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*Imagological Analysis of the Algerian Dessert in The Sheltering
Sky (1949) and La Nuit de la Lézarde (1998)*

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Dedications

I dedicate this work to my lovely family
My parents; Ahmed and Ouardia
My three brothers Mahdi, Mohamed, and Lounes
My uncle, Hamid and Ali.
My favourite aunt Hanane.

Kenza.

I dedicate this work to
My dear parents Akli (Amar) and Dahbia
My four brothers Mohand, Kamel, Lyes, and Sidali
And my sweet sister Lydia.
My beloved future husband Nadhir.

Leila.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the representation of the desert in Paul Bowles's "The Sheltering Sky" (1949), and Malika Mokeddem's "La nuit de la lézarde" (1998) using Imagology as a theoretical framework. Imagology, a theory focusing on the study of images and representations of different cultures developed by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, it is applied to analyze the portrayal of the desert in these literary works according to characters' perceptions and themes. The representation of the desert in the works of Bowles and Mokeddem, examined through the lens of Imagology, reveals the complex cultural and symbolic significance of the desert in fiction. The desert serves as a crucial space, reflecting the existential and psychological state of the characters, and functioning as a metaphor for the encounter between different cultures. Through the application of Imagology, the representation of the desert can be seen as a construct that shapes and is shaped by cultural perceptions, challenging limited views and inviting a nuanced understanding of its multifaceted symbolism. The desert highlights the interconnectedness of literary representations and cultural identity, and is a site of exploration, where the boundaries between the self and the other, the familiar and the foreign, are blurred. This representation invites readers to question preconceived notions and stereotypes, emphasizing the importance of understanding the cultural, historical, and political contexts that inform these two selected literary representations of the desert in both novels.

Key words: Algerian desert, Stereotypes, Representation, Imagology.

I. Introduction

The present dissertation is a comparative study of two prominent literary works which were written in different times by two distinct authors. It revolves around Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) and Malika Mokeddem's "La Nuit de la Lézarde" (1998). At first glance, the two novels appear to be incomparable because the two authors belong to different literary traditions, wrote their novels in different languages and periods. Moreover, they also can be seen as very distinct in terms of themes, settings, and narrative styles. While Mokeddem focuses in her *La Nuit de la Lézarde* on exploring the intersection of culture and the complexities of identity as an Algerian woman, Bowles's narrative examines the experiences of American expatriates who venture into the Sahara Desert, with focus on the themes of alienation, existential conflicts, and a quest for self-discovery.

The questions that we shall address in the course of our dissertation and to which we shall provide an answer is how can we shape a comparison of two literary works by Mokeddem, an Algerian Francophone woman author with Bowles, an American writer and composer, known for his exploration of existential and psychological themes? Our comparison is primary justified by the fact Mokeddem's *La Nuit de la Lézarde* and Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* share an important element for comparison; it is their representation of the desert. Mokeddem's narrative set in the Algerian desert, focusing on the lives of the nomadic people, her ancestors, and the impact of modernity on their traditional way of life while *The Sheltering Sky* takes place also in the same desert of North Africa. It follows the adventures of an American couple crossing the Sahara, seeking for the re-discovery of their human spirit in a different and remote environment.

More precisely, the present study of the two novels will be basically based on the comparison of the ways the desert attracted and inspired the two authors to create literary works, in lens of imagology theory which is known as the study of literary representation of national stereotypes, developed by Manfer Beller and Joep Leerssen in their book: “Imagology: History and Method”. We shall also investigate how the desert not only tells many stories through the main characters’ adventures and perceptions, which may converge and differ in many aspects at the same time, but also how do they perceive that space. What is important is to compare Bowles and Mokeddem’s literary representations of the desert despite their different backgrounds, cultural context and geographical distances. In other words, the main focus of our comparative analysis will be on the descriptions images constructed on this infinite space by a foreign and a native woman writer. Yet, before starting our comparison, it is important to refer briefly to the prior studies devoted to the selected novels by literary critics and reviewers.

Review of the Literature

Beginning with *The Sheltering Sky*, Iorena Pérez Hernandez examines the formation of the characters in Paul Bowles's novel under the light of two cognitive theories, namely Lakoff's (1996) theory of the self and Johnson (1987)'s conception of image-schemas . Hernandez (1997) discusses the cognitive mechanisms through the reality that the three main characters (Port, Kit and Tunner) present. For her, each of the characters symbolizes one thing within the whole story. Port, for instance, is presented as someone who, most of the time, controls the two other characters, especially Kit. He oppresses her and considers her as a slave. Furthermore, Hernández writes that three constituent parts exist in one individual in arrange to form a total one. She points out that: “Only when all these parts exist together can a person function correctly” (p.267). According to her, the novel is split into three key

sections; Tunner's mental health, Kit's mental disorder, and Port's death .In other words, in order to comprehend the essence of life, these three periods are essential. (Hernandez, 1997).

In an article entitled, "Grains of Utopia: The Desert as Literary Oasis in Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* and Wilfred Thesiger's *Arabian Sands*", (2000), Syrine C. Hout explores the literary representations of the desert in Paul Bowles' novel *The Sheltering Sky* and Wilfred Thesiger's *Arabian Sands* (1984). The author examines how the desert is portrayed as a place of utopia and how it shapes the characters' experiences. The article deals how both authors were repulsed by the softness and rigidity of Western life and set out to explore the deserts, traveling among peoples who had never seen a European. Syrine C. Hout examines the themes of isolation, self-discovery, and the contrast between the desert's harsh reality and its perceived utopian nature in the two works of literature. She notes that the two novelist's perception of the compared spaces of the of the desert's otherness stands as a symbol of the restricted cultural exchange between East and West. (Hout, 2000).

Moreover, Bouvet Rachel is another critic who has examined Bowles' novel. In an article, "L'Altérité du Désert dans *The Sheltering Sky* by Paul Bowles" (2001), she explores how the desert comes to have symbolic meaning and proposes viewing it as a place of "Otherness." The article addresses the idea of "Otherness," which is so full of perspectives and ways for the interested reader to delve into the reading of the "Other," reflect on it, make sense of it, and attempt to understand the world in all its complexity. Bouvet elucidates the intricacy of the concept of the "Other" by means of this article, which strikes a balance between various disciplines in the human relationship with the desert. (Rachel, 2001).

As far as Malika Mokeddem's *La Nuit de la Lézarde* is concerned, Jane Elizabeth Evans (2010) examines many facets of the author's literary works. In her thesis entitled, *Tactical Silence in the Novels of Malika Mokeddem* (2001), Evans writes that Mokeddem establishes a new style of writing in her work *La Nuit de la Lézarde*, by using innovative

themes and issues. Unlike Mokeddem's earlier works, which focus on women's subordination, the impact of tradition and religion on the women's emancipation, the selected novel does so in a more subdued manner, deviating from the blatant criticism of religious fanaticism that was prevalent in Algeria during the Black Decade, which inspired her first novels. (Evans, 2010).

