de l'obscurantisme qui déracine à jamais. Mais à présent, je me trouvais à bord d'un voilier en partance pour ce Sud qu'ils fuyaient. Je m'y rendais en vacances. Eux, ils s'étaient échoués là, pleins de détresse et de lassitude. À mi-chemin d'une survie besogneuse, de fantasmes tant de fois rabâchés qu'ils en avaient perdu les contours. (121, my italics)

This scene is one example of the way Mokeddem uses a nomadic perspective—one which destabilizes the reader's sense of place and time. *Je* and *ils* act as counterpoints to each other, pulling the reader between “me” and “them.” Reading from a first-person perspective puts the reader in Shamsa's shoes, looking with her eyes and understanding of “them,” the *harragas* and refugees. Such a contrapuntal structure highlights the similarities and differences between the two and gives the audience a feeling of empathy and uncertainty. The question, “What if...?” is thus begged. Shamsa furthermore sees herself in these migrants: she sees the similar complexions and history but also recognizes the privilege of having her very own boat.

Therefore, it is unclear to the reader whether Shamsa's identity is at all stable in this passage. We might ask to which group she belongs—the immigrants, the tourists, or both. Readers use their knowledge of the Mediterranean migrant crisis to reflect on the fictional Shamsa's position, wondering whether she will be allowed to be more than the color of her skin or her national origin, just as contemporary migrants struggle to surpass their skin color and political status.

The connections between Shamsa and the fictional migrants (in other words, the juxtapositioning of her past to their present) in this passage demonstrate the plurality of Shamsa's identity and deploy chronological and spatial vacillation in order to destabilize the many meanings of Lampedusa. This passage insists that those “traversant tous les possibles” resituate themselves in Shamsa's position, in the uncertain in-between, the “intermezzo” smooth

space of which Deleuze and Guattari write, where skin color, origin, religion, and socioeconomic status are uncertain (121). Traveling the Mediterranean, for Shamsa and the *harragas*, leads to destabilization, to nomadic identity.

Uncertainty and flux are furthermore seen in the plurality of perspective in Mokeddem's nomadic texts, especially in *N'Zid*. "Elle bascule," begins the novel (11). The as-yet-unnamed protagonist regains consciousness in several middles: in the middle of the sea, between an unknown past and unknowable future. She is "elle" now, not yet "je." In fact, she does not become "je" for thirty-six more pages: "Elle se sent toute chose d'avoir pu dire 'je'" (47).

Throughout the novel, the work of finding her identity is an ongoing process, and there is no neat ending to her story.⁴¹ After Nora finally learns the truth about her identity and how she ended up bruised, alone, and on a boat, she plans to set sail again by the end of the novel. The book ends with Nora once again looking onto the Mediterranean. "De son lit, Nora peut voir la mer" (213). She makes plans to memorialize her lost love Jamil's music album, to sail to her father's home in Galway, and to then return to her mother's home of Algeria, opening the door for the next part of the hypothetical story.

Lastly, we can see vacillation in Mokeddem's book titles. "N'zid" can variously mean "je continue," "je nais," "j'ajoute," "je suis ici," and "je reste ici" (Miller 31). Faiza Baiche points out that the title was originally *Une Guinness à Galway*, but this, Mokeddem's only title in Arabic, is "un écho aux différents moi autobiographiques" (5), highlighting the nomadic self that is in continuous metamorphosis. *La Désirante* is also an example of vacillation, being a title in the present progressive tense, "the desiring woman." This sense of both action and "continuing-ness" reflect the heroine's transformation and search for authenticity. Its chapters are structured

⁴¹ This echoes the nearly two dozen possible endings for Yasmine's story in *Le Siècle des sauterelles*.

to vacillate between Lou/Léo, Shamsa's lost love, and the events of her quest: chapter titles include *la disparition*, *l'enquête*, *point mort*, and *le traquenard*, for example. The reader is thus pulled between the history of Shamsa and Lou, and Shamsa's present journey, a vacillating, fugue movement that reveals the connection between the past and present. As discussed above, we learn of the significance of sailing and the sea to the couple's story, why their boat is named *Vent de sable*, and what role the *vent de sable* played in their pasts. While the reader is moved from past to present, s/he is also taken on a tour of the Mediterranean, from Ajaccio to the Strait of Messina, from southern Europe to North Africa.

CONCLUSION

For Mokeddem, "l'espace traversé est aussi l'espace-écriture" (Frickey in Helm 119). In other words, space that is crossed becomes the space of storytelling, where contestation and displacement *take place* and *make room* for nomadic subjectivity. Refusal finds a propitious smooth space in her work, usually a solitary desert or sea. Moreover, space equals freedom and thus also the possibility of changing one's own story.

Mokeddem's preoccupation with movement is an evident by-product of the many political and artistic upheavals and transitions in her life. As Algerian people and literature have been deterritorialized and subjected to identity crises, so are her characters and the imaginary of her novels. Her texts can thus be considered nomadic in four ways: by their genre, structure, language, and themes. In each of these aspects, movement, the voyage, and the in-between are the defining characteristics of her texts.

Language, textual structures, chronological uncertainty, vacillation of time and space, and themes of the *Unheimlich* all operate together in Mokeddem's nomadic texts. She writes from the in-between, not as a tourist or traveler, not in one single language, without attachment to a

single space. Mokeddem's characters and work represent this Mediterranean and Saharan world of the *mélange*, these two most ancient spaces of traversal and exchange.

The real and fictional are grafted together in the literary map that Mokeddem creates in her nomadic texts. Her hometown of Kénadsa, her street in Montpellier, a harbor, her *ksar*⁴², the sea, France, Canada, the Triangle of Death in Algeria, "her" dune, and her home are all places that influence her writing and that are recreated in her work.

Mokeddem-as-writer was formed by these geographies and in essence traffics the imaginary of these places in her novels. In a reversal of this perspective, on the other hand, we also see that her nomadic texts tell the stories of places, in opposition to places having created stories as is the case with Homer's Mediterranean. "[J]e n'ai plus besoin de fuir. Depuis, c'est l'écriture, le plus grand départ, c'est là que j'essaie d'aller au plus loin. Maintenant je dois interpellier les silences du passé pour mieux habiter le bastion de ma solitude" (*Transe* 26).

In the next chapter, I delve further into her nomadism, exploring the nomadic self created through nomadic movement and nomadic texts. The ideas in Chapters One and Two have laid the groundwork for understanding the construction of the nomadic self, and in the next chapter, the role of the body as a nomadic, subversive entity will be discussed through the lens of biopolitics, and I will examine the various nomadic selves that occur throughout Mokeddem's work.

⁴² "Walled village"

CHAPTER III
THE NOMADIC SELF

for the embattled
there is no place
that cannot be
home
nor is

- Audre Lorde, from "School Note"

INTRODUCTION

Nomadism and nomadic movement appear in every book Malika Mokeddem has written, and this physical movement becomes, in her novels, a spiritual and metaphorical journey, a refusal of constraints and of the past. Bodies on the move resist essentialized identities since they are liberated from an anchoring point, and they subvert imposed hegemonies. This chapter considers the interaction between space, bodies, and narrative in terms of a subjectivity that I call the “nomadic self.” I contend that movement marks nomads and that nomadic bodies evade control and normalization in the quest for authenticity. This refusal and subversion leads to the discovery of the self that is authentic and unconstrained by hegemonic power.

The nomadic self as I define it is refusal, a heterotopic mirror held up to society and actively contesting control. As a heterotopic site and mobile smooth space, the nomadic subject contests and subverts the biopower wielded upon it by striating forces. Characters arrive at the self through movement in Mokeddem’s work, usually in flight from striating forces toward

smooth spaces. Flight, or the “fuite” so central to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s nomadology, creates space for physical movement as well as the possibility for a “leaky” subjectivity—i.e., slipperiness of identity or resistant alterity. I argue that *l’écrivaine nomade* is the nomadic self par excellence since she resists externally imposed control via her discourse and the narratives that give her voice. I examine these ideas in Mokeddem’s work through the theoretical lenses of biopolitics, heterotopias, and nomadic theory, focusing on the author’s use of the nomadic self in *Les Hommes qui marchent* (1990) (*HQM*), *N’Zid* (2001), and *La Transe des insoumis* (2003) (*Transe*).

A key idea in tying together the threads of writing and its relationship to self is the idea that silence is the ultimate striating force. Zohra, Nora, and the narrator of Mokeddem’s memoir insist on telling their stories, and their narratives exist as smooth spaces for alterity—they exist in resistance to dominant, hegemonic narratives. Mokeddem’s deployment of narrative in the quest for nomadic selfhood creates a subversive narrative cartography (Braidotti *Nomadic Theory* 3). That is, these resisting narratives create smooth spaces, spaces of alternative memory, movement, and existence. These narratives shout against colonial forces, religious fundamentalism, patriarchal supremacy, and the resultant silencing of dissent. Instead of a silent, acquiescent self, Mokeddem provides the alternative of the nomadic self not beholden to power systems. Her nomadism provides possibility and positivity via narrative voice.

THEMES

Because I have provided synopses of the aforementioned works in previous chapters, I turn for the moment to thematic elements of nomadic subjectivity in *HQM*, *N’Zid*, and *Transe*. The trope of bodies that contest control are especially central to *HQM* and *N’Zid*, two books which concentrate on em-/immigrants who reject state control. In *HQM*, Zohra’s physical

movement and storytelling resist imposed sedentarization. Nora, in *N'Zid*, finds her identity and spiritual home through travel. *Transe*, on the other hand, begins with a stationary female body but accomplishes movement through imagination and literature. *HQM* recounts the story of the Ajalli family, sedentarized Algerian nomads. Zohra, the raconteur matriarch of the family, is characterized as being in constant movement. Her very existence as well as the stories she keeps alive through their telling provide visible and literary alternative narratives that show a world of refusal (of urban areas, French-controlled territory, and modern technology, for example) and different ways of being (tattooed, uncontrollable). I concentrate on Zohra's resistance through movement and memory as primary modes of nomadic subjectivity.

From a book set primarily in the desert, I move to one set on the Mediterranean. *N'Zid* begins with female movement: "Elle bascule" (11). Mokeddem tells the story of Nora, an amnesiac woman who awakens on a boat in the middle of the Mediterranean with memory loss as the result of violence imposed on her; she finds identity through movement. Eventually she learns that she is of Algerian and Irish ancestry, her name is Nora Carson, and her companion has been kidnapped by fundamentalist Algerian terrorists. I concentrate on Nora's evolving identity which creates lines of flight that allow for nomadic subjectivity.

Finally, after the desert and the sea, I move to a memoir set between France and Algeria. *Transe* contextualizes Mokeddem's work both personally and professionally as it swings back and forth from past to present, between two continents, laying bare the development of a writer whose work and life rail against striating forces. This work begins with a woman *not* in movement, in contrast to the aforementioned novels: "Il est parti ce matin. Je suis seule dans le lit" (15). Like *N'Zid* and *HQM*, *Transe* ends with a woman on the move, making peace with her past and moving along in her own line of flight. I concentrate here on how Mokeddem's own

nomadic subjectivity is accomplished through being *une écrivaine nomade* who travels between these countries and uses writing as a means of freedom.

THE NOMADIC SELF: RESISTANT SUBJECTIVITY

I have examined nomadisms in these three works throughout my project, and this chapter ties them together through the idea of the nomadic self. In her work, Mokeddem has foregrounded moving bodies, those who confront borders and refuse exterior-imposed limits. Besides the physical movement which links characters and author, the practice of being a nomadic writer is of great importance in reading Mokeddem's oeuvre.

In Chapter One, I discussed the physical movement of characters and the ways in which this movement creates smooth space for flight. That movement is reflected in the structure of the nomadic text, studied in Chapter Two. In this chapter, then, I especially attend to *inner* nomadism, that is, the flight and transformation essential in creating nomadic subjectivity. The texts I examine in this chapter are themselves acts of subversion since they give voice to women, especially, who do not "fit." Rosi Braidotti's definition of nomadic subjectivity understands it as a process that

...results in a critique of representational regimes that focus especially on the dominant image of thought as the expression of a white, masculine, adult, heterosexual, urban-dwelling, property-owning subject... For nomadic thought, this replication of sameness is counteracted by creative efforts aimed at activating the positivity of differences as affirmative praxis. Replacing the metaphysics of being with a process ontology bent on becoming, that is to say, subversive moves of detachment from the dominant system of representation (*Nomadic Theory* 6-7).

Mokeddem's narratives, per Braidotti's theory, write back, scream "no," and refuse submissive silence. Her novels and memoirs are transgression in practice, the evidence of nomadic subjectivity of the author and of her characters.

Mokeddem's work presents three major models of the nomadic self: the characters of Zohra and Nora, and *l'écrivaine nomade*. These three women are mobile—some physically, some psychically—but their resistance to hegemonies makes them smooth forces which exist in resistance, as mobile heterotopias. I present Zohra as a model of movement and memory, both through her physical movement and through the storytelling which enables memory that resists sedentarization and thus the disappearance of nomadism. Nora's slippery identity resists certainty and borders—types of sedentarization—as she also moves throughout the Mediterranean. The writing of *N'Zid*, which Mokeddem refers to as "salutaire," serves as an intertext in *Transe*. The writing of that novel coincides with the author's practice as *une écrivaine nomade*, leading her back to her hometown of Kénadsa (*Transe* 232).

As I consider these three examples of nomadic subjectivity, I rely heavily on the multilayered sense of the French word "fuite" that Deleuze and Guattari use in their theory of nomadology. The word means either "flight" or "leak" in English, and it is therefore especially useful in discussing resistant identity. Mokeddem's characters use flight to slip away and evade control, and their selves change or become "slippery" as a result. In addition, I refer to aspects of Braidotti's nomadic theory and the ways of becoming-nomadic that she outlines. Zohra, Nora, and *l'écrivaine nomade* are what Braidotti calls "*conceptual personae* or figurations. These are ways of situating and framing the subject position, and its political and epistemological practices, so as to produce an array of creative counterimages of the subject" (216 original italics). They are active, transgressive, and expansive subjects: their self-affirming movement is resistant and

transgressive; their very existence calls hegemonic discourses of nationalism and religious fundamentalism into question.

ZOHRA: RESISTANCE THROUGH MOVEMENT AND MEMORY

In understanding Zohra, the grandmother from *HQM*, through the lens of nomadic selfhood, it is her movement and memory that make her a force of resistance and *fuite*. Her movement is physical and chronological, literal and literary, and she is the personification of the desert, a landscape in constant flux. Moreover, she is a subversive body that also, by her very existence, resists, and we thus see how she flees any kind of unwanted control.

Zohra's Movement

Zohra is a body in movement, and Mokeddem uses the words *démarche*, *animée*, *ballants*, *dansant*, *pas*, *foulées*, and *baromètre* in the description of the woman, all words connoting dynamism, agitation, and mobility (9). The novel begins with her in movement, “bras ballants, magroune dansant, un pas, deux pas, foulées tissant le fil aveuglant des heures. Pendant des journées” (9). Her headscarf is also in constant motion and reflects her moods. She exists outside linear time and the Gregorian calendar: “‘Je suis née l’année de la très grande sécheresse.’ Y en avait-il une dans le désert qui ne le soit pas? ... Elle eut soixante-quinze ans pendant des années” (10-11). Her determination not to be pinned down with such details mirrors her resistance to any form of pinning down or sedentarization:

Prise par l’urgence de dire ce monde en voie de disparition, Zohra redonnait aux bédouins des départs et des haltes. Avec les tambours des ergs et leurs orgies de sable. Avec le silence scellé sur les regs. Zohra était le désert . . . Ce qui lui importait, c’était sa vie nomade. Ce qui la chagrinait, c’était qu’elle y avait été arrachée. “L’immobilité du sédentaire, [dit Zohra] c’est la mort qui m’a saisie par les pieds. Elle m’a dépossédée de

ma quête. Maintenant, il ne me reste plus que *le nomadisme des mots*. Comme tout exilé.” (11 my italics)

This *fuite* is in the sense of “flight”: she is only barely sedentarized, her body in constant motion and her stories reminders of bodily and spiritual freedom. Her tattoos and dress set her apart and abolish time that could possibly situate her. She directly links immobility to death, then deftly seizes upon the power of storytelling as a metaphorical means of nomadism.

Moreover, Zohra persists in her subversion of norms. When forced to settle permanently, she still resists with “un pas, deux pas” (71), escaping the modern urban space of the new *ksar*⁴³ for the old one. “Zohra détestait ce lieu [le nouveau *ksar*]. Aussi, chaque matin, fuyait-elle vers le vieux *ksar* pour respirer un peu d’humanité... Zohra marchait en rêvant.” The old *ksar* and Zohra’s psyche are connected, which is why she feels homed there. The labyrinthine, colorful space full of the scent of spices, the cries of children, and the call to prayer reflect Zohra’s mental and spiritual geography—her emotional geography, that is. She can be her true, nomadic self when placed in this site of sensuality.

Braidotti writes of nomadic thought as “tracing lines of flight and zigzagging patterns that undo dominant representations” (*Nomadic Theory* 2), and Zohra’s transgressive movement through the twists and turns of the old *ksar*, with her back turned metaphorically on “*tomobiles*” and *roumis*,⁴⁴ is a joyful movement against colonial France and creeping neoliberal modernization, toward her ancestral and spiritual roots and self. “The central tenet of nomadic thought is to reassert the dynamic nature of thinking and the need to reinstate movement at the heart of thought by actualizing a nonunitary vision of the thinking subject,” Braidotti states (7).

⁴³ Village

⁴⁴ Foreigner, non-Muslim

Zohra's refusal of the modern and colonial is a refusal, too, of the "straightjacketing" of her mind and soul. As French policy towards nomads in this region had, for decades, focused on modernization and control of tribes, Zohra practices nomadic flight (in Braidotti's and Deleuze and Guattari's sense of the phrase). Her movement acknowledges and reflects the complex history of the desert tribes and their rhizomatic movement, whereas striating colonial forces do the opposite.

Zohra's Memory

Mokeddem states that her own grandmother served as the inspiration for the character of Zohra in *HQM*, the character "un petit bout de femme à la peau brune et tatouée... Sèche, Zohra avait la démarche alerte, toute de grâce animée" (9).⁴⁵ The author found refuge in her grandmother's stories, and her affection for this woman is demonstrated by her often romantic portrayals of Saharan Bedouins and *les hommes bleus*, who appear throughout her novels.

[Ils] ne se posaient pas de questions inutiles. Ils marchaient du lever du jour à la tombée de la nuit, enroulés de silence et drapés de lumière. Quand ils étaient fatigués, ils dressaient un camp. Se nourrissaient de peu. S'accroupissaient et regardaient l'horizon ou le ciel . . . Leur marche perpétue le désert. (15)

Zohra's behavior, indeed her very being, "est déviant par rapport à la moyenne ou à la norme exigée" since she is unplaced, prefers feet and camels to "tomobiles" for mobility, rejects Western notions of time (i.e., years and birthdays), and is privileged to be set apart from the world of *roumis* and a world war: "Jusque-là, je n'avais jamais vu ni un roumi ni une 'tomobile.' C'était un des derniers privilèges de notre vie nomade. Un siècle après leur arrivée dans le pays, nous leur échappions encore" (29). She had heard of horrors, riots, and massacres in Algerian

⁴⁵ See Mokeddem, Malika. "Geography of an Exile." Trans. Alison Rice. *Religion and Literature*: 173-179; and Chalet-Achour, Christiane. *Noun: Algeriennes dans l'écriture*. Biarritz: Atlantica, 1998.

cities, but she prayed to God “de nous garder le plus longtemps possible à distance de ces drames.” She desires a life on her own terms, not a foreign life upended and crafted by striating forces.

While existing alongside these “foreign” events and in a country invaded by *roumis* and “*tomobiles*,” Zohra is an “incompatible site,” as Foucault says, since she, up to this point, has seen neither a foreigner nor a car (Foucault 6). “C’était un des derniers privilèges de notre vie nomade” (29). The timeless desert nomad un beholden to the modern world is what Foucault would term a “heterotopia of deviation.”

By resisting emplacement in time, place, and behavior throughout *HQM*, Zohra provides *fuite* in the sense of “lines of flight” through her narratives that defy sedentarization as the only option. She deviates from the sociohistorical narrative that connects her to colonizing forces and a world war, creating alternative memory that rejects the prioritization of these narratives. “Nous, nous vivions hors du temps. Nous n’avions de nouvelles que de loin en loin, par les caravanes arrivant du Tell... Par exemple, nous n’avons appris les événements de Sétif que plusieurs mois après leur déroulement” (31).⁴⁶ Her stories of trader caravans, Tuareg men in blue who arrive in the village periodically, are reminders of a pre-colonial, non-sedentarized culture. Leïla, her granddaughter, is a receptive audience for the stories since Zohra is representative of the freedom she desires to act out but which lives silently inside her for the moment. Braidotti calls this “remembering nomadically.” This memory is “a creative force that gives ‘the wretched of the earth,’ as Fanon put it, a head start toward the world-historical tasks of envisaging alternative

⁴⁶ When Nazi forces surrendered on May 8, 1945, celebrations took place across the globe. In the Algerian town of Sétif, people also used this opportunity to make demands for independence. Anti-colonial forces, French police, and vigilantes on both sides clashed, sparking five days of bloodshed in that town and Guelma, accompanied by disproportionate reprisals by French forces. Over 100 Europeans were killed, and between 1,000-6,000 Muslims were killed. Many consider this the first spark that eventually led to the war for Algerian independence.

world orders and more humane and sustainable social systems. It comes down to a double consciousness of both the multiple axes of oppression...as well as the creative force they can generate” (32). Zohra’s existence and especially her memory of nomadic life stand as alternatives to *roumis* and “*tomobiles*.” In other words, these objects which represent the colonizer, the West, and striating forces—so powerful in the dominant sociohistorical narrative—are rendered weak and powerless, their hegemonic narrative force weakened by the voicing of a different life. Zohra presents the reader and Leïla with camel caravans, stories of Bouhaloufa and Saâdia, and the Sahara, a world without these signifiers of colonial oppression.

One example of such narrative and ideological subversion of dominant colonial narratives is the following passage:

C’étaient des hommes bleus. Ils avaient appris l’existence de ce puits à une distance respectable du village. Évitant les cités de Béchar et de Bidon-Deux, ils venaient y faire eau et vivres, au grand bonheur de Zohra. À les observer ainsi harnachés et le pas lourd, ils donnaient à Leïla l’impression de pachydermes surgis du passé de Zohra, afin de soulager sa tristesse. Et c’est avec étonnement qu’elle assistait à la métamorphose de sa grand-mère. N’étaient ses habits de bédouine des hauts plateaux, on l’aurait vraiment crue membre de cette tribu berbère... Zohra prenait des nouvelles des pistes, des points d’eau, s’informait de certaines tribus... Leïla l’admirait dans ses gestes d’autrefois. (112-113)

In terms of memory and the production of subversive narratives, we can see via the representation of Tuareg caravans in this passage the real (i.e., Zohra, the caravan, and the village) and the imaginary (i.e., pachyderms, ideations of nomads, the fantasized past) emerge from the confusion of desert space (as the caravan materializes from the sandstorm) to meet

under her granddaughter Leïla's eyes. Zohra's memories have come to life in this scene. Her memories have become flesh.

Mokeddem's descriptions of *les hommes bleus* produce a space that is ruptured: the space is shot through with rhizomatic points of time, giant mammals, urban and desert space, and multiple characters, upending the idea of a singular reality imposed by sedentarization: that of the urban, the colonial, and the rational. The physical existence of difference inspires the nomadic self that is dormant in Leïla. The scene is situated at the meeting of the Sahara and the village of Kénadsa and, moreover, sits on a fault line of the imaginary. The fateful meeting of Leïla and the caravan, which will change Leïla's perspective and lead to her own nomadic pilgrimage out of the Sahara and across the Mediterranean, creates an imaginary out of a landscape in order to "make" sense of this convergence of the emotional, the imaginary, and the real. Therefore, despite sedentarization, Zohra-as-subversive-body is a heterotopic site because she makes suspect, neutralizes, and inverts relations of nomadic and Western space and time. She exists as the very antithesis to *les roumis*, urban spaces of misery, and forced emplacement. She is a nomadic figuration that resists hegemony. Her physical refusal is furthermore complemented by her memory-refusal, thus her storytelling creates narrative/imaginative space which she also reclaims via her physical presence. Resistance to hegemony via movement and memory provide *fuite* in both senses: flight toward smooth space and "leaky," subversive nomadic subjectivity.

NORA: RESISTANCE THROUGH IDENTITY

Nora, in *N'Zid*, resists hegemonic narratives in similar ways. She is hypermobile on the sea, circulating throughout the Mediterranean, without a destination, without state sanction, challenging ideas of state power and belonging through her multiple identities. She accomplishes

fuite in both senses of the word, that is, through hypermobility (flight) and through “leaky” subjectivity that changes constantly. Her identity development is akin to Braidotti’s idea of figurations, especially in that the multiple identities “produce an array of creative counterimages of the subject... [It is] a dramatization of the processes of becoming” (*Nomadic Theory* 216-217). Similar to Zohra, Nora is a moving body of uncertain belonging or identity whose only emplacement is on a boat on the undulating sea. Therefore, before moving on to identity, it is important to look more closely at Nora’s boat in order to understand how it aids in movement and thus is key to her nomadic subjectivity.

Boats

Besides jellyfish, two objects float in *N’Zid*: Nora and her boat. The boat and body-boat thus deserve closer scrutiny. Nora’s boat, *Tramontane/L’Aimée*, is the primary vehicle for her movement throughout the Mediterranean, and that boat becomes a sort of secondary character in the book, one which I address later in this section. Her floating body is also a key image in the novel and, like Zohra, this body embodies resistance.