Furthermore, according to Nevine El Nossery's review of *Témoignages fictionnels au féminin : Une réécriture des Blancs de la guerre civile algérienne* (2013), is death. The voices of those who have been silenced will be heard, thus the latter will not be final. She also sees travelling as a recurring topic throughout Mokeddem's works, such as in *Les Hommes qui Marchent* and *La Nuit de la Lézarde*", as a symbol for women's resistance to confinement and marginalization. According to her, Mokeddem is "la plus rebelle des écrivaines Arabes". One of her main areas of interest is rape, a terrible crime and a means of male power that is most frequently ignored and in reality, attributed to the degraded and shamed women of patriarchal culture. El Nossery lists a large number of other female authors who write about rape. She believes that women writers who offer a dramatized account of history work to combat the denial of women's fundamental humanity by those who would distort Algerian national history. El Nossery claims in her conclusion that, because these authors typically took up writing at considerable personal risk, their stories have more truth value. (El Nossery, 2013).

The main theme of the book, Sophie Laval's article, entitled, "Oublier Les Limites de la Censure" (2002) writes that the Algerian author wrote her literature amid a time of political turmoil and conflicts, which did not stop her from questioning the boundaries and restrictions placed on women in general. According to Laval, the act of writing:

L'acte d'écriture se transforme, dans ces conditions, en un engagement pour lutter contre les limites imposées par un pouvoir politique décidé à taire toutes les revendications, à faire fi de la liberté personnelle pour imposer une dictature implacable. Les écrivains Algériens se sont retrouvés face à cette situation sociale et politique qui conditionne leur art et rend

impossible le développement de celui-ci sans une prise de position contre le pouvoir en place. Ceux qui se risquent à le questionner payent souvent cette audace de leur vie ou, du moins, de leur sécurité (Laval, 2002).

Issue and working hypothesis

From the review of some of the literature on Paul Bowles and Malika Mokeddem and their works, one can notice that many critics have dealt with the two selected works; “The Sheltering Sky” and “La Nuit de la Lézarde” separately. Some have limited their analysis of Paul Bowles’ novel to its literary value and context, while others have focused on the existence of the main characters and their symbolism. Similarly, Mokeddem’s selected novel has been studied by comparing its form and style with the author’s previous literary works. However, our reading of the two works reveal the representation of the desert, and its influences on people positively and negatively.

Our task is to undertake a comparative study of Paul Bowles’ *The Sheltering Sky* and Malika Mokeddem’s *La Nuit de la Lézarde*, with a particular focus on the desert imagery present in both novels, by examining its literary and cultural significance. Thus, our comparison will be based on the theory of imagology according to Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen.

Methodological Outline

This dissertation follows the guidelines of the IMRAD method. It includes a review of some critical studies devoted to *The Sheltering Sky* and *La Nuit de la Lézarde*. Additionally, it identifies our issue and working hypothesis. It is followed by the section on methods and materials, in which we explain the relevance of concept of “Imagology” to the two selected works. Then, our research will examine from a comparative perspective Bowles’ and Mokeddem’s lives as well as their literary careers. This section also includes a general overview and the backgrounds of both works respective historical periods. In the results section, we shall present the research’s findings. The Discussion section is divided into two

chapters. The first one focuses on the representation of the desert through the main characters according to Imagology theory. The second chapter concerns always literary and cultural images of the desert, which appear and reappear through settings and the different themes of the two novels.

I. Methods and Materials

1. Methods

This section deals with the theoretical concept of “Imagology” that we shall try to define in order to apply it in the two fictions. We intend to borrow Manfred Beller’s and Joep Leerssen’s theory on “Imagology”, they wrote that this theory can be explained as the study of cultural representations, and cultural stereotypes; it is the study of our mental images concerning ourselves and others. It permits us to carefully consider and analyze the complex interaction between images and perceptions in the context of our research. Imagology is the study of comparative literary representations, operated in a constructivist perspective in its analysis of international stereotypes. As Manfred Beller argues “Imagology studies the origin and function of characteristics of other countries and people, in the way in which they are presented in works of literature” (M. Beller, 2007. The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters). He said that Imagology theory is a field of study that investigates the origins and purposes behind the portrayal of traits associated with different countries and peoples as presented in literary works. As Leerssen, for instance, asserts that “Imagology is not a form of society, its aim to understand a discourse of representation rather than a society”. In the same vein, Manfred Beller observes that “when people from various countries and cultures meet each others, real experiences and mental images compete”. (Beller, M. Lerssen, J. 2007. Imagology: history and method).

Imagology possesses an archeological dimension and a pre-history. Its archeological roots trace back to the cultural criticism of early-modern Europe. This latter established the foundation for the exploration of imaginative constructions and representations of other cultures. The pre-history of Imagology includes the theoretical underpinnings that made it possible to analyze literary cultural images in depth and consider their larger sociocultural implications. As Leerssen asserts: “Imagology has its archeology and its pre-history. The archeology leads us to the cultural criticism of early-modern Europe which began in the tradition of Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558)”. (Leerssen, J. 2007. *Imagology: history and method*).

Manfred Beller said that the representations of other people can also be seen in painting, these visual depictions are projected optically, capturing people's external appearances. However, the most important domain that gives rise to national-typological functions is the domain of ideas and mental imagery. The interaction between mental images and optical projection shapes how societies perceive and represent the "other," creating a dynamic intersection between the cognitive domains of cultural identity and artistic representation. He explains: “images of other peoples can also be found in paintings and caricatures, they are projected optically, perceived in their outward appearance and also defined metaphorically, but the most important sphere of origin of all national-typological fictions are the mental imaginations and ideas.”(Beller, M. 2007. *The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters*).

According to the explanations provided by the two theorists, it becomes evident that the concept of Imagology holds significant relevance to our study in examining the narratives of Bowles and Mokeddem. This imagological analysis not only amplifies our comprehension of their storytelling methods, but also aims at revealing how the two writers construct and present cultural identities, exploring whether they perpetuate stereotypes, challenge cultural

boundaries, or offer multifaceted portrayals of their respective societies in relation to the desert. Using a comparative approach, we shall analyze and interpret how these authors perceive and portray cultural identities, offering insights into the complexities of representation in the two texts. Bowles, as many other Western authors, develops a publishable story to share the exotic aspects of the desert to create sensations for his readers. The images provided by this American travel writer will be paralleled with that of a local writer, who tells her story from inside providing images of a country she is familiar with. Africa and the East represent a site of the exotic, the mysterious, and the strange for Europeans travelers and writers. In European culture, travel writing has a long tradition and its origins go back to the Ancient Greece. This genre is characterized by a specific imagology and cultural representations. Consequently, the concept of imagology is useful when analyzing the two novels in order to identify similarities and differences between Bowles and Mokeddem about their representations of the Algerian desert.

The discussion section is divided into two chapters. The first chapter concerns the images of the desert that are presented through the main characters of the two novels. The second chapter will be about the themes in both works. The dissertation ends with a general conclusion that restate the main issues treated in this peace of research.