One such example is Nora swimming while her boat is anchored: “Au contact de l’eau, elle réincorpore ses muscles, ses membres, éprouve ses articulations et souffle” (72). Her body, which embodies memories and identity yet to be unlocked, floats as a boat does. She accomplishes a *fuite* in the sense of flight, being hypermobile on the sea and able to circulate freely. “L’aspiration profonde que manifeste le comportement de Nora est le désir de se situer dans un non-lieu, qui se trouve être à la fois le non-lieu flottant du bateau, toujours en train de se déplacer, et le non-lieu de la mer, elle aussi toujours en mouvement” (Brahimi “*N’Zid* de Malika

Mokeddem” 136). She floats both on the boat and in the water, thus transforming her body into a boat, a migrant body par excellence.⁴⁷

Boats are also important in understanding how movement and the overcoming of hegemony operate. Foucault claims, “Le navire, c’est l’hétérotopie par excellence” (9). Likewise, *la barque ouverte* is also a key image in Édouard Glissant’s poetics of relation. He writes, “Cette barque est une matrice, le gouffre-matrice. Génératrice de ta clameur. Productrice aussi de toute unanimité à venir... Cette barque est ta matrice, un moule, qui t’expulse pourtant...” (18). This idea of relationality as a key part of identity-making is similar to Braidotti’s emphasis on transversality in nomadic subjectivity. “[S]ubjectivity is a socially mediated process of relations and negotiations with multiple others and with multilayered social structures” (*Nomadic Theory* 4). Like Zohra, Nora exists relationally—one could also say transversally and rhizomatically. They are both displaced, unacceptable bodies feinting from omnipresent striating forces.

We see Nora’s crisis further reflected in the boat trope, via its change of name and its motion upon the sea: it exists in an unstable space and evades control. The boat’s log also demonstrates this *perpetuum mobile*. When Nora first regains consciousness, she checks the log and finds that the boat left Port-Camargue and has made stops throughout the eastern Mediterranean, in Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt (19). “Elle pense à l’ambiguïté avec laquelle se débrouillent tous ceux qui portent en eux plusieurs terres écartelées. Tous ceux qui vivent entre revendications et ruptures... Des *trous* à la place de l’intime” (22, my italics). She and the boat have been “sited” at these ports, yet she still lacks a home other than the ever-undulating sea, the felicitous space that connects these disparate sites. These *trous* enable a *fuite*;

⁴⁷ This image is also an intertext to the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus washes up on the shores of islands, first after encountering Scylla and Charybdis and then after seven years with Calypso, when he washed up on the Phaiacians’ island. Such imagery further strengthens intertextual links with Homer’s epic.

they allow her subjectivity to “leak” through the striations and membranes that would contain it. They thus make her an outlier without any anchors of name, nationality, or past. She is an embodied *tabula rasa* who has none of the usual striating forces to guide her in her quest. The boat is a space that floats throughout the Mediterranean, as Nora does, and it takes on different identities, as she does.

Boats and identity furthermore entangle in *N'Zid* when Nora changes the name of her boat from *La Tramontane* to *L'Aimée*. A fellow sailor notices and questions her, pointing out the palimpsest left by the change: “Ils s'effaceront [les traces des lettres originales] dans quelques jours. Le sel de la mer et le soleil vont s'en charger. Sur les côtés, le nouveau nom couvre complètement l'autre” (75). She stumbles over her explanation for the renaming, stuttering “je...” several times and trying to dismiss the interrogation. “L'homme ne semble pas avoir perçu son ton cassant malgré les suspensions du ‘je’... ‘Je n'ai pas changé le nom, juste les lettres,’” she claims (74). This renamed boat is a metaphor for her own “suspensions du je,” where multiple identities throughout the novel reflect this palimpsestic identity.

Nora's own identity will also be changed by the salt, sea, and sun. Although the Mediterranean is a site of violence against Nora, its signification eventually becomes that of a felicitous space: “*La mer est douce pour les épaves*” (22, original italics). This site of the modern cast-off is reclaimed by the nomads who traverse it as migrants, viewing it not as an obstacle but an opportunity. “[Nora] se revendique de la communauté des épaves, jetées à l'eau par les confluent de l'absence et du désarroi... Plus de passe. Plus de terre. Même plus leur nostalgie. Os ou bois flottés, délavés. Comme une indéfinissable dérive de la détresse à l'abandon. Avant le plein flot de l'oubli” (22). As she travels, her body takes on significations of

refugee, asylum-seeker, economic migrant, and detainee, just as the nomadic body does the more it travels.

For Nora, “la mer la remplit, navigue en elle” (29), functioning spiritually and physically to re-home her. Castaways like Nora and the undocumented immigrants she encounters on her odyssey are “jetés à l’eau par les confluent de l’absence et du désarroi” (*N’Zid* 22). They resist biopower by physically moving outside its control. The boat is thus one means that makes flight possible and also acts as a stage for the production of “leaky” identity.

Pronouns

Nora’s “leaky” subjectivity is seen not only through action involving the boat but also through references to this character, the boat. Uncertainty of identity is time and again reflected in the pronouns used in relation to Nora in the novel. She is first referred to as “elle,” a pronoun situating her as an object around whom the narrative revolves. The novel’s opening sentence is, after all, “Elle bascule” (11). She is on a boat, a floating body on a sea, with no anchors of selfhood, nationality, or memory. She is “elle,” an imprecise pronoun which is perhaps an object and perhaps a person in French; not yet a “je” or even a “tu.” When she decides to sail to Cadaqués, Spain—“Elle a maintenant un but” (23)—she finally has a goal and a direction in which to move; she starts her identity quest in earnest.

Nora eventually becomes “tu,” making her a person again, but in relation to another person. When she later becomes “ana,” the long form of the “n” in “n’zid,” this Arabic pronoun finally gives her an “I,” although not in her native language. This pronoun first occurs as a mysterious voice from the sea: “Soudain une voix d’homme, une voix rauque, étouffée par la rumeur de la mer, demande: ‘N’zid?’” (30). After this call to the Arabic “I,” she makes her first jellyfish drawing and then a therapeutic, detailed sketch of the sea and marine life. “Elle creuse

son oubli profond où même le ciel se noie... La chair de poule électrise sa peau jusque sous les cheveux. Des larmes de joie remplissent ses yeux. Elle sait qu'elle vient de retrouver là le meilleur d'elle-même... Elle n'a plus peur maintenant" (32). The first call to "ana" coincides with her first redemptive, comforting experience after regaining consciousness, that of drawing. Then when she finally refers to herself as "je," she is well on her way to a better, more accurate picture of her true identity.

These "suspensions du 'je'" (74) and "jeux du 'je'" (57) are teased out gradually in the novel through Nora's multiple identities, which I discuss later: Myriam Dors, Ghoula, Eva Poulos, and Nora Carson. Nora is not simply a singular essentialized "je"; she is Mediterranean, European, African, Gorgon, metamorphosis, and what Mokeddem calls a *corps-texte*. Her true nomadic self comprises all of these aspects.

Furthermore, this slipperiness of identity can be read as a rejection of hegemonic discourse. Jean Rolland, the former friend of Nora and Jamil and the terrorist responsible for the violence and kidnapping in the novel, "prétendait que [l'Islam] était la seule façon pour que le pays retrouve sa véritable identité. Il disait que le mouvement islamiste était salutaire à son avenir" (168). The Algerian terrorists who reject alterity and are attempting to impose a hegemonic identity on that country have ironically created subversive alterity in Nora. However, she affirms her freedom through movement and through these changes of identity, or figurations.

Monstrosity

Nora's next identity is Ghoula, or "ogress" (49). While introducing herself to Loïc, another sailor whom she befriends, she extemporaneously invents an autobiography, telling him that her name is "Ghoula," a childhood nickname: "'Je...je...suis peintre.' Elle se sent toute chose d'avoir pu dire 'je' et fond sous son regard... D'où a-t-elle sorti ce 'je' et tout ce qu'elle

vient de débiter avec assurance et spontanéité? Elle a même pris un accent libanais et roulé les r” (47, 49). She spins a tale (a narrative weaving again) about life in war-time Beirut, describing herself as a nomadic artist (Mokeddem once again prioritizing nomadism in a character’s past): “Une vie de nomade avec mon attirail contre le corps, comme excroissance protectrice, à dessiner du rococo à la lueur d’une bougie, au milieu des ruines et du bruit des bombes’... D’où a-t-elle sorti ce ‘je’?” (48).

Nora’s monstrous identity here is a nod to a mythical intertext, the *Odyssey*, and Mokeddem once again pulls the reader across time into ancient myths and epics. Besides the connection to Greek mythology, the ogress is also an important myth in North Africa. She is, like Nora and Zohra, a terrifying female because she does not fit the hegemonic cultural narrative for her environment. Her existence outside these norms defies her civilization.

[L]a ghoulia pourrait avoir une ascendance des plus maléfiques: qu’elle soit issue de la légendaire Lillith, la première femme sur la terre à l’image d’Adam, mais faite de souillure et de sédiments parasitaires au lieu d’argile, partant des différences génésiaques qui voulurent que l’Ange fût de lumière, Satan de feu, Adam d’argile et le ghoul de souillure. (Najima Thay Thay Rozaly cited in Mihalovici 289)

Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, in *Contes de femmes et d’ogresses en Kabylie*, cites the example of Teryel, an ogress who “demeurée hors civilisation, est solitaire; cependant, elle peut exceptionnellement avoir un unique enfant,... n’ayant jamais mangé de chair humaine” (cited in Mihalovici 290). Mokeddem thus links Nora to the primordial female figure, one born out of difference and existing outside civilization due to her recalcitrance.

The appearances of the monsters Medusa, Scylla, and Charybdis as well as the Fata Morgana mirage of a headless Nora in the Strait of Messina are the next allusions to monstrosity.

These instances not only provide clear intertextual links to Homer's *Odyssey*, they also push the trope of the monster as it relates to identity. When Nora enters the Strait of Messina she spots a sail on the horizon.

Une curieuse impression s'empare d'elle: c'est elle-même qui pointe là-bas de la ligne où le ciel tombe dans la mer et menace de se rattraper... Elle voit une femme sans tête dans le cockpit de ce voilier surgi du néant des eaux. Elle voit un corps sain, attentif à la tension du safran, aux ruades des vagues. Elle voit le cou tranché net, un moignon lisse de toute cicatrice. (35)

The Strait of Messina's geography and temperature actually do cause a type of mirage called a Fata Morgana. Thermal inversions caused by warmer air atop cooler air refract the light, raising an image on the horizon so that it appears to be floating. In ancient Mediterranean tales told to both warn sailors of these dangerous places and to try to explain these phenomena, these illusions were called fairy castles and were believed to be caused by demons trying to lure sailors to their deaths.

Nora is a monster in this scene, and her very existence is a deviation against Nature. Although her displacement is an illusion, this illusion reflects her psychic reality: she does not yet know who she is. She is unplaced, outside time due to her amnesia. Nora furthermore sees as if through a hallucinatory mirror, her own headless body sailing on the horizon, perhaps as the terrorists see her and want to make her headless.

Nora-as-monster also suggests her existence as a heterotopia since real and fictional spaces commingle in positioning her in a myth-saturated space and as a mythical creature. The demons Scylla and Charybdis live here, according to Homer's work, and are ready to devour sailors or smash their boats in a whirlpool or upon the rocks. The monstrous site sweeps away

heterochronic time, as Zohra's Tuareg caravans do, and serves as a space for deviation. The violence embedded in the idea of these monsters and in the image of a beheaded Nora also reminds us of the violence that accompanies transgression and transformation, as we saw in Saâdia's, Djelloul's, and Yasmine's stories. Again, this figuration "can be taken as a dramatization of the processes of becoming" (Braidotti *Nomadic Theory* 217). Thus we see how the self, regarded through the mirror of illusion and mirage, takes on alternate significations. In essence, heterotopic monsters create smooth space for Nora to continue her quest and understand her nomadic self.

The Medusa is another monstrosity in *N'Zid*. Like the term "fuite," "méduse" is another double entendre operating throughout Mokeddem's novel. Until she regains her memory, Nora is very much like a jellyfish—she is quite transparent, without any history or sense of self to color her or fill in the void. The *méduse* furthermore appears as a jellyfish floating in the Mediterranean; in Nora's sketches; in the verb "méduser," "to be stupefied or aghast"; and in Mokeddem's phrase "jouer à la méduse nomade" (67). Nora perceives the jellyfish to be akin to her real self: "Je suis trop transparente!" (34) She says she draws jellyfish rather than squid on her drawing pad: "Oui, méduse. J'en dessine beaucoup...Je n'aime pas l'opacité et le côté 'regardez-moi, regardez toute la noirceur derrière laquelle je me cache' de votre seiche" (78). She floats and "fait corps" with the water, letting the Mediterranean lead the way and provide clues to her identity, just as a jellyfish is at one with the sea and works with (not against) water in order to move.

Only later in the novel does Mokeddem link the *méduse* to *la Méduse* from Greek mythology.⁴⁸ They were usually thought of as sea demons and associated with terrible storms that sank boats and drowned sailors in the Mediterranean.

Dans la mythologie, Méduse et ses deux sœurs, Euryalé et Sthéno représentent justement *les déformations monstrueuses de la psyché*. Et tiens-toi bien, Méduse, elle, elle est *le reflet d'une culpabilité, d'une faute*, transformées en exaltation vaniteuse et narcissique.

En fait, une exagération, une succession d'images falsifiées de soi qui empêchent l'objectivité, la réparation, donc la guérison. (115 my italics)

Like the terrorists' idea of Nora as someone who is a deformation to a hegemonic Arab and Muslim Algerian identity, Nora is the proof of a societal error that must be "rectified." Her mixed heritage, relationship with a European, and contestatory thinking make her "une faute" who is literally put out to sea and physically assaulted.

Proper Names

In moving on to another type of identity and figuration within Nora's quest, I now turn to the proper names she explores. Names are very significant in Mokeddem's work, and she frequently names characters to demonstrate irony (e.g., "Saâdia" means "lucky" in Arabic yet this character is raped and confined to a brothel for years), to make historical or literary links ("Mahmoud" is both a Mokeddem character and the male name Isabelle Eberhardt took), or to give clues about a character, as seen here with Nora's various proper names.

The first clue to Nora's identity is a passport and identity card found on *L'Aimée*. The documents belong to "Myriam Dors, née en 54 à Colombes, domiciliée rue Mouffetard à Paris" (15). The name Myriam is from the Latin for "Mary." Other origins include "Stella Maris," or

⁴⁸ Medusa and her sisters, Euryale and Sthenno, were Gorgons, or Terrible Ones, in Greek mythology.

“star of the sea,” and “Stilla Maris,” or “drop of the sea,” both of which are a foreshadowing of Nora’s identification with the sea.

Her last name is a conjugation of the French verb “dormir,” therefore making her a “sleeping je.” This is her first identity in the novel, one discovered just after coming to consciousness on the heterotopic site of the boat. “Elle, elle a été effacée. Elle est comme un fantôme qui aurait oublié de déterrer son histoire” (17). This *déterrement* also occurs when she scrapes away paint to reveal *L’Aimée*’s true name: *Tramontane*. The sleeping *je* of Myriam has been awakened on the *Tramontane*, this “wind across the mountain.” Furthermore, “perdre la tramontane,” or “losing the North Star,” has happened to her via her amnesia and highlights her disorientation. In addition, as explained at length in Chapter One, this is another instance of wind that pushes the nomad on an identity quest.

Next, after a conversation with Loïc, Myriam Dors goes to an Italian doctor, claiming to be a Greek woman who has fallen down stairs. She tells the doctor, ““Je n’ai pas l’accent grec. Je le sais”” (57). This woman, Eva Poulos, complains of memory problems. The doctor tells her, “Vous avez conservé les repères de l’espace et du temps...[V]ous n’avez que des troubles mnésiques, pas une amnésie” (58-59). In other words, she may regain her childhood memories but may not remember what caused her amnesia. Eva Poulos, is another Mediterranean identity, her first name Latin for “life” or “living one.”⁴⁹

Her last name, “Poulos,” is a common suffix for Greek family names. Used without the family name, as it is here, it means “nestling” or “chick.” Like a baby chick, Eva is growing and has, in a sense, hatched into a being with a proper name. She has transformed from a sleeping or

⁴⁹ Much like the novel’s title, this identity is in the present progressive tense, highlighting the unfinished aspect of her identity quest.

gestating self (i.e., Miriam Dors), to a foreign self (i.e., ‘Ana), to a monstrous or half-human self (Ghoula and headless Nora), and finally to a living self that has a possibly recoverable identity, moving her steadily toward subjectivity.

Mokeddem furthermore most explicitly connects identity and narrative through Eva Poulos: “*Je suis Eva... Eva Poulos. Eva Poulos! Mes parents étaient grecs... Étaient? Père copte, mère juive. Je suis née à Paris. Une Franco-gréco-judéo-chrétiens-arabo-athée pur jus. Eva Poulos*” (64, original italics). The reader can only guess how Nora invented this identity along with a genealogy, yet the name does underscore the thematic links throughout the Mediterranean that Mokeddem highlights throughout the novel. Braidotti’s idea of ethical freedom is especially suitable for this passage. “Eva Poulos” affirms her freedom not only by the genealogy narrative but also through her resistance via narrative. She is a figuration Nora creates for herself, propitious to that time and situation. That figuration and the narrative created to support it contest the government surveillance that is trying to track Nora as well as the fundamentalist forces trying to kill her. It is “a micropolitics of resistance” (Braidotti *Nomadic Theory* 324).

In the meantime, after following leads and listening to news of a missing-person search on the radio, Loïc, her sailor friend, finally exclaims, “*Moi, je sais qui tu es... Je sais depuis hier que tu t’appelles Nora Carson*” (108). The name “Nora” means “light,” and in *N’Zid*, the sun is an integral part of most of Nora’s sketches, and the trope of sunlight in the desert and on the sea appears in all of Mokeddem’s books. Moreover, names meaning “light” in Arabic are found across Mokeddem’s oeuvre. The main character in *La Nuit de la lézarde* is Nour, meaning “light”; Shamsa, meaning “*la soleil*” [sic] is the name of the main character in *La Désirante*. The family name Carson means “son who lives in the swamp” or “coastal rocks.” This self connotes

life-giving light and a beacon for travelers, and it is with this identity that Nora finally regains a past.

Loïc has found out that Nora lives at 21, rue des Saints-Pères in Paris and is a comic book author. Her father's name was Samuel.⁵⁰ Nora's father built a boat called the *Galway*, a tribute to his hometown, but died in a car accident a week after he finished it. His wife, Aïcha, whose ironic name means "living one," witnessed much death and destruction during the war for Algerian independence as well as the Algerian independence movement in France, where she witnessed the October 17, 1961 massacre and mass round-up of Maghrebi protestors in Paris.

Nora embodies contradictory identity. This can also be read as contestatory subjectivity, especially in the face of a terrorism which recognizes only hegemonic identity. She is similar to Eva in her "salad bowl" mixture of identities: Irish, Algerian, and French. She is "un être de frontière (161), "nomade sans tribu" (176, 184), a nomadic figuration and thus must make her own lines of flight to find smooth spaces felicitous to her contestatory nomadic subjectivity.

L'ÉCRIVAINNE NOMADE: RESISTANCE THROUGH NARRATIVE

Braidotti states, "Writing is an intransitive activity, a variation on breathing, an end in itself; it is an affective and geometrically rigorous mode of inscription into life... [T]he writer's task is to resist the gravitational pull of the master signifier and oppose it" ("Writing..." 163, 165). Mokeddem's writing-into-existence of Zohra and Nora force the creation of a narrative space that serves as a line of flight for both author and reader where silence is categorically rejected. In a newspaper editorial, Mokeddem explains this relationship between the written word and coming to oneself: "Et parfois il y a un craquement qui se fait et ce sont, en fin de

⁵⁰ "Samuel" means "name of God" or "God has heard," and the priest Samuel, of Biblical renown, anointed Kings Saul and David of Israel.

compte, nos mots qui sortent. Ce sont tous ces textes qui nous permettent de dire, un jour, ‘Je’” (“L’État algérien m’a censurée”). She has written extensively of her own subversion, how books “satisfied the questionings that my coming to consciousness raised” (“Geography of an Exile” 176).

Braidotti writes extensively of nomadic memory, the kind that enables Mokeddem to transform her personal, family, and national history into fiction and memoir. This memory is an aspect of nomadic subjectivity and actively decolonizes and destabilizes, it works against striating forces. “[N]omadic memories are affirmative, destabilizing forces that propel subjects actively toward change. They are the kind of memories that are linked to ethical and political consciousness and concern events one simply forgot to forget... What matters ultimately about the job of remembering is the capacity to engender the kind of conditions and relations that can empower creative alternatives... [Nomadic memory] is whatever works to create sustainable lines and productive planes of transversal interconnection among entities and subjects that are related by empathy and affective affinity, not by some generic moral model or idealized paradigm” (*Nomadic Theory* 32-33). It is “differing as much as possible from all you had been before.” Remembering nomadically transgresses against accepted histories and dogmas. Most importantly, memory creates since it refuses the silencing of lives and experiences. Mokeddem’s insistence on remembering through narrative is key to nomadic subjectivity. “Becoming nomadic means that one learns to reinvent oneself, and one desires the self as a process of transformation” (41).

Mokeddem’s interior subversion first manifested itself in a distancing from her family. “Solitude was one of my first conquests. Forged by a continuous battle for existence, for the right to no longer be considered as a subaltern member of a family because I was of the feminine sex.

TO BE separately, entirely” (177, original emphasis). Her solitude was transgression and conquest, a whittling out of her own space within the family, the exile of knowledge.

This palpable need to venture outside of familiar moral and emotional geographies, to thus create a space of one’s own and a narrative of one’s own makes what I call *l’écrivaine nomade*. “Flight” from Kénadsa to Oran, almost to Canada, then finally to France provided the physical space that nurtured the mental space necessary for Mokeddem the person and Mokeddem the author to write. Conversely, narrative space that creates nomadic subjects such as Zohra, Nora, Djelloul, Selma, and Sultana, to name only a few, also creates within the writer the spiritual and psychic space necessary for resistant authenticity, a smooth space acting as a critical heterotopia that subverts all striating control—i.e., of nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and patriarchy. Braidotti explains, “Creativity is...active displacement of dominant formations of identity, memory, and identification so as to open them up to that roar that lies on the other side of silence” (“Writing...” 170). In other words, *l’écrivaine nomade* thus employs space in order to deploy narrative and therefore to achieve authenticity. She who controls the narrative controls the terms of freedom. Writing is, then, “a micropolitics of resistance” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 324).

Transe is the work which, I argue, best illustrates what the *écrivaine nomade* is and shows the trajectory of the author’s coming-to-self. The memoir was published a mere two years after *N’Zid*, giving readers a meta-picture of the writing, publication, and reception process of that novel in the memoir. “C’est après l’écriture de *N’zid* [sic], un roman sur l’amnésie, que cette envie du retour chez mes parents s’est imposée... L’écriture de *N’zid* m’a été salutaire. Elle m’a effacée de la terre, de toute terre, de tout désamour, blessure, pour me livrer aux seules pulsations

de la mer, de ma Méditerranée” (232-233). Stated otherwise, the process of creating this book was a form of *déterrement* which preceded nomadic subjectivity.

As we journey to Kénadsa with the narrator in *Transe*, we see how certain striating forces fall away simultaneously with physical and geographical movement. The narrator recounts that after the publication of *N’Zid*, Algerian booksellers in Paris tell her, “Il faut venir en Algérie. Vous y avez beaucoup de lecteurs. Nous avons besoin de nos écrivains...” (233). Nomadic texts thus have spurred her physical movement. Upon arrival “à l’autre rive,” she can physically look out across the Mediterranean from her Algiers hotel room toward France. “Maintenant, de quelque côté que je sois, je nomme immédiatement l’autre. Maintenant j’ai deux bords... Je suis entière par ce duo en moi” (229). It took a departure provoked by the winds of misery and dissatisfaction for her to come to terms with having “deux bords.” The narrator’s voice as a writer is geographically expanded by this trip, as she publicizes her work and increases readership and thus the possibility of more nomadic becomings on that side of the Mediterranean. She creates networks of hopeful, subversive readers and booksellers who contest the terrorists threatening her life because of those same books.⁵¹

The narrator travels further inland, toward her past. At the Béchar airport, the closest city to Kénadsa, “[j]e suis dans une compression du temps entre passé et présent. Je me cogne à ses concrétions. Elles m’étourdissent” (238). She is in a space that is in-between, not in Montpellier, not in Kénadsa; she has yet to see her family and so “belongs” nowhere and to no one yet. Time, to her, seems compressed as she is in-between two hugely important chronological markers, of departure and return, not having visited her family in twenty-four years; having left as a student

⁵¹ It is important to note that Mokeddem’s work, up to this point, had been published during Algeria’s *décennie noire* during the 1990s, when scores of Algerian intellectuals and journalists were assassinated both there and abroad specifically because of their written output that contested fundamentalist Islamic and Arab identity.

and come back as an accomplished kidney specialist and a novelist; having had a secret relationship and marriage with a Frenchman which lasted for seventeen years. She has written her way out of Kénadsa...and then returned.

“À mon entrée dans le bâtiment de l’aéroport, quelqu’un s’exclame en arabe: ‘Bienvenue à notre écrivain!’... Mon regard est tout de suite captivé par la délégation qui m’attend: Fatiha, ma mère, deux de mes sœurs, mon oncle” (238). The nomad writer has come full circle back to her family, where she will make peace with her dying father. The reader comes full circle as well, being reminded of the space and milieu from which this writer emerged. As we remember this, we appreciate even more profoundly the sheer amount of writing and perseverance it took to allow the writer to make this full circle, to return to this site of silencing and striating forces intent not only on binding her to tradition but also on killing her.

Through witnessing the author’s displacement and return, we are reminded of our own readerly journey across Mokeddem’s oeuvre and through her memoir, *Transe*. This return-themed section of the memoir contrasts to the *ici/là-bas* structure of the previous two sections and moves in a linear way, as opposed to the contrapuntal structure of sections one and two.