2. Materials

a. The Historical Background of The Sheltering Sky (1949)

Paul Bowles *The Sheltering Sky* is a novel that reflects the historical, cultural, and political context of the mid-20th century, particularly in the setting of North Africa. The narrative tells about the encounter of Americans with the foreign during a transitional moment in cultural and political history, engaging with the problems and limits of the new world order that was emerging simultaneously with Bowles's travels to Morocco and Algeria. As its title

suggests, the author portrays the Western subject's desire to escape the modern world seeking refuge in the desert through an experience in this “mysterious, dangerous, and compelling” landscape

The writer Paul Bowels wrote this first novel, *The sheltering Sky* in 1949 and its story, as mentioned earlier, is set in North Africa, particularly in Algeria, which was still a French colony. 1940s was a period often referred to as the “Post-war period”, which was characterized by a focus on individualism and existentialism. In the years leading up to World War II and during the war itself, many Americans and Europeans travelled to North Africa as a way to escape the constraints of their own societies and seek adventure in a place that was rather unexplored and unfamiliar. This is reflected in the novel through the characters of Port and Kit Moresby as well as through the major themes of that period, which include the search for the “Self”, the struggle for meaning in a chaotic world, and the fragmentation of society.

As part of that historical context, *The sheltering Sky* follows the journey of three American travelers, namely Port, Kit and Tunner, who engage to visit North Africa after world war II. The story concentrates on Port Moresby and his wife Kit, who set off and cross their paths through Algeria by leaving the modern world behind with their friend Tunner. Initially, the trip was meant to assist Port and Kit in resolving their marital problems because they had recently realized they truly love one another, but they feel helpless when they find out how their relationship started to fail and how happiness abandons their couple. They thought it useful to go into the desert in order to refresh their feelings and restore their passion. Tunner, their friend embarks on a voyage into the Sahara Desert with the couple. His goal at this point is to diminish tension between Port and Kit whose marriage is on the verge of disintegrating. Amid the marital conflicts, Bowles provides a complex and atmospheric narrative that explores the psychological and emotional challenges faced by three characters

in their attempts to cope with the harsh realities of the desert and the existential void that often accompanies the loss of personal values. The characters in the novel face a sense of disconnection and disillusionment, which can be seen as a reflection of the general mood of the time in which the novel was written.

b. Paul Frederick Bowles' Biography

In addition to the importance of the historical context, Bowles' biography is also significant to understand *The Sheltering Sky* because it provides context for the novel's themes and the cultural and political environment in which it was written. Bowles was born on December 30th, 1910, in New York. In addition to being a writer, he was also a composer, translator, playwright, poet, novelist, and music critic. He wrote various novels and short stories and his talent and abilities as a writer appeared early in his life.

Moreover, some fragments of Bowles' biography are included explicitly or implicitly in the novel. As an illustration, Bowles' nomadic lifestyle and experiences in Tangier, Morocco, inspired him in shaping this novel. The author wrote his *The Sheltering Sky* during his trips around Morocco and Algeria. This background provided him with firsthand knowledge of the North African landscape and culture, which is vividly portrayed in the novel. In his paper entitled: "Constructing the Postwar Art Novel: Paul Bowles, James Laughlin, and the Making of *The Sheltering Sky* (2020)," Evan Brier considers the story of the making of Bowles's novel *The Sheltering Sky* as a case study for the emergence of the art novel as a commercial niche after World War II.

Bowles' biography also offers insights into his literary style, which is characterized by a cool, detached prose that contrasts with the increasingly violent and irrational events in the novel. This style is evident in *The Sheltering Sky* and is a key aspect of the novel's unique narrative voice, with which the novel gained a critical success, was considered a model of

existential fiction, and had a great influence on his subsequent works. Therefore, understanding Paul Bowles' biography is essential for comprehending the historical, cultural, and political context of *The Sheltering Sky*. Bowles studied music and picked up the piano at the model school in his childhood. He, then, joined the monthly literary magazine at the public high school in Jamaica, which sparked his enthusiasm for writing. Then, as soon as he started working, he built his own library, began to produce surrealist music and poems. Bowles, however, abandoned his studies in April 1929 to travel to Paris. His interests turned to music while he was employed there by the Paris Herald Tribune. The Sonata for Oboe and Clarinet was Bowles' debut musical piece; on he worked in Paris in 1930. He joined Gertrude Stein's literary and creative community of that time. The person who challenge this aptitude as a musician was Stein, who had faith in his abilities as a poet too. She suggested him to visit Tangier in Morocco rather than spending his time on French Riviera as he had originally planned.

Bowles wrote *The Sheltering Sky* while on a trip with her to Morocco, which was his most powerful source of inspiration. After 36 years of marriage, Jane passed away in Spain in 1973. He wrote *The Denmark Vesey Opera* and *My heart's in the Highlands* for William Saroyan in 1939. He once more composed music for Saroyan in 1940 like *Love's Old Sweet* and *Shakespeare's Twelfth Night*. Bowles spent his later year in his home in Tangier, greeting visitors and people; he died on November 18th, 1999, and he was buried next to his parents' grave in New York.

c. Synopsis of *The Sheltering Sky*

The Sheltering Sky is a novel by Bowles tells the story of a married couple, Kit and Port Moresby, who traveled to North Africa in the company of their friend named Tunner. The narrative events happened in the years following the World War II. The author uses long sentences to depict the desert, manipulate the reader's emotions and give him the impression

that he is actually traveling across the desert while reading the travelogue. As the narrative progresses, the trip takes a dark turn as they become increasingly alienated from each other and their surroundings. Port, Kit and Tunner embark on a journey to escape the monotony of their everyday lives, but they quickly find themselves penetrating into the depth of the unfamiliar and sometimes dangerous environment of North Africa. As they struggle to make sense of their experiences and their relationships with each other, they are forced to confront the fragility of their own identities and the limitations of their understanding of the world around them. The narrative then focuses on the poor state of Port when he becomes ill, and his experiences of hallucinations, which increase mental fragility. He drifts away from reality and feels immersed in an unfamiliar environment. Amid the desert and its sandstorms, Port becomes more and more depressed and increasingly detached from his surroundings milieu and friends. In a sensational way, Bowles describes the black night, which serves as a symbol the protagonist's death in exploring the difficulty and the fragility of the human psyche under extreme circumstances. Bowles and Mokeddem, as already mentioned, come from different cultural and literary traditions and their literary works explore different themes and experiences. However, what they have in common is that both are known for their writing about the desert.

d. The Historical background of *La Nuit de la Lézarde* (1998)

Mokeddem's *La Nuit de la Lézarde* delves into her personal experiences as an Algerian woman writer and the historical context of Algeria. The novel addresses the challenges faced by women in Algeria, a country that struggled for independence from France and later grappled with Islamic fundamentalism in the 1990s. The author depicts women's struggle against misogyny, patriarchy, and Islamic fundamentalism. Her works highlight the historical context of Algeria, particularly in 1990s, and promote freedom to love and be loved in a conservative society where expressing feelings and desires can be challenging. With a

lyrical style, Mokeddem expresses sadness at the violence that plagued Algeria during that period. *La Nuit de la Lézarde* narrates the story of Nour, the main character, reflecting on the in tolerances and shortcomings of Algerian society, reflecting the historical and cultural context of the country during the 1990s.