Skimming backwards through the memoir provides a nomadic reading, meaning one that opposes striating lines, refuses a chronology imposed by the author. Furthermore, through an “oppositional” reading, we reflect on the family dynamic which produced this writer, one she describes as “le creuset familial. Sa sécurité. Son réconfort. Consubstantiels de ses sacrifices. Ou la rupture et l’envol. L’écriture s’impose en ultime liberté de *l’infamille*” (178-179 original italics). This infelicitous space of the family in the past, certainly a key striating force, is imbued with an abrasive moral and emotional geography which threatened nomadic subjectivity. The

seeds of exile had long ago been planted in Mokeddem through education and, like Djelloul Bouhaloufa, knowledge set her apart from familial geographies:

Pour moi, [la liberté et la solitude] ont grandi ensemble dans cet exil magnifique, le savoir. Le savoir est pour moi le premier exil. Unique car irrévocable... La notion d'exil ne pouvait se rattacher à un territoire pour mes aïeux nomades. Elle traduisait déjà l'exclusion volontaire ou supportée du groupe familial... Plus tard les violences subies ce 1er novembre [où la foule enragée avait chassé Mokeddem pour n'avait pas être voilée] avaient illustré l'ampleur de mon isolement et de ma vulnérabilité. Quelque chose d'irréversible s'est joué là. Quelque chose s'était brisé en moi, à moi: la notion même du lien déjà si ténu à force d'être étiré, distordu, malmené. En regard de cet exil-là, les franchissements des frontières, des mers représentent plutôt une délivrance. (158-159)

She was made an outsider in Kénadsa and denied existence or expression. Her flight from there consisted of making felicitous spaces through her work and writing craft.

When she finally arrives back in “her” desert, the relationship of space to narrative comes full circle as she recognizes herself in and as a part of this space: “Ça c'est mon désert. C'est moi...je m'y reconnais” (238, 244). The nomad has circled back to her home “camp” and stakes a claim there. She is able to return exactly because she left and it is through her physical and psychic flight that she found the freedom of alterity and its resistant accompanying narratives.

CONCLUSION

In the novels and memoir I discussed in this chapter, master cultural narratives attempt to control female characters and nomads, yet these bodies-in-movement reject the imposition of control, creating smooth spaces and moving in the interest of self-preservation and in resistance to the State, religious fundamentalism, and other forms of violence against “unacceptable”

bodies. I examined the philosophical consequences of the nomadic self by interrogating it as a site of diversity, alterity, and agency. Through narrative, *l'écrivaine nomade* creates a space for nomadic subjectivity—her own, her characters', and her readers'. In other words, she writes the possibility of alterity into existence. Her nomadic narratives create space for flight.

The culmination of movement and identity is found in the trope of *les femmes qui marchent*, embodied in Zohra and Nora. They are women who fashion selfhood through insisting on their own contestatory narratives. They make and preserve their nomadic figurations and moreover form a circular, interlocking story within Mokeddem's oeuvre. They are literally memory in the flesh, the carriers of the nomadic tradition, bulwarks against hegemony. The women reject biopolitical power over their lives and instead set out to find heterotopic sites.

CONCLUSION

Malika Mokeddem opens her 2008 novel *Je dois tout à ton oubli* with a horrific scene:

La main de la mère qui s’empare d’un oreiller blanc, l’applique sur le visage du nourrisson allongé par terre auprès de la tante Zahia et qui appuie, appuie. Cette main qui pèse sur le coussin et maintient la pression. Les spasmes, à peine perceptibles, du bébé ligoté par des langes qui le sanglent de la racine des bras à la pointe des pieds. Le cri muet des yeux de Zahia qui semble tout figer. (11)

Selma, the novel’s protagonist, wonders whether this vision from the past was a dream. She hears the tramontane wind roar outside her home, sees the flames flicker in her fireplace—these conditions mirror those present in her long-buried memory. This “accident vital de mémoire,” as Mokeddem described it during my interview with her in her home, is based on a true story from the author’s own life. The baby in both the real and fictional stories was born out of wedlock, and as a child, Mokeddem witnessed her mother and aunt suffocating the baby. Years later, she confronted her mother about the incident. Her mother told her that the very presence of this life would have brought shame on the family, so she simply *had* to suffocate the baby: “Qu’est-ce que tu voulais qu’on fasse? On était bien obligés de tout étouffer!” (see Appendix)

Mokeddem’s works display a preoccupation with suffocation as a form of censure of the nomadic self, and her stories of censure (via publishing houses and death threats) recall various

forms of suffocation of narratives. While writing this dissertation, I began to see the many ways that suffocation happens all around us and how literature combats that. The further I moved in my research and writing, the more I realized the stakes of narrative. I realized that the literal snuffing out of lives is but the end result of the suffocation of subversive narratives. The denial of this newborn's life because it did not fit a narrative of purity and thus personified *haram*, or shame, is one example. Mokeddem has written and spoken about her and her cousin being chased through the streets of their hometown because they were not wearing veils and thus did not fit the narrative of acceptable Algerian Muslim womanhood, another example of hegemonic forces attempting to mold subversives and society, to snuff out difference and transgression of mores. The presence of lives whose truths counter certain very powerful and hegemonic narratives is dangerous because these lives resist and undermine that hegemony, and thus the power that certain stakeholders cling to, sometimes violently. Narratives hold the power of life or death over the transgressive body; narrative *is* a matter of life or death.

I envision two major avenues of development of this project: interrogating practices of censure of writers, and reexamining and amending directions in the field of Francophone literature. Firstly, I point out that when stories are censored or covered up, they are taken out of a place, removed from it. When there is no narrative space of difference, that alterity is pushed out of the public imaginary and thus out of public space, most often violently. We are seeing such violence erupt at the global level and manifest itself across borders, particularly targeting the "narrative-makers." This has brought even more urgency to my project. More journalists and writers are being arrested in Turkey, Mexico, and Egypt. Criticism of those in power in China results in surveillance, prison, or disappearance. In the United States, one might view the Black Lives Matter movement as the insistence on the inclusion of subversive narratives in American

life. In France, groups such as *Les Vies noires comptent* and *Brigade vies volées* call for justice for Adama Traoré, Ibrahim Ali, Théo, and others who have been victims of state violence. In addition to physical and online activism, a new generation of *écrivains engagés* is grappling with these issues in novels such as Saleem Hadad's *Guapa* (2016), Salim Bachi's *Le Chien d'Ulysse* (2013), Nina Bouraoui's *Mes mauvaises pensées* (2005), and Boualem Sansal's *Le Village de l'Allemand* (2009) and *Harraga* (2007) all of which confront and uncover subversive narratives.⁵² Critical studies of this new generation of writers keeps these subversive narratives in the spotlight and brings them into wider conversations about the role of literature in movements for justice and human rights. In addition, as university humanities departments struggle with funding cuts, such studies could help boost public support for the arts, demonstrating exactly how valuable and useful literature is in the "real" world.

Secondly, concurrent to my reading in the field of biopolitics, the death toll of Mediterranean migrants from Syria, Libya, and sub-Saharan Africa continued to rise. Mokeddem mentions the Mediterranean as the site of modern-day Homeric Gorgons and critiques Europe's treatment of these political refugees and economic migrants, and I believe that a biopolitical and geocritical study of Mediterranean migrant literature is now more timely than ever. Tahar Ben Jelloun's 2006 novel, *Partir*, and Abdourahman Waberi's 2003 novel, *Transit*, along with several of Mokeddem's novels, rewrite journey literature and present migrant stories that variously play on the trope of hospitality, use intertexts to Homer's *Odyssey*, and employ multiple narrators in various transitory spaces in order to interrogate migrancy. The geographical

⁵² Films such as Houda Benyamina's *Divines* (2016) and Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea* (2016) are award-winning films that touch on similar themes to Mokeddem's.

area of study of Francophone works has been expanded, yet the field remains ripe for study as more literature treats transit and movement.

Thirdly, climate change has brought drought, desertification, famine, and water conflicts to northern Africa, pushing people to move or fight for resources. Such crises inevitably touch the writerly imagination and thus expand the science fiction canon, helping to create genres such as eco-fiction, speculative fiction, and “cli-fi.” This genre encompasses Anglophone classics such as *Dune*, by Frank Herbert (1965) and the MaddAddam trilogy, by Margaret Atwood (2003, 2009, 2013). Georges-Jean Arnaud’s series of 98 books, *La Compagnie de glaces* (1980-2005) and Jean-Pierre Fontana’s *Sheol* (1976) are two examples in this growing Francophone canon. I believe that Francophone works in these several genres deserve greater study, especially since their Anglophone counterparts have been so well-studied and are staples of English literature courses.

Fourth, my project actually started with a focus on autofiction, and Mokeddem’s two memoirs might serve as starting points for investigation into this field in the context of the Francophone Maghrebi canon. Particular preoccupations of the female Francophone Algerian canon include the autobiographical, home, and the personal, and while so much critical attention has been paid to male writers in this grouping, women’s stories are still often forgotten or allowed to go out of print. A comparative study across languages and storytelling traditions could further promote these artistic projects as well as open new paths for criticism, activist publishing, and historiographies of Algerian and Maghrebi women’s writing.

Fifth, Françoise Lionnet has provocatively stated, “French literature is no longer ‘French’” (203). Scholars have critiqued literature from the colonized and decolonizing world via its use of codeswitching, themes of hybridity, use of histories that counter History, and many

more examples. Such literary perspectives are changing the field, making publishing more accessible to non-Hexagon writers and also slowly changing departments of letters and literature in the world of higher education. In France, Beur literature is particularly preoccupied with questions of autobiography and generic interrogations of how to write the self when identity means displacement, and meanwhile Gastarbeiterliteratur in Germany, Black-British literature, and Littérature-monde in the Francophone world bring these previously “suffocated” narratives to an increasingly receptive public and publishing world.

Lastly, as far as critical perspectives, my research for this project led me to Nomadic Theory, yet I found out that while there is plenty of scholarly work on nomadism in the fields of Anthropology and Sociology, very little exists in literary criticism. The idea of home or unhoming has been scrutinized by scholars such as Stuart Hall, Édouard Glissant, and Julia Kristeva. These and others have written extensively about home in opposition to the idea of foreignness, unhoming, and displacement, creating a duality that is inescapable for its subjects. As a result, in literature, many displaced or, alternatively, second-generation writers of immigrant heritage continue to produce on the margins of the Francophone literary world. Only recently have Christopher Miller and Rosi Braidotti attempted to craft a theoretical space especially for nomads and those writers who exist rhizomatically and Mokeddem’s real and textual nomadism complements their work by challenging the very duplicitous differentiation between French and Francophone literature. At the same time, we are seeing how belonging to one single nation is less and less relevant. This is the new nomadism.

The world has always been in movement, yet society has become more mobile through easier, cheaper travel and especially through the Internet. We are now able to live increasingly mobile lives yet still struggle with deterritorialization and home. We are on the cusp of

completely new directions in Francophonie, and nomadism therefore seems to be the next logical step in unhinging ourselves from that colonized perspective. My hope is that Mokeddem's unique literary project and this scholarly project can serve as a jumping off point for projects that contribute to justice and new directions in Francophone Studies.

APPENDIX:**AUTHOR INTERVIEW WITH****MALIKA MOKEDDEM**

This interview took place on July 21, 2016 in Montpellier, France. It has been edited for clarity.

Whitney Bevill: What is a nomad?

Malika Mokeddem: A nomad is a group, or a single nomad—it is also singular—but generally, one is not a nomad alone. It's a familial group, a tribe, or tribes, who were nomads together because of the territory on which they traveled. Nomads were herders, and when they moved, it was in pasturelands. Whenever they found out that there was rain towards the north, they went north; when they found out there was rain towards the south, they went south, or towards the east, according the seasons or according to the weather. There was also a second category of nomads which was the merchants. Geography still ordered human life [back then]. The desert was immense, and you had to take camels, which traversed the desert slowly while bringing products south to north, and north to south. The salt caravans brought salt north. For a long time that caravan [route] was for foodstuffs, and then tea, cotton, and cloth, etc., from the north to the south. Anyway, the two modes of life [long-distance and short-distance nomads] remain tied together, and the caravans, those that traversed great distances didn't go as families. It was a group of men that would depart—they did so very efficiently—and their families lived according

to the lifestyle of the other nomads, meaning they took their small herds out to pasture to graze, herded the donkeys, wove cloth, etc. So there are two styles of nomadism.

WB: What is “liberty” according to you?

MM: I’d like to tell you what I told an Algerian girl. There was a 20-year old Algerian girl who said to me, “Madame Mokeddem, I’d like you to tell me how to be free like you.” I told her that, at her age, I didn’t know how; I *hoped* to be free. But I didn’t know how, or what it freedom really was. And I thought about it a moment, and I said, “In fact, one becomes free by saying ‘no,’ by refusing that which constrains and wounds us or humiliates us.”

Obviously, the condition of being free is not the same for everyone. Everyone doesn’t have the same demands and the same desires in life. Everyone isn’t made the same either. Me, I’m a woman, so I needed to flee all these desert women, to flee from poverty, from moral restrictions: I had to say “no” to the patriarchy. [I had to say,] “No, it’s not my father who’s going to decide at what age I’m going to marry; maybe I won’t marry for a long time.” Marriage wasn’t a concern for me, and little by little, to be free, for me, was not to be a servant to reproduction. I told myself very early, “I don’t believe in God; I won’t marry; and I won’t have children.” These strong ideas of freedom towards which I aspired were [planted] in my mind from an early age. And education: that wasn’t a sure thing because we were girls. We couldn’t go to the university! And if I had to be in a class with boys, I fought. And I fought in every sense of the word because sometimes it was violent and dreadful. I was such a brazen adolescent! I was insolent and didn’t know limits in a country that had just finished a war, that was still very traditional—[these values were] just something that was assumed. Happily for me, I had teachers that tempered my

resistance, who guided me. That was fantastic. I mean, I was always in battle, in a permanent state of war!

It was also funny: I had a small group of friends, and we went from middle school [sixième] to senior year [terminale] together. Since I crossed swords with all of these boys all the time, I was good at everything, particularly in math, and no one was as good as me in philosophy. No one could rival me! And when a problem was put before us, one of my friends, Ahmed—whom I liked very much—and we looked at each other like, Who'll answer first? There were these games within the adversity all around us. I also had good friends who were like brothers, so I had a good time in that way also. That's why I wrote *Mes hommes*. The men that I wrote about, they're the ones who accompanied me [in those early years] or whom I was totally against and had to confront. But there were many more that I liked because with a temperament like mine, and the place I was in—I was certainly in a male environment—and I had a demeanor like theirs, perhaps even more aggressive.

WB: It appears that education and school is a form or space of freedom for you.

MM: It *was* nevertheless a French school, during the war anyway. But I was lucky because in this struggle starting at the age of five, I always had outstretched hands and kindness everywhere, in all areas. That is, those who were supposed to be our enemies helped me more than those that were supposed to protect me. For example, once I was going through town and I saw soldiers harassing and humiliating people, and I arrived at school unhappy, *suffocating*, *miserable* having seen that. I had a teacher who told me, “Malika, you'll see, that will change. Algeria will be independent.” You've read about this [in my books], right? She told me, “My dear, your war, it is *here* that you have to win it,” pointing to the school desk. “It is *here* that you

have to prove to the French that you are also worthy. Go to your father and tell him that you can be just as good or better than a boy so that he won't take you out of school."

So these awakenings weren't freedom because at my age, five-years old, I didn't know what freedom was. At five- or six-years old, we only know to say "No" when someone wants to hit us or when someone wants to treat us like a servant: just be good and prepare the bottles for our brothers, never receive affection because we are girls. We can't sing, show our legs, jump... The world [for girls] was nothing but that which was forbidden. I had the impression that my mother never even said anything nice to me, that she was always barking at me.

And I went to school and it was a school full of enemies, yet I found a woman who treated me with kindness, with affection even. I had very long hair and she loved my hair; she did my hair during recess. It was truly something, the love that I found there, and this woman who was blonde and had blue eyes; she had nothing in common with my universe. Yet it seemed to me that she spoke only to me, and it was very touching. So I didn't go to school; I *flew* to school, towards her. She was very kind and loveable and loving, and proud to guide me towards things other than the conditions that would have been mine. I was lucky to have her as a teacher for three years. She accompanied me. I suppose that she's dead now; I never had the chance to see her again. But she is still someone important for me because I know that many things come into play during childhood: putting me at the threshold, helping me cross the threshold of knowledge, [learning] that there are no limits, that I had to progress, that sometimes I would have to go it alone, that sometimes I would have to do it despite others, etc. She spoke to me deeply. I know that she wanted my well-being. By contrast, for example, my family [didn't].

All of that contributed to something very important in the constitution of my thinking, to exciting my reasoning. Thanks to her, and to the doctor of the village (who was a soldier), I learned not to say, “The French are mean, they are this or that; the Arabs are like this; the Jews are like that,” never. To never consider groups of people as monolithic, but to tell myself, “There are individuals in every camp who are upright, who are generous; and others who are perverse; and [these differences] are everywhere.” And I learned nuance in reasoning. I grasped the complexity of human behavior, how soldiers can commit horrors and how they can come at four in the morning to steal from us and hit my father in front of us, etc. And the next day it’s my teacher who finds just the right words to console me and to tell me that it’s my *father* who’s the hero and the soldiers are nothing but bastards. I’d see what a treasure [compassion] was. I had an excellent start thanks to this woman, thanks to Dr. Chall (the village doctor)—thanks to these two people who were supposed to be our enemies. They armed me to defend myself against my real enemies that were closer, that is, my parents who wanted to take me out of school, who wanted to marry me off when I was 13, who didn’t want me to continue at school. That was a fight for life.

WB: It scares me that those closest to us can be our true enemies.

MM: No, I must say that I owe certain people, because they opened my eyes—my grandmother is one of them. [These people] taught me not to judge childishly. I tell myself that’s the first rule of love. I didn’t have the love of my parents—they were poor buggers. And my mother was drowned in chores, literally devoured by such tasks, by pregnancies—she had 12 pregnancies, 13 children! When I say she was a baby factory, it’s only a slight exaggeration! For the women around her, it was the same, a life of labor and pregnancies, one after another, that consumed them, that devoured everything. She didn’t think about taking care of herself at all; she didn’t give any love at all, but because she didn’t have any either.

But anyway, I had love from my grandmother, with whom I got on very well. That protected me against my father during childhood. He didn't have the right to raise a hand to me, and if he had, he would have been cursed [by my grandmother], and he was very afraid of being cursed by his mother! That made my mother absolutely livid because I escaped his rules. It was first my grandmother, then my teacher, then Dr. Chall, that I had. Even if I felt overcome by loneliness, these people kept me from feeling it; these relationships accompanied me, and I found comfort in thinking about them. I wanted to stay loyal since, you know, it comforted me. It galvanized me to leave.

WB: The tribe of your grandmother, is it Doui Menia?

MM: No, they were from the desert. My grandmother was from the South and the Hauts Plateaux. We were from the highlands and went to the desert just [to trade]. Some tribes, generation after generation, bickered and mocked one another. There was just one time during the year when they were at peace, and it was for a dance. They had a dance that was absolutely unbelievable for the time because people were so uninhibited: women flirted with men, mores were put aside... There were the peoples that came from [sub-Saharan] Africa, with dark skin, and once a year, there was this dance where women could flirt with men. Such a thing was *absolutely* unheard of. But as soon as they finished the party, they started bickering again. It was a kind of cyclical rivalry, but sometimes it could lead to very violent things.

WB: You said that Zohra [your grandmother] said that it is only palm trees that have roots, and I love that idea. Do you think that you have roots here in France, or are you stateless?

MM: I don't like roots because they fix you somewhere, and the life of nomads was dirty. I suppose that in fact I am, rather than a woman with roots, a woman of memory. And it's this

memory, made from all these dangers we just spoke about—memories of friendship, of aid, of people whose character played a fundamental role for me and which kept colonial France from being a swelling wave... There were also these people who carried me and who made me who I am, so they contributed more than my family to my true identity, my Mediterranean identity.

I don't feel and I never felt stateless. I absolutely wanted it in moments of exasperation, in moments when I was afraid that France was going to war—the Gulf War, for example, or leaving Algeria. But I left Algeria! I have an Algerian passport *and* I have a French passport; I have both. I wouldn't have been able to have only a French passport without giving up a part of me. Nevertheless, even if Algeria makes me hopeless, I don't recognize myself at all in what it's become. I hope that it'll change one day, but for the time being, it's awful enough. So rather than excluding myself from a community, I instead want to belong to those with whom I have something in common.

Of course, I came and settled here in France, where I built my house. And when I say “built my house,” I mean the house where I wrote. It's the house of writing. Me, a daughter of a nomad, I put myself in this region which very much resembles the other side of the Mediterranean, the other shore. I built a house that could be from either shore of the Mediterranean. What I really like—you know that I sailed a lot—is this polyphony of languages, this polyphony [of life], this development of the art of cooking [*gestures to olives and sausages we are enjoying*] which is like a broadening itself, because there are the same vegetables, but cooking them [is different altogether]... “What spices is he adding to the dish? Yum! It's good!” It is a Mediterranean *art de vivre* to which I belong. I believe I could say that my country is the Mediterranean. My homeland is the Mediterranean, the sea.

I have, while sailing and living on the coast, realized that I was a girl that needed to see space. Only, in the desert, as I wasn't going anywhere, and since I never left, the horizon seemed to me an abyss that I could never cross and was part of my imprisonment. I told myself that that was the worst confinement, to be enclosed in immensities. So it was necessary that I leave the desert and that I leave Algeria and come establish myself in France. First I was in Paris, but even in Paris, I needed to see the sea again. It was when I made a life for myself here in Montpellier and took to the sea again and... Oh man! I had the feeling of freedom! A different freedom. Untying the mooring lines means leaving, going out to sea. It's an absolutely giddy freedom that I discovered, and the sea offered me this magnificent gift, which was crossing, an immense crossing.

The sea gave me its horizons. The horizons weren't emptiness. After forty-eight hours of sailing I could arrive in Corsica, Sardinia... I'd stop and then I'd continue on. So, I finally learned to watch the horizon not with anxiety but with excitement, calculating where we'd go. I projected myself and in a way, the sea gave the desert back to me. It made me love the desert, made me understand that it wasn't the desert [that was the problem], it was maturity. With maturity, and while sailing, I began to realize what was imprisoning me was [my childhood of] poverty, the traditions, all that. It wasn't the immensity of the desert.

So now, if you will, the sea is my space. It's a traversed space, a loved space. It's a space that's less dangerous than the desert. Also, I suppose after the era of independence there were recoveries of nationhood, with a nationalism that I found stupid. The act of navigating on the Mediterranean and hearing the marine weather forecasts in Italian or Spanish, hearing other languages comforted me. I needed to hear other languages. I needed to go live and spend time with other people to get close to them and see how they live.

WB: Do you consider yourself a Mediterranean nomad?

MM: No. Surely, while sailing, I had the impression that this was a way of life that was a little bit nomadic, but even so, I returned home afterwards. I'm not a nomad. I have desires now—work and going to new places by boat because that will help me to discover great distances...Australia, New Zealand...all these countries that I don't know. But I have to say about nomads—what dictated their movement was the survival of the group. For me, it's about the desire to meet others, to see them. So I don't think that I have kept the nomadic spirit, just the memory.

WB: In *N'Zid*, *Mes hommes*, and *La Désirante*, you wrote about the Mediterranean as a space of freedom for Nora, yourself, and Shamsa. You said that the desert was totally different, but do you think that for you, the dunes were also a space of discovery of freedom?

MM: Me, I didn't discover them; I opened my eyes in this universe. And it certainly wasn't a space of freedom because everything stayed fixed. Of course, there were the dunes, which were at the mercy of the sandstorms, but it was despairingly unchanging. There were no seasons; there was only a little bit of winter with a little moisture; and summer was hard. No, it's a very harsh, bitter climate. It's a universe that isn't even made for humans.

But on the other hand, I saw my professors, for example, those who came to this place where they were assigned. They arrived and discovered the space. They said, "Oh it's marvelous! The beauty is magic!" For them, when they discovered the desert, it was majestic, splendid; the cities are well-designed with great colors. But for me, who couldn't leave, a young person who was threatened by my social condition, I could never escape it. I detested it. I could no longer see any beauty in it. There was too much light, which blinded me. I didn't see it anymore. And in fact, it

was only when I returned a long time after that, yes, I found it magnificent. But it's a constraint and nothing more. Humans forge their lives in these spaces. But I traveled through it later and I once again found my filiation since I am a daughter of the desert.

WB: I mention "emotional geography" in my dissertation, and I thought that I saw a change in your writing regarding the desert and the sea. Your point of view seems to have changed, or it's a different understanding of these spaces. It was truly a geography that was marked by emotion and maturity.

MM: Of course. The Mediterranean was completely outside the realm of pleasure and of discovery, so it was thanks to the desert that I realized I needed space. And this need of space was anchored in me by the space of the desert. Even if I wasn't seeing it, it was in me. It's just that I needed to learn how to look at it differently and not accuse the desert with the words and demands of humans.

WB: That reminds me of several writers of the desert, there is Paul Bowles...

MM: ...Paul Bowles, but he was actually in Tangiers, not the desert, right? But it's at the entrance to the Sahara, yes. He went from time to time to do a short stint there in the desert, but he was in Tangiers especially. There, there were all the homosexuals...

WB: Yes, he exoticized the desert... I thought also of Isabelle Eberhardt.

MM: She loved the desert. She described the people and their poverty. Her novels aren't extraordinary, but her daily journals are some absolutely magnificent texts. And [they have] poignant truths about humanity! She was a compassionate woman, benevolent; she desired to discover these people, to describe them. She wrote them accurately: their living conditions, their

poverty, the humiliations that were inflicted upon them and that they too inflicted. And it's because of this region she came to Kénadsa, my hometown, in 1904 and stayed 5 months. I suppose she was the first European to come to this region before the military—Lyautey sent [troops] as scouts... So, I appreciated her gaze; her writings were precious for me—[her writings are] a witness for me of the priceless of this region.

WB: I imagine that St. Exupéry must have been the same for you because you said that you were marked by *The Little Prince*, but you also rejected it.