Malika Mokeddem wrote her novel *La Nuit de la Lézarde* in 1998, which is set in Algeria. The 1990s was a period of significant cultural and literary activity. Despite the political turmoil and violence known as the “Black decade”, the country was still recovering from the Algerian war of independence, which had ended in 1962. Algeria sank into another atmosphere of violence throughout this dark decade. It was a time of torture and cruelty against a populace that had been oppressed and lived in constant fear of terrorist attacks. Thousands of Algerians, particularly intellectuals, journalists, and teachers were targeted by the attacks. Therefore, many people chose to live in exile as it is the case of Malika Mokeddem, who opted to live in France because of the provocative style of her writings. She criticizes the political system and the Algerian government. Regarding this, Kamel Igoudjil asserts the following in his book *Postcolonial Algerian Writers in French*:

During the Algerian civil war between 1991-1999, a new Feminine literature emerged in the literary space called “ the literature of urgency” the rise of female Algerian literature at that time was due to the fact that women had been condemned before and during the civil war. Women were the specific target of Islamism ; therefore Algerian women novelists took up the pen not only to testify to the horrors of “unrest” .But also to condemn the physical violence exerted against women ,and particularly, to reclaim the public space from which religious fundamentalism wanted them to be excluded (Kamel, 2015).

La Nuit de la Lézarde explores the experiences of women during that period through the main character struggling to cope the complex social and political landscape of Algeria. Mokeddem describes the difficulty of a woman living a sort of exile in her own country. She examines the place of religion in society and the threat posed by religious fanaticism. In addition, she criticizes the increase of violence against women murder threats to her. The struggle of the

protagonist of the novel is an illustration of difficulty for women to live in that time, as it is apparent through the dilemmas faced by the young woman named Nour.

e. Malika Mokeddem's Biography

Malika Mokeddem was born on October 5th, 1949 in Kendsa (Bechar), in the Southern part of Algeria. She is the eldest of her ten brothers and sisters and the secondary daughter of an illiterate nomadic family. She studied in the primary school of her native village. At the secondary school, she was the only girl to go to school and obtaining the baccalaureate exam in Bechar. She decided to study Medicine in Oran where she specialized in Nephrology in 1979. She settled in Montpellier, where she made the decision to devote her time to writing and literature.

Mokeddem, almost wrote novels related to the history of Algeria from colonization to independence, and even after. Among her novels, we can cite: *Les Hommes qui Marchent* (1990), *Les Siècles des sauterelles* (1992), *L'interdite* (1993), and *La Nuit de la Lézarde* (1998). The recurrent subject of most of her novels is the desert, where she depicts the images of the Sahara in her county. During the Black Decade, Mokeddem was one of the Francophone Algerian women who spoke out against the violence committed against all the Algerian citizens. She has received many death threats from radical Islamic organizations. Thus, she decided to live in France seeking for more security and protection.

More importantly, Malika Mokeddem left her family because of her personal experiences and the challenges she faced within them. The imbalance in her parents' preference for boys over girls likely created a sense of injustice and inequality for her from a young age. Choosing to immigrate to France can be seen as a way for Mokeddem to break free from the constraints of her upbringing and societal expectations. Her decision to leave her family and start a new life in France can be understood as a form of escape.

f. Synopsis of *La Nuit de la Lézarde*

La Nuit de la Lézarde is Malika Mokeddem's novel, which was published in 1998. It is divided into nine chapters. It is set in a deserted Ksar in Southern Algerian where all the its residents left except two friends, a young woman Nour, and a blind man Sassi, who continue to live in this wild place. Nour escapes from her husband's home and finds herself in the deserted Ksar after he decides to remarry as she is unable to have children. Nour decides to settle in the home of the man who killed himself, after a long walking in the desert. She rejects the forced marriage and leaves her husband's house to explore the Sahara in search of independence and freedom. Nour meets Sassi, a blind man, her only neighbor and both become close friends. As time goes on, Sassi secretly starts feeling love for her, but she is just interested in his friendship. They invest their time raising a variety of vegetables in their small garden to sell them in the village. She occasionally repaints her home and finds consolation in the visit of Dounia, an adolescent girl who seeks solace in her books, which represent an escape to external world. Nour loves also the three boys Alilou, Kamel, and Bachir who help her by keeping her company at the Ksar. At the end, Nour feels sick and Sassi transports her to the hospital, but after a short time, she decides to come back to the Ksar where she dies.

Our comparison of the two novels' historical context, the two author's biographies, and summaries reveal the following common points: first, the two authors are disillusioned by their respective countries' constraints. Therefore, both spent the majority of their lives abroad. While Bowles chose to live in Paris then settle in Morocco, Mokeddem opts for living in the South of France where he feels free from the harsh cultural and social norms, which prevent woman's emancipation. Both writers share a self-imposed exile to forget about the problems they met in their homelands. Moreover, a parallel can be drawn between the times in which the two narratives were written. Bowles published his novel "The Sheltering Sky" in a period of disillusion and alienation and the novel captures the feelings of that time. This vivid

description contributed to make of the novel a classic of American literature and a significant work of the post-world war period as it reflects on the spirit of adventure and the search for meaning that characterized that historical era and provides pictures of the North African landscape and its impact on the characters.

Similarly, the biography, the historical context of Malika Mokeddem's *La Nuit de la Lézarde* are very important to understanding the story. At the time when the novel was written, Algeria passed through a bloody conflict, which targeted, as already mentioned, particularly learned men, security forces, and women. The 1990s, was a turbulent and traumatic period, which had a significant impact on Mokeddem's writing of *La Nuit de la Lézarde* creating a tense and chaotic atmosphere that profoundly affects the characters and the narrative. The conflict disrupts the lives of the Algerian people, leading to fear, insecurity, and a sense of impending danger. The characters in the novel cope with the psychological and emotional toll of living in a society plagued by violence, as they navigate the challenges and uncertainties of daily life. More significantly, Bowles and Mokeddem's portrayal of two tumultuous periods in Algerian and world history underscore the pervasive impact of the war and its outcomes on individual (characters) lives. The two novels describe the psychological and emotional struggles of characters as they try to cope with the profound changes and disruptions caused by the conflict, ultimately highlighting the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. What is also common to both narratives is their representations of the desert with its positive and negative aspects, as we shall examine and discuss it in details throughout the coming chapters.

III. Results

This section of this dissertation reveals the results reached through our comparison of the representation of the desert in Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* and Mokeddem's *La Nuit de la Lézarde*. By using the theoretical concept of "Imagology", an important branch of comparative literature, which studies, from a comparative perspective, national and cultural representations. More precisely, our comparative analysis focuses on the theoretical concepts of two literary scholars and cultural historians, Joep Leerssen and Manfred Beller, who write that "imagology" aims to understand a discourse of representation rather than a society.

We have tried to study cultural stereotypes and images in the literary text of Paul Bowles. We illustrated how an American writer perceives and represents another space as well as another culture. We focused on how his perceptions and representations of the desert can shape intercultural relations, identities, and attitudes. We have provided examples from Bowles' text, which illustrate how stereotypes and images of the Algerian desert and its people are constructed and disseminated. Comparatively, we analyzed other images concerning the desert as described by one of its inhabitants, Malika Mokeddem, who presents another facet of the Algerian desert. It appears that Bowles and Mokeddem present the desert in nearly divergent ways. For Bowles, the desert is a sort of "shelter" as the novel's title suggests, whereas Mokeddem presents it as a space of confinement as well as a site to rebel against her social traditions.

The study discovered that the two novels provide different and similar images of the Algerian desert and its people. These differences result from the experiences of the Western writer as a traveler who has visited many places around the world and the Algerian writer who examines the desert of her country. What remains common is the two authors' particular emphasis on the theme of the search for self-discovery, which suggests a connection between

the authors' lives and their works. The following part of our dissertation will mention points about the examination of the two novels' shaping of characters and themes.

IV. Discussion

In the course of the present section of our work, we shall concentrate on Paul Bowles' and Malika Mokeddem's representations of the desert through characters and themes as displayed in *The Sheltering Sky* and *La Nuit de La Lézarde*. In the first chapter, we shall focus on the depictions of the desert by considering the main characters such as Port and Kit, and then we shall compare them with Nour and Sassi. We shall then draw parallels, in the second chapter, between the main themes that the two selected literary works focus on. All these elements will be examined in relation to imagology.

Chapter one: The Characters' Representation of the Desert

The Sheltering Sky and *La Nuit De Lézarde* are two novels that follow a story of two couples that sleep in separated rooms, which center around the desert. On the one hand, Paul Bowles's main characters are Americans; they see the desert as a place of self-discovery. The American traveler goes on a journey across different locations such as Ain Krorfa, Boussif, El Ga'a and so on to meet different people. The novel is divided into three parts: *Tea in the Sea*, *The Earth's Sharp Edge* and *The Sky*. The three parts are divided into 30 chapters. On the other hand, Malika Mokeddem's *La Nuit de Lézarde* is concerned, it was written later in 1998. The story tells about people of the Sahara and shows their difficult life in the desert.

In this chapter, we focus on what links the two narratives in the two author's perceptions of the desert. In other words, how Bowles and Mokeddem present their insights of the desert through their main characters. We shall analyze them according to Imagology theory by examining the different images that appear and reappear in the two narratives.

a. **The Images of Desert from Bowles' Characters Point of view**

Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky*, as mentioned previously, is set in North Africa, precisely in the deserts of Algeria and Morocco. The desert is described in the novel as a vast and challenging area of sand, dunes, and harsh landscapes. It is a place of powerful isolation, desolation, and mystery. Bowles refers to local populations, which the three American travelers met on their trips across the desert. The Arabs and Berbers are portrayed as primitive, dirty, lazy, and mysterious. Bowles, who had lived in North Africa for an extended period, may have drawn upon his own experiences and observations of the region as the subsequent excerpt illustrates:

On the terrace of the Cafe d'Eckmuhl-Noiseux a few Arabs sat drinking mineral water; only their fezzes of varying shades of red distinguished them from the rest of the population of the port. Their European clothes were worn and gray; it would have been hard to tell what the cut of any garment had been originally. The nearly naked shoeshine boys squatted on their boxes looking down at the pavement, without the energy to wave away the flies that crawled over their faces. Inside the cafe the air was cooler but without movement, and it smelled of stale wine and urine (Bowles, 1949, p.8).

The passage above shows the lens of imagology theory to provide a clear picture of cultural and social dynamics. The mention of Arabs, set apart from the rest of the port's population only by their red fezzes, sitting on the Cafe d'Eckmuhl-Noiseux's terrace, creates an immediate contrast. Their choice of mineral water suggests a certain level of affluence, or at least a desire to project such an image, which suggests a socioeconomic divide. Their worn and gray European clothing, on the other hand, points to a different story—one of assimilation or adaptation to a new cultural setting—possibly signifying a blending of cultures or a loss of original identity. This story of poverty and social marginalization is further supported by the picture of the almost nude shoeshine boys, which brings to light the harsh realities that some societal groups must endure. Static and decay that permeate the social landscape are metaphorically represented by the smell of stale wine and urine in the cafe's stagnant atmosphere. The passage deftly examines identity, assimilation, and social inequality overall,

encouraging readers to consider the intricate interactions that exist between perception, culture, and societal structures. Such contrastive images appear clearly right from the beginning of the novel when Paul Bowles establishes the difference between the tourist and the traveler through the voice of Port, who states:

Another important difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his own civilization without question; not so the traveler, who compares it with the others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking. And the war was one... (p.8).

The main character, Port Moresby, and his wife, Kit, as adventurers, dare to go across the desert in order to flee and forget about their sad and blustery lives in America. Once in the desert, they find themselves confronting the awesome emptiness and hostility of the Sahara, where the vastness of the landscape accentuates their marital conflicts. Throughout the narrative, Bowles uses the desert as a symbolic image, which goes hand in hand with the characters' psychological and emotional states, as they struggle with their inner conflicts and the challenges of their journey. Port's perception of the desert and the places surrounding it is characterized by a sense of transformation, alienation, and displacement. The following passage is an illustration:

Everything looked unfamiliar: the houses, the streets, the cafes, even the formation of the town with regard to the hill. Instead of finding a summit from which to begin the downward walk, he discovered that here the streets all led perceptibly upward, no matter which way he turned; to descend he would have had to go back. The Arab walked solemnly along with him, now beside him, now slipping behind when there was not enough room to walk two abreast. He no longer made attempts at conversation; Port noticed with relish that he was a little out of breath. (p.21).

Port's experience of being unfamiliar in the town is expressed clearly in this passage emphasizing his sense of confusion and cultural alienation. Everything is portrayed as foreign, including streets, cafes, and houses, which emphasizes a significant cultural and spatial displacement. Port's difficulty navigating the streets of the town, which seem to lead upward, represents the difficulty of adjusting to a new cultural setting. The protagonist is constantly reminded of his outsider status by the Arab who is walking beside him; their physical distance

and lack of conversation reinforce social and cultural barriers. The theory of imagology, which studies how cultural perceptions influence interactions and experiences, is best illustrated by this encounter. It draws attention to issues of cultural displacement, conflict between cultures, and the difficulties of defining oneself and finding a place in a multicultural society.

Moreover, when Port was invited to drive to Boussif with Lyly's family, he was looking to the land, the valley, the tents and the hills from the car. They stayed in the hotel and Port was fascinated by the landscape, which he describes an idyllic picture in what follows:

The roof of the hotel in the early morning, before the sun had come from behind the nearby mountainside, was a pleasant place for breakfast. The tables were set out along the edge of the terrace, overlooking the valley. In the gardens below, the fig trees and high stalks of papyrus moved slightly in the fresh morning wind. Farther down were the larger trees where the storks had made their huge nests, and at the bottom of the slope was the river, running with thick red water. Port sat drinking his coffee, enjoying the rain-washed smell of the mountain air. Just below, the storks were teaching their young to fly; the ratchet-like croaking of the older birds was mingled with shrill cries from the fluttering young ones. (p.72).