MM: Yes, because his little flower tells him “yes,” but the nomads, the wind carries them because they don't have roots! That's how I think about it. We don't need roots! That annoyed me a little because he [Exupéry] was a bit clichéd, but it *is* a pretty text. Actually, I was moved to read this this marvelous story during a time of great struggle because the boss of my father's shop had given it to me the day of big round-up [by French soliders]. I was in despair because the army had arrested all the men of the village. We were worried and had only a little bit of money. And this boss went and bought me a copy of *The Little Prince*. He told me, “Go home and read that.” So he cared for me like that... And it really got to me. It was the first text that spoke to me about the desert...except for that misstep about the nomads.

WB: Why are there no maps in your books?

MM: Did you see in my office? Come see. I love maps. I have them in front of me sometimes when I write... So here is the north of Algeria, with the Hauts Plateaux. Béchar is here and Kénadsa just beside it. My mother's side of the family was in Morocco, and yes Bouhaloufa was the one who left and started a family there. My mother never did hear from him.

WB: Do you use navigational maps when you write? I noticed it's possible to follow the navigation...

MM: I know the maps by heart. Obviously, I use them to follow a course for greater credibility [in my texts], but I used to actually calculate the courses. I used to have some maps for that but I don't need them anymore. But these places, I know by heart.

WB: Can we discuss sand and sandstorms?

MM: Yes, and *Vent de sable* was the original title of *Les Hommes qui marchent*. For months it was *Vent de sable*. And there was a film that was called *Vent de sable* too, which made it a little exotic, so I changed the title to *Les Hommes qui marchent*. Closer to nomads. But I liked the idea of naming a boat after a wind. There are many people who call their boat *Tramontane* or *Mistral*, so for me it was *Vent de sable* as in "walking across" the Mediterranean on sand.

WB: I thought it was almost like you yourself were a sandstorm that travels around the Mediterranean!

MM: Yes, it's memory [of the past]... It's where I'm from! But it was done unconsciously. I put my "sandstorm" on the Mediterranean.

WB: I've written about the female body in your books, that it's a site of contestation in politics and literature. You write that the female body moves in the desert, crosses the Moroccan border, travels in Algeria, and around the Mediterranean. Why is it important that the protagonists in your books be in movement? I noticed that, for Zohra in *Les Hommes qui marchent*, the book begins with her movement. And there are other examples such as in *N'Zid*, which begins, "Elle bascule," and the protagonists are always moving. Why is this important?

MM: Because there are so many hostile contexts so often that my heroines have no choice but to flee, to flee the conditions made for them. And then they display their bodies like standard-bearers. Their bodies, the way they're dressed, the way they walk, the way they carry themselves—it's a declaration of rights. Their bodies are a symbol, a weapon.

I believe that it's exasperating, this colonial history and a history of confiscation of independence by dictatorial regimes. Immobility is also the breeding ground of conservatism, where nothing moves. Ideas are especially "hassled" until they leave to go somewhere else. [Mobility] is sometimes putting oneself in danger but it's chiefly progressing and seeing how someone lives elsewhere. That's why my characters also come back to these places in order to try to change these mentalities. And then, it's also so that people see them alive, living. They've fought and they've won battles.

And so, movement is life. What moves the nomads? It's the desire to survive in hostile constraints, in another manner [of being]. Humans are just those who get on their own two legs, and they advance, and they leave. Leaving, then, is to enrich oneself with new horizons, with confrontations with other ideas. It's banal, yet it's reality. But especially, what's awful for Algeria and for the whole Arab world is what we're seeing now in a cruel way. The intelligence, the forces of life in these countries flee the dictatorships, the wars; they leave.

And so there's a hemorrhaging: these countries bleed their youth, their potential, their intelligence. They flee these horrible conditions and go live elsewhere to survive so that their children do not suffer like them. That only amplifies these movements of rupture and departure... That's why conservatives are afraid of globalization. There is a fear of the Other. But the "Other"

is being enriched by the cultures of others and they carry it [into the world] and they contribute to it.

WB: The landscapes in your books are particularly interesting. I thought that the sandstorm was a kind of character, especially in *Des rêves et des assassins* and in *N'Zid*.

MM: One could consider it as one of the important characters, but it is only the sandstorm that can obscure the horizon and change this unmovable universe, this sky which appears as a roof against which we bang our heads. In the immense cauldron of the desert, the horizon becomes obscured and then the sandstorm closes in on us, works its way into everything, penetrates everywhere. It's impressive to see! I found it to be beautifully strong. Sometimes I was excited for it because it came and erased these things that never change. There was nothing but the wind that could do this—rub out the desert, rub out all humans. And so, later, there were the storms [on the sea] also, the ones on the Mediterranean. I know them well. It's the extreme violence of nature which made the desert come alive for me. [Before, in the desert,] I had the impression that there was just the mineral and the dead. And all of a sudden, I could see the wind virtually breathing, see the sand dancing, see it moving, the sand buffeting us. It was like a breath of air which sort of upended the desert and muddled it. It was a battle between the organic and the inorganic. It was like a trance.

WB: Yes, I was struck by the use of sandstorms in every book, from the name of the sailboat to the actual storm. I found that it was the *V/vent de sable*, both the boat and the storm, that pushed the action and made the protagonist change. It was also an announcement of change in the books, when there is a storm and the wind rises, you know that something is going to happen.

MM: Which happens during a storm—more over the sea than in the desert. In the desert you can do absolutely nothing but shut yourself away, hide. But on the sea, during a storm, you have to react, and react very fast. It's a kind of test: are you able to survive? Are you worthy of being on a boat in the middle of the sea? Are you able to get out of this, and fast? If not, you'll fall on your head and you'll be eaten by fish!

And there are the big waves, the *mountains* of water that make you want to turn and flee, that make you tough... There is a symphony in the storm: there's the wind, the noise of the water, and the noise of the boat also. The huge waves raise it and carry it for a long time and they cause this pushing, which causes a smoothness of the motor which goes...[makes machine sound]...and which is going to silence with the wave until the next one. There's also a kind of melee of the boat that belongs to the storm. The boat reacts when everything's going well, and it becomes reassuring; the noises shouldn't change too much—they can rise or fall, ok, but there shouldn't be any anomaly. You become very sensitive to the sound and you listen to the sea, to the wind—is it falling or rising?—and to the noises of the boat. And then the next wave! Instead of being hostile, the boat becomes like a cradle being carried by the waves, one after another, one giving way to another, and it's a moment where you must master the situation.

I was sick with panic sometimes, but I was lucky I was never sea sick! Yet because I saw great sailors get really seasick in rough water, and was like, “Wow! I am living this!” It's great to be in the middle of the unleashing of nature and to feel complete calm. I was content when it stopped, obviously, but it was also enjoyable to experience that.

WB: I have the impression that you love to work *with* the sea, and by contrast, the desert was just something that acted on you.

MM: Exactly! I was like a butterfly, stuck on a large painting—a very beautiful painting but I was stuck on it. I didn't see its beauty. But the sea was truly a battle. We often stopped in a port or cove, we went swimming, we brought snacks... It was a way of life that I loved. And I was happy; it was the experience of freedom. So, it's without comparison to the desert. It can't win against that!

WB: You love Faulkner. Whom do you read besides him? You've already mentioned St-Exupéry and Eberhardt.

MM: I'm not a big reader of their books, except for *The Little Prince*, but their other texts didn't really touch me. I really like Charles Dickens because his work is set in England and is like a social painting, which is often very impressive. It shows me a certain universe that I'm not familiar with. What I found in Faulkner was closer to what I myself knew. Kateb Yacine or Camus were speaking about an Algeria that I didn't know, but Faulkner was writing about the South—the brutality, the violence, the people of the South. I had the impression that he was speaking about my own South. He is truly a Southern writer, which I liked about him, plus the power of his writing, which I find incredible... But in the end, it enormously beautified my adolescence.

I didn't have any hobbies, couldn't go anywhere. The only escape possible was reading, so I read everything that I could. My teacher, the town doctor, my professors who didn't leave [either], they had cases of books. That was my summer reading, you know. We had four months of summer vacation and you couldn't go outside—it was 50 degrees in the shade. You'd melt! So, I loved to read Colette, for example—the descriptions of gardens and cool air. Of lightness. I loved Carson McCullers, too, and was truly impressed to know that she'd written *The Heart is a*

Lonely Hunter when she was twenty-two-years old. I found that fabulous. I loved it, and I found *Ballad of the Sad Café* extraordinary. I read Hemingway, I read Miller a little. Steinbeck, I read a lot of Steinbeck for a while. I don't know if I could read him again. I read Flannery O'Connor. To describe this little world, these little details that can be so horrible, you have to be just a little bit twisted. I found her novels absolutely delightful.

These writers brought far-flung places close, so I always had my nose in books. It was like a threshold that I crossed to no longer see the abyss of the desert. And I went with those writers to the United States, and to Russia... I read the Russians a lot also for a while. I loved reading Sartre, obviously. A fundamental book during my adolescence was *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. I thought, "Wow! There is a woman who thinks these things!" She was my spiritual sister. It was that book which caused such an explosion in my life—a *woman* can write that!

WB: Are there other women writers that marked you like de Beauvoir? That opened your soul?

MM: Obviously Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor were wonderful for the imagination. For a long time, I'd asked my teachers for books by women writers because, in general, only male writers were prioritized. Hemingway reigned among them during those years, and I loved *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and others of his, but if you read three different books by McCullers, you'll see that at the age of just twenty-two, she was able to paint complex characters and complex situations. It was just... She made women noble for me. *Ballad of the Sad Café* was also a completely different text. So with her, [I saw] was that women entered into the realm of literature. They were there already, but I didn't know that. For me, in my judgment, women can be great authors. I found their works to be very strong. The poems of Akhmatova, the Russian, very activist.

Colette, I loved her glorious spirit; that's completely another thing. Her insolence, the elegance and insolence but also her demanded sensuality—I liked it a lot. And one has the impression that even when she's dramatic, she carries a lightness; she has an elegance at the same time. She's truly sensual. There's a book of hers that I loved, *Sido*, about her mother, the descriptions of the garden, of her beauty. Also, I don't know, for example, how many times I can read the first 20 pages of *Que ma joie demeure* by Giono, about Provence. One evening, he lays down in his bed, the moon is full, and he imagines what he's going to do. And suddenly, I, who was isolated, who'd never traveled, I saw this land, I smelled its scents. It's an absolutely magnificent passage! I can't say that there's one who had preponderance over others.

To be a woman and a writer *is* possible, and [it's possible] to be a great writer like Flannery O'Connor, like Carson McCullers, like Colette, and so on. I read a little bit of *Mémoires d'Hadrian*, by Duras. I loved Duras. Obviously. I've read practically everything of hers. I began with *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* and watched the evolution of her writing. All those little paperbacks, I left them in Algeria. I need books with me, so when I came here as a student and didn't have much money, I bought the authors that I loved in pocket-sized editions. It was necessary that they be here with me.

WB: It's impossible to get rid of my books. They're my children!

MM: Fortunately, I've left some everywhere, only because now I don't know where to put them.

WB: And did Duras and Colette influence you in your writing?

MM: I don't think so. Because if I have influences, they're really mixed since I read so many people.

WB: Back to Faulkner: he described your South. Is it his descriptions, his style, or the violence that influenced you?

MM: No, I was angry enough! No, I don't have any idea. Perhaps he influenced me, but consciously I didn't think of it when I set out to write, frankly.

WB: My next question is about El Para: why did you choose him as a character in *La Désirante*?

MM: He's an enigma, a soldier, an elite military parachuter... And since some generals helped him escape justice, no one was ever able to bring him to trial. It was unheard of, and you should have seen how he fascinated the French media at the time because he was handsome, had green eyes, brown hair. They were saying this and that. But where is he? How is he hidden? Was he sent to the end of the earth? Is he tranquilly passing the days now? He needs to stand trial, but it keeps being dismissed...

Fiction is nourishing, obviously; it nourishes reality. I always found the question, "Are you a writer of the imagination or of reason?" artificial, really. Is it truly necessary to claim oneself as a writer of the imagination? I don't know. Look, what is reality? Reality is a lot more inventive, a lot more cruel, a lot more extraordinary than the imagination of humans. Those who are in command create the worst disasters. You have to inspire yourself to create a work of fiction; you don't make anything up. One writes, and writing is not just narration.

Would my writing have been the same if I had not lived ten bloody years in Algeria? Would my desire not to write anymore now, would it not have been this way if not for this failure of the Arab Spring? With these dramas which are still ongoing, you have the impression that there's a

crescendo of violence. And this menace of nationalism which looms over us everywhere, even in Europe, it's worrying. It really renders the act of writing undesirable. So one must be endowed with an ego, really... All writers have an oversized ego, but to want to change the world...

WB: Did you want to change the world with your writing?

MM: Change the world, no, but to exist in this world, yes. [What I mean is] that an Algerian woman, in the eyes of the law, is less than a person. They're not adults; they're still under the guardianship of a man. [I write] for them and say to them, "I do *not* want to marry, I do *not* want to have any children, I am a *free* woman, I am *atheist*." My heroines generally resemble me, and this is a way to emphasize the fact that women *can* become writers, that they *can* become specialist doctors, they *can* leave their country... yet people will continue to want to taunt them. So [I'm putting] a grain of sand between their teeth for them, between their neurons, so that they can finally function.