The passage's description of the hotel roof as a calm place to have breakfast in the middle of a beautiful setting plays on cultural ideas and views about the natural world and its inhabitants. The way that fig trees, papyrus stalks, and stork nests are portrayed plays a part in shaping a specific cultural perception of the environment. Due to their widespread symbolism, storks can signify a variety of concepts, including wisdom, rebirth, and fertility, depending on the culture. Furthermore, the image of the river gushing with dark red water could have symbolic meaning, perhaps referring to cultural connotations with life or blood. The passage demonstrates how literary representation shapes and reinforces cultural perceptions of nature and wildlife, providing insight into societal attitudes and beliefs. This is in line with the imagology theory.

Port, an American traveler, comes to North Africa with his wife for the sake of adventure and self-discovery. The couple looks for meaning of life so they choose the desert as an ideal

region to regain their lost passion and to forget about the constraints of their lives in America. When Port reaches the desert, he expresses certain preconceptions and stereotypes about the region and its people. Such vision can be seen in his statement: "But my world is not humanity's world. It is the world as I see it" (p.78).

Furthermore, another stereotypical description appears in the fourth chapter when Port goes out to walk in the street and meets a group of people, which let him to create a collective biased image. He depicts them as individuals lacking personal motivation and vitality. Like the space in which they live in, they are hostile and unfriendly to strangers. His self-reflection is based on a certain preconceived notion about Arabs' behavior as the passage asserts:

How friendly are they? Their faces are masks. They all look a thousand years old. What little energy they have is only the blind, mass desire to live, since no one of them eats enough to give him his own personal force. But what do they think of me? Probably nothing. Would one of them help me if I were to have an accident? Or would I lie here in the street until the police found me? What motive could any one of them have for helping me? They have no religion left. Are they Moslems or Christians? They don't know. They know money, and when they get it, all they want is to eat. But what's wrong with that? Why do I feel this way about them? (p.16).

The passage above shows that Port views the people with suspicion and a sense of detachment. The descriptions of the people imply a lack of vitality due to their aged appearance and expressionless faces. The narrator expresses a sense of loneliness and mistrust of human connection by wondering if these people would help in a time of need. The passage illustrates the narrator's understanding of societal and cultural attitudes toward the observed group from the standpoint of imagology. The narrator's stereotype or perception is reflected in the way the characters are portrayed as cold and uninterested. This image is further reinforced by references to their lack of religious affiliation and their emphasis on worldly matters like food and money. A deeper examination of societal beliefs and prejudices is highlighted by the narrator's reflection on their own emotions and assessments. In the end, the passage supports the ideas of imagology theory by demonstrating how literary representation modifies and reinforces cultural perceptions.

The narrative voice, in Bowles's novel, considers the Arabs and Berbers as part of an exotic background. They are reduced to mere objects to enhance the atmosphere and internal struggles of the Western protagonists. As an illustration, Port shows no consideration to Smail; he does not even tell him his real name, pretending to be "Jean," instead of Port. For Port, Smail is greedy and deceitful because he wants to be his friend for his money. Port's lack of consideration to Smail is shown clearly in the following dialogue:

Where are you going, Jean?" Without answering Port made a great effort and gained the top. "Au revoir," he called, walking quickly up the middle of the street. He heard a desperate scrambling behind him; a moment later the man was at his side.

"You didn't wait for me," he said in an aggrieved tone.

"No. I said good-bye" (p.20).

Smail becomes a tool to show that Port is upset. Immediately, he suspects him because of a girl. That is why he suggests introducing Port a "friend". However, Port's preconception of local people is clear, even with woman. The following passage indicates that he sees woman's body as sex objects and a commodity for sale, rather than acknowledging the person's humanity :

A girl?" he said. "You mean a whore."

Smail was mildly indignant. "A whore? Ah, my friend, you don't know me. I wouldn't introduce you to that. C'est de la saloperie, ça! This is a friend of mine, very elegant, very nice. When you meet her, you'll see" (p.23)

What comes from the above excerpt is that Port's perception of Algerian women is negative as they are depicted as sexual objects, "whores". They are nothing when compared to the elegant American ones. For Port, African women remain as mysterious and exotic figures in the eyes of the American characters. They are seen as veiled and living in a culture that is inferior to the western one. This stereotype was recurrent trope reflecting the Western perspective on the Eastern women at the time the novel was written.

From the above excerpt, it is clear that Bowles provides a kind of one-dimensional portrayal of the local people. His prejudices are part of criticism found in Edward Said's Orientalism (1978).

It's important to note that *The Sheltering Sky* contains both negative and positive images of the desert and its inhabitants. His portrait of the area remains a product of the context in which the text was produced. The narrative includes Orientalist stereotypes and misrepresentations that were prevalent in Western literature during the mid-20th century. These negative images of the desert present a limited and often distorted view of the local populations. The novel's focus is primarily on the inner psychological journey of the American characters while Arabs and Berbers are just part of the exotic backdrop against which that journey unfolds. In what follows, we turn to Malika Mokeddem's perception of the desert and its people.

b. The Images of Desert from Mokeddem's male Characters' Point of view

In *La Nuit de la Lézarde*, the desert as a whole, stands for a place of confinement and dislocation. Such a negative image is provided through the main character, Sassi, an Algerian blind man, who is forced by circumstances to live in the desert. He has weak personality and lacks confidence; he struggles with his physical and moral handicaps. He has a pessimist view on life in general and on life in the desert in particular as he has completely lost hope as it is shown in his statement: "Alors, je suis un petit reg, un petit désert noir. Comme lui, ma carcasse absorbe des sensations par tous ses pores, et même par la corne des pieds, pour s'inventer des mirages" (Mokeddem, 1998, p.15).

Sassi lives alone for long time until Nour comes at the Ksar (A palace in Arabic), where his life starts changing. The presence of Nour motivates him to do works in farming. They begin helping each other in cultivating their garden. They work hard to produce a variety of vegetables, which they sell in the neighboring market. This passage tells more about their collaborative efforts:

Tôt le matin et en fin de journée, Nour et Sassi partent au village vendre les produits du jardin cultivé en commun. L'après-midi, ils ne s'y rendent que fort tard, après la canicule de la mi-journée, et sans trop se charger. Ils savent, par expérience, que la plupart des courses ont été faites au cours de la matinée. A la tombée de la nuit, les villageois ne songent plus qu'à parer aux oublis ou satisfaire des besoins imposés, en dernière minute, par les préparatifs des diners. (p.20).

The passage above depicts the dynamics between Nour, Sassi, and the villagers reflect certain cultural perceptions and stereotypes. It illustrates cultural misconceptions and stereotypes about community dynamics, work ethic, and rural life. It provides insights into the construction and perception of cultural identities within the village setting through the interactions and daily routines of the characters.

In the desert, life is harsh that is why all the ksourians left the area. The primary reason is the lacks of water as human beings cannot survive without it. The taps just run for only an hour every two days. Sassi has a well where he waters his garden, but they did not care about his well, because it is not enough for the life of everyone. To live in the desert the one must endure all hardships. The narrator explains that the imagery of the well symbolizes a primitive and inadequate source of water, contrasting sharply with the modern amenities as it is provided in the following passage:

Ils s'en moquaient de ton puits qui ne suffisait plus à la vie de tous. Et que voulais-tu qu'ils fassent de ta pompe ? Ils partaient des maisons en dur, avec eau courante et toilettes. Eau courante, comme tu y vas ! Seule l'odeur de leurs égouts court pour empester les rues. Leurs robinets, eux, ne coulent qu'une heure tous les deux jours (pp 27-28).

The blind man loves his friend in secret, even though he cannot see her, but he imagines her as beautiful and very powerful. He cannot touch her, but when she fell he helps her to get up, and he found it as an opportunity to touch her body, he cannot imagine his life without her, as she is his oxygen, so he thinks about what he will do for her when she returns from the hospital because he has been very patient. However, he is unable to express his attachment to Nour for fear of losing her. He says that she is the light of his night, the one who illuminates his darkness. The author assists:

Nour lumière de ma nuit. Chaque jour, je suis allé vers elle, comme un somnambule, sans jamais l'atteindre. Elle prend tous les chemins de la fuite : le rire, des images insolites, son désir pour d'autres hommes... Quand je crois l'avoir enfin rejointe, elle fait une pirouette et me renvoie à mille lieues. Il faut que je puisse la raccrocher à son attente pour qu'elle ne perde pas l'espoir. Et quand elle sera guérie, elle ne pourra plus me tenir à distance avec ses discours sur la sacro-sainte amitié qu'elle a investie en moi. Je la coucherai, l'embrasserai et lui ferai l'amour à en perdre le souffle, à combler tous ses manques et les miens. Voilà ce que je dois faire. Jusqu'à présent, je me suis comporté comme un Oualou. Je n'ai rien compris (p.172).

Nour and Sassi represent the opposite of each other, the relation between them is ambiguous, even though they are friends, but each one has its own goals in his life. He is passionately in love with Nour, but she cannot love a blind man, which is symbolized by the "night" that symbolizes Sassi, "Le noir est le cœur de la lumière. Il y a toujours une part d'obscurité dans la clarté." (p.59). The relationship between the two characters has been analyzed by Dalmas Frank, who demonstrates how cultural imagery and stereotypes impact perceptions of love and disability, highlighting the complexity of identity construction and interpersonal relationships. He wrote that:

Les différences dans le couple Nour-Sassi montrent une lutte qui se reproduit dans beaucoup d'histoires d'amour. Sassi est aveugle et Nour symbolise la lumière ; elle est voyante et lui est non-voyant. Mais c'est Sassi qui a une perception plus aigüe des sentiments et des sensations tandis que Nour reste aveugle à l'amour de ce dernier puisqu'elle s'est créé un idéal masculin qui ne se réalisera jamais. Leur amour est impossible car leurs existences se croise sans se trouver, sans se « voir » (Dalmas, 2016).

It appears that Sassi is sexually attracted by Nour, but he is unable to fulfill his desires. Therefore, he finds consolation in touching and smelling her dress in an attempt to satisfy himself as he expresses it in what follows: "comment est ta robe aujourd'hui? Sans attendre la réponse de son amie, Sassi tend une main vers son habit, en saisit l'ourlet et le palpe (p.15). The narrator reverses the roles of the two characters by examining the man in the negative

way, where he says that his childhood was stifled darkness like deafness while Nour believes that darkness is the greatest emotion in life, because she does not know what light means.

This following dialogue confirms that Sassi is like an imprisoned man in the desert:

L'obscurité, elle, nous protège, nous renvoie d'abord à nous-mêmes, à notre infini intérieur. Elle est une immensité qui surpasse la lumière. Arrête ! Tu n'arriveras pas à me donner l'envie d'être aveugle. J'aime trop la lumière, même quand elle blesse. Et moi donc ! Si l'obscurité est mon univers, la lumière est la toile de mon imaginaire (pp. 45-46).

Sassi talks to his friend Nour and he tells her that she stayed in the Ksar despite the comments made by the ksourians. They believe that you are a foreign woman without a husband, children, or any family to live with. And you do not know about past life. This passage is an illustration:

Tu es restée dans le Ksar, suscitant des rumeurs contradictoires et la convoitise de bien des hommes. Une femme sans mari, sans enfants, sans aucune famille et qui, de surcroît, leur affirmait en crânant qu'elle n'avait pas même de passé... je te soupçonne de t'être bien divertie à nos dépens (p.55).

It appears from the above passage that the desert is a significant setting to the narrative and an essential part of Sassi and Nour's love story. The landscape of the desert is described by Mokeddem in vivid detail and it plays a symbolic role in the novel, reflecting the isolation, harshness, but also a refuge which helps the possibility of love in such an arid environment.

When comparing the perception of Port, the protagonist in *The Sheltering Sky* of the desert with that of Sassi in *La Nuit de la Lézarde*, we can deduce that the two characters perceive the desert in similar and different ways. Both characters find in the desert a place of escape and a refuge to forget their past experiences. However, their different perceptions of the desert are different because of their different backgrounds, perspectives on life and on the desert, and their personalities. Port is an American traveler as the narrative voice maintains: "Paul did not think of himself as a tourist; he was a traveler" (Bowles, 1949, p.8). He travels to many places of the world in order to find the inspiration to write because he is a writer as

Kit states: “Ah, yes. Monsieur is a writer, but he is modest!” (p.163). Port stops writing after his father death: “Since the death of his father he no longer worked at anything, because it was not necessary” (p.163). And that influenced his relation with his mother, and with his self, as it is clear in the following passage: “And when he saw his mother, which was seldom, she too would say: “Been working?” and look at him with her large sad eyes. He would reply: “Nope,” and look back at her insolently. Even as they were driving to the hotel in the taxi, with Tunner saying: “What a hellhole” as he saw the miserable streets (p.164). Sassi, for his part, sees the desert as a space of achievement though he is blind, he works as farmer who considers this specific place as a paradise where everything grows and where he can spend all his life. This passage confirms it:

Accroupi dans le jardin, Sassi avance d’un pas de crapaud dans les rigoles humides. D’une main experte, il examine ici le tuteur d’un plant de tomates, cueille la une poignée de fèves, une courgette, une aubergine, un poivron arrivé à maturité. Puis il les dépose en petits tas distincts, en bordure des carrés de plantation (Mokeddem, 1998, p.41).