WB: Do you think that you have accomplished this through your writing?

MM: A little, yes. Maïssa Bey told me she started writing when she read me. When I go to Algeria, there are many Algerian women—and even children of immigrants here—[who] tell me, "Kenza, that's me; Shamsa, that's me!" And it's great! It's beautiful! But you don't change the world, you don't change a country... But at least, my books may be able to play a role with a child or adolescent in the way that others' books played a role for me. That is, they nourished my thinking, and they structured it instead of letting me be recruited by fundamentalists. I tell myself that that suffices as a goal. If my books play this role, it means that I'm truly a writer and that I'm participating in something. I'm *participating*, but I'm not *changing*. I can't change...

WB: Speaking of women, you wrote that Nora, in *N'Zid*, is like a jellyfish. I really liked that because she's transparent and changes in the book; she's looking for herself throughout the book. In your other novels as well, the protagonists battle with their identities. Did I understand that correctly?

MM: They question them, rather. They want to escape the framework of their identities, their futures which were decreed by a government: Muslims are like this, Algerians are like that. So they contest, moving the boundaries, changing their horizons. The image of Nora as a jellyfish: I like this image very much because she doesn't remember anything anymore. Obviously, the jellyfish, when taken out of water, is just like her—she has viscous skin with nothing inside. Nora has the impression that she just appeared somewhere because she can't remember any of her past. But as soon as she starts to recover it, on the boat, she's like a jellyfish filled with water. She becomes phosphorescent, full of light, light playing through her. So she identifies very much with the jellyfish. The jellyfish resembles water, the colors [playing through the jellyfish], and it doesn't cross the sea—it's the *sea* that crosses *her* in a way. She has an amnesic aura that gives the impression that it's the sea that crosses *through* her, [like how] she listens to different radio stations, she knows many languages. It's polyphony [and] the Mediterranean flavors and languages, which, little by little, give her back a consistency, a fullness. She'll recognize herself again little by little from a place, from the language of a place.

WB: Are you also an artist like Nora?

MM: Not anymore. I used to draw a little. My first teacher told me that I was pretty talented. But to draw is to express something. During my childhood, I truly desired to learn by *questioning*, so

I preferred throwing myself into books. I needed to understand the world: why is it twisted? Why war? So, drawing demanded great effort and I was tormented enough on my own.

WB: I noticed that there is a great change in landscape across your work. There's a focus on the desert, then the sea, like in *La Désirante* and *N'Zid*. It is like the *Odyssey* but set in the Mediterranean.

MM: I sailed through the Strait of Messina quite a few times. As soon as I passed through it, I thought of Charybdis and Scylla, there with the two rocks. I went on to Ithaca by boat and I often had Homer's works with me. It'd be unthinkable to sail there without them.

Everything is mythology: there are so many terrible things, the disappearance of people, the song of the sirens which tells them to come and join them... But it's the government that lures them in with these hopes.

WB: You said that your grandmother influenced your writing. I believe that the structure of your books is sometimes like a circle or spiral. Is that a mark of the orality of your grandmother or a way of telling stories in Arabic? Or is it your own choice to tell it like that?

MM: I don't believe that my grandmother influenced my writing because I started writing more than 30 years after her death. She was important for me, and my first book was dedicated to her, and I obviously tried to write as she would have expressed herself. Arabic is a very metaphorical language and [my writing reflects that,] especially, I think in *Des rêves et des assassins*. I think that I left metaphors behind to some degree... [I]n *Le Siècles des sauterelles* and in *Les Hommes qui marchent*, I was returning to the old days, the memory of the nomads but as they reacted to

the woman that I am, someone confronted with fundamentalist conflicts, etc. Gradually I allowed myself to get rid of metaphors in order to have a more direct language.

Sometimes I know how my book is going to finish. One writes partly consciously, but an enormous mass of unconsciousness surfaces, which come through the writing. So how to enjoy my writing is for someone else to tell you perhaps, those who study it. Myself, I'm too inside of it.

But me, coming from another language, I was drawn to Arabic for a long time. Now I've put Arabic on the backburner but have preserved the memory of its tone, which I miss. It was like a second skin of my writing and, because of that, I think that I could never write like a native French writer. My writing will always have something from somewhere else.

WB: As in *N'Zid* and *La Désirante*, there is Italian, Spanish, and French, and a little bit of Arab, but in the other books, there are Arab glossaries.

MM: Yes, when there are many Arab words, I'm obliged to include an Arab glossary. But gradually there have been fewer and fewer Arab words in my books, and I'd prefer not to make the reader go to a glossary and have to break the rhythm of reading. It's also practical to put notes at the bottom of the page, and all you have to do is lower your eyes to see the definition and go back to the line you were reading.

WB: Yes, it's true that when I read *Les Hommes qui marchent*, I had to do that sometimes. But I also thought that it was interesting, as a reader, because I felt almost like a stranger in the book sometimes since you used Arabic—as if it were nothing!—but for me it was really interesting to

be exposed to that codeswitching. And I learned some Arabic! But I have a question about *N'Zid*. Why did you choose Galway and Ireland as settings to include?

MM: I love Ireland. I *love* Ireland, and I wanted the title to have to do with the other side of the Mediterranean. The original title was like a joke, *Un Guinness à Galway*, to say to my readers, “I’m somewhere else.” But it’s my only Arabic title so far. I’ve been to Ireland many times and to the west coast; I love it. We rented a car and I have a friend there, a professor who invited me; she’s originally from Galway. And traveled together for several days and went to Connemara. It was wonderful, a magical coast with enormous cliffs, beaten by the waves. I was very touched by the history of poverty there, where they truly had nothing to eat except potatoes, where people took to boats on the sea in order to leave. They were fleeing from poverty like I fled from the regime [in Algeria]. That’s how I imagined the father of Nora as an Irishman from Galway, but he had survived everything and he spent his life building a boat which he never sailed, which Nora puts out to sea.

WB: Did you purposely name the protagonist Nora after the wife of James Joyce?

MM: Voilà! And in *La Nuit de la lézarde*, my female character is named Nour. Nour is “light” and Nora is “luminous one.” It’s a name that I like a lot. And obviously, someone from Galway who married someone from Algeria, that made the junction between the two cultures.

WB: Finally, the last question. What do you not reveal in your writing?

MM: Writing gets at what’s most intimate, and it seems to me that I went there. I don’t have the impression that there’s anything hidden. One terrible thing, on the contrary, is that by dint of writing, and especially writing about the self—autobiographical literature, that is—I ended up

understanding memory. In fact, there was a memory, a traumatic shock, which I recount in *Je dois tout à ton oubli*.

So I had written *La Transe des insoumis*, and I had written *Mes hommes*, and because of this returning to my past, I had a predisposition to go farther although I didn't really know what that meant. One day, I was on duty [at the hospital], and I had a young patient, around thirty, and I liked her a lot. She was on dialysis, so I had known her for a while. She'd undergone an operation and I'd been of charge of her dialysis after that. She died under my care that day. I did everything to save her, but she died. It was a terrible shock. I didn't know what we had done to her. We discovered afterwards that the surgeon must have known she had liver failure. And her brothers, too, had died after an operation, yet [the doctors at my hospital] didn't know about it; they hadn't looked into her medical history.

I was so angry because the stupidity of others had caused the death of this woman, who was younger than me. I'd never felt this way because to be a doctor is to be constantly exposed to sickness and death. You're happy sometimes when you succeed, but sometimes death is stronger and shows us the limits of our knowledge and what we can do. Even if we're shaken up, we're humbled also. We're doctors and there's a science to it, but sometimes, sometimes it's not possible. You just have to accept it.

I'd returned home and was in such a state. It was winter; I lit a fire in the fireplace, and I lay down. I needed a big glass of whiskey. And there was a wind outside, the tramontane. I listened to it screeching, and in this state, where the alcohol perhaps lowered my inhibitions a little, I saw the hand, I saw the image... An image from my early childhood which I'd completely forgotten. I saw the hand of my mother suffocating a newborn, a bastard of the family. I sat down and I

asked myself, “What in the world is this?” And the image stayed with me. Little by little, things became clearer. I was three and a half years old. I’d completely forgotten this episode.

In *Je dois tout à ton oubli*, [the protagonist] is the little girl that I was. I had nightmares for months. Once, I’d gone to bed, and I seem to remember that someone opened my door, and I saw the child that I was, with long braids, four years old. She sat on the corner of my bed and she said to me that she was not happy because I’d forgotten, that I had everything wrong, something like that. “I have everything wrong, I betrayed you.” I told her, “No,” and tried to console her. In fact, I woke up and thought, “Yes, this child, I wasn’t happy that I’d forgotten her.” I wasn’t happy. As if the child that I used to be was unhappy because I was just now discovering her.

And in my novel, I tried to address the child that I was. This time, the title, *Je dois tout à ton oubli*, is to her that I am saying that. It’s because *you* forgot that *I* could live without having this enormous thing [weighing me down]. So I suddenly understood also that the distance at which my mother held me, and at which I also held her, that was the source [of the forgetting]. I was making my mother afraid because she didn’t know if I knew what had happened, and so we had our distance and our memory. I thought that she didn’t love me just because I was recalcitrant. I also didn’t approach her either because I absolutely didn’t want to be what she incarnated.

However, the source of all of it was much more troubling. It was a childhood trauma which I’d totally forgotten and which had resurfaced with the death of this woman who was younger than me. It took four or five years of writing to process it.

And the wind. A sandstorm was happening that day [my mother suffocated the newborn], and that erased this horror from my mind. The day [the girl died], there was the tramontane also, a strong one. I heard the tramontane and I saw this image again. I sat down and called [my friend]

Mathilde. “Mathilde, I think I’m going mad!” She said, “No, what’s going on?” I told her about the death [of the girl] and I said, “Listen, this is messing with my head.” She said, “Do you want me to come over?” I said, “Yes.” She came. She sat down and we talked for a long time, and while talking to her, I reconstructed the story little by little. I told her, “I’m crazy.” She said, “No, you forgot this, like amnesia.” And so I called it a “un accident vitale de mémoire.” Like a stroke [AVC, in French].

WB: And it was provoked by the wind.

MM: By the wind, by the death of my patient, by autobiographical writing for several years. It was *I* who had suppressed this. I’d completely blocked it out from my life for fifty years. I hadn’t been home [to Algeria] for a long time, and I went there and said to my mother—I wanted to do this face to face—I told her, “I saw you. I saw what you did.” And she raised her arms to the sky, and she said to me, “What did you want us to do? It was a bastard. What did you want us to do?”

So I had the confession. The child was the bastard of her sister and my uncle, brother of my father, who couldn’t get married because he was promised the third sister. So it was a great big family mess. And they’d snuck around instead of marrying. For years, the young sister of the three hated my uncle. Afterwards, so many terrible things were blamed on this. It was extraordinary.

I think it’s my most beautiful title, *Je dois tout à ton oubli*. For many months, I told myself I couldn’t write. I couldn’t write about it. But in the end, I said, “Yes, of course, it’s *necessary* that I write about it.”

WB: And were things better with your mother after that?

MM: The next time I saw her, she was dead. She died a year and a half after that. But I was... “glad” isn’t the word. It was a good thing that I could say that to her, but I didn’t tell her that I’d forgotten it and that it had come back to me. I had the confirmation that it wasn’t a delirium, that it had come out because of great anxiety, that it was reality.

So I saw all of my childhood differently: my relationship with my mother, I saw it all again from a new angle, my revolt, etc. It was based primarily on an enormous family trauma. I wrote in *La Transe des insoumis* that I suffocated, but this sensation of suffocating a child, stemming from that, the fear that one would suffocate me. To see a baby suffocated... I had fled [when I saw it]. I ran out into the sandstorm. My father saw me running away and shouted, “Malika, what are you doing!” He brought me back to the house in a state of shock. I was actually in shock. And after, I didn’t remember anything. Like people who see something violent in front of them lose the ability to speak; me, I lost the memory of this instant.

WB: In order to survive?

MM: To survive. But the child me, the child had tormented me to say it out loud, to experience it. So was by writing that I got her to leave me in peace. I told her that I’d leave her in peace as well. To say to her, “You actually did me a favor. You permitted me, while guarding that memory, to revolt, to defy my family.”

WB: What did your mother think of your revolt? Did she understand in some way?

MM: She told me, “You always want more and more. What’s necessary for you? Where are you going to go? Are you going to Mars?” I already felt like I *was* a Martian. She didn’t understand that I wanted more, that I wanted to be a doctor and didn’t even want to come back, to settle in

Kénadsa, marry a general or whatever, that I wanted to go to France. I hadn't seen her for two years before I left [to move to France]. I flew to Kénadsa, stayed twenty-four hours; I saw my parents and hugged them, knowing that they weren't going to see me for a long time. They didn't know that and it wasn't worth it to tell them. I didn't want to hinder my freedom of movement. So I [left], and after I wrote to them from Paris, telling them that I had left Algeria, that I lived in Paris. They didn't respond and they didn't want to hear anymore from me.

-Translation from French with help from Kayla Kauffman

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