The point where Port differs from Sassi is that Port sees the desert as an amazing place of light and happiness where someone can spend the time, as he asserts: “That’s why I hate cold countries, and love the warm ones, where there’s no winter, and when night comes you feel an opening up of the life there, instead of a closing down. Don’t you feel that?” (p.82). Sassi sees the desert as a place of sufferance and darkness, especially when he is alone, he expresses it in this statement: “Je n’ai pas de pieds!” (p.13). Sassi, unlike Port, started working after meeting Nour, but it was physical jobs, he works in the garden with her. Every time Nour was active in her job, and she doesn’t like wasting her time. She always likes to spend her time in gardening and going to the market she said: “Bon, si tu n’es pas plus loquace, on ferait mieux d’aller au marché.”(p.20).

c. The Representation of the Desert in both novels Through the Female Characters' Eyes

In Bowles' novel, Kit stands as one of the main characters; she is the wife of Port and she is an American woman, "she has all the knowledge and intuition required to get by in the world of emotions and human interactions. According to the metaphor of the divided person proposed by Lorena Pérez Hernandez, she would be a representation of the inner self that each person possesses, as she was previously described. Kit is introduced to us as being at the polar opposite of Port, who is portrayed as being rational. (Hernandez, 1997).

In the early stages of her journey, she regards the local Arabs with a sense of cultural distance as it is shown in the following statement: "The people of each country get more like the people of every other country. They have no character, no beauty, no ideals, no culture—nothing, nothing." (Bowles, 1949, p.10). But as the narrative progresses, Kit discovers a really different background and people; she struggles to grasp the intricacies of a foreign culture. She perceives herself as culturally superior to the desert people. Thus, she cannot even engage in their conversations and share ideas or beliefs. This is clear in the following conversation:

So am I, in a way. It gave me a first-hand opportunity of seeing what conversations are going to be like here—just how unbelievably superficial they can be."

He let go of her waist. "I disagree. You don't say a frieze is superficial just because it has only two dimensions."

"You do if you're accustomed to having conversation that's something more than decoration. I don't think of conversation as a frieze, myself."

"Oh, nonsense! It's just another way of living they have, a completely different philosophy" (p.107).

This conversation reflects a difference in perspective of the nature of dialogue and a recognition of the cultural differences in the way people communicate. In the novel, Kit's experiences and how she reacts to the desert landscape and people in North Africa give us a

glimpse into how the Western imagination and its encounters with the “exotic” landscape.

The subsequent excerpt illustrates such a perception:

“Do you think you can be happy here?” asked Port in a hushed voice.

Kit was startled. “Happy? Happy? How do you mean? “Do you think you’ll like it?”

“Oh, I don’t know!” she said, with an edge of annoyance in her voice. “How can I tell? It’s impossible to get into their lives, and know what

They’re really thinking” (p.98).

The quotation above shows that Kit finds a difficulty to integrate into the new culture, and she is unable to feel happiness with the southern people because she struggles to understand the local people and culture.

Furthermore, Kit had endured a miserable experience in the desert when Port falls ill. She finds herself alone in the foreign land and obliged to face various challenges including language barriers, ambiguous customs and traditions. The following passage is an example of language difficulties that Kit encounters: “Then she went out to the gate and tried to speak with the guards; they did not understand any French, and kept saying: “Non, m’si.” As she was gesticulating with them, Captain Broussard appeared in a nearby doorway and looked at her with a certain suspicion in his eyes. “Do you want something, madame?” he said, (p.167).

Kit could not also face the impoverished living conditions in Sba where she could not find even the most basic necessities of life such as “blanket” and “milk”, as she deplores: “but what can you expect-you are in Sba, not in Paris.” (p.165). In addition, her situation worsens with the strict treatment of the Captain Broussard, who did not believe that what she says about Port’s passport. He considers it a “piece of lying” and considers her as a “suspicious character”. He even refuses to give her a cigarette which “he held in his hand” (p.184). Perhaps she does not realize that, in Algerian culture, it is a taboo for woman to smoke, which may contribute to dislike him; “ trying to remember how much she disliked Captain Broussard. He had not even offered her a pack of cigarettes.” (p.185).

In sum, Kit sees the desert as a place where it is very difficult to live. She could not resist the harsh living way of life as she is used to comfort during her life in America.

As far as Malika Mokeddem's novel is concerned, Nour the main female character considers the desert as a space of contemplation and resistance. A limited woman who has suffered from the patriarchal order and the culture in the North, but she is a strong woman, she spends her time in a long period of contemplation of the Ksar and its surrounded desert. The description of the landscape as a "mass of sand and rocks" burying all sounds emphasizes the physical and emotional distance between Nour and her past, as this passage affirms it clearly:

Perchée sur une terrasse comme une vigie guettant une apparition. Nour observe les environs. N'étaient deux taches vives, le safran de sa robe et l'indigo du turban emmêlé à ses nattes, sa silhouette se confondrait avec l'ocre des murs. De cette hauteur, Nour aperçoit le village où habitent, maintenant, ses anciens voisins. Elle le fixe un instant sans tendre l'oreille. Le feu noir de ses yeux consume son doux visage " ce n'est pas la distance qui en éteint la rumeur", pense-t-elle. Son regard balaie le reg séparant le ksar du village. Une étendue de pierraille par les vents. Cette masse de sable et de cailloux enterre tous les bruits et le ciel est comme une cire coulée par-dessus (Mokeddem, 1998, p.12).

In the passage above, the author gives the image where Nour with her silhouette almost completely merges with the ochre of the walls, alone on a terrace staring like a lookout at the village. She looks where the black fire lights up consumes her face and brings back the image of the dark fire in the desert. The narrator describes the desert as a place where Nour is free, she is free of limitations and does whatever she wants. Nour has a garden in the desert where she plants vegetables. There, she finds her psychological comfort with her friend Sassi, a blind man who helps her in her daily life. She has adapted to her life in the desert even though she doesn't have neighbors, since they have all abandoned their houses. All that remains in this lonely site are the blind man and his friend as the subsequent excerpts shows it clearly:

Les habitants sont partis les uns après les autres, emportant leur barda et les planches des portes. Sauf à mourir, on n'abandonne jamais du bois derrière soi au règne de l'aridité. Vents de sables et intempéries avaient commencé leur œuvre de destruction bien avant l'évacuation des demeures. Dans

l'expectative du départ, envisagé de longue date, personne ne rafistolait plus ni les toits ni les murs. La décrépitude du ksar avait précédé sa désertion. Ne restent plus, dans ce site esseulé, que l'aveugle Sassi et Nour "La nuit et la lumière," plaisante souvent Sassi, opposant sa cécité au prénom de son amie (p.11).

For Nour the desert is the only safe place; it is a refuge, which protects her from her oppressive husband. It is important to point out that Nour flees from her husband's terror. She refuses to live together with a second wife as her man wanted to remarry because she cannot give birth to children. To live in peace, she crosses to the desert in search of a quiet life, even though she knows that living there is not easy for a woman alone. Mokeddem (1998) argues that Nour's conscience wrestled with uncertainty, she made a decision with the absence of her husband and she fled their home. Her flight became a relentless quest for peace; Nour resembled a nomad without a tribe, adrift in a sea of uncertainty. The endless sands of the Sahara, far from offering solace, served only to amplify her anxieties. From one oasis to another, she roamed, driven by an insatiable yearning for tranquility. Yet, with each step southward, she felt herself slipping further into a void, a profound sense of emptiness gnawing at her core. (p 35).

The author conveys the idea that Nour has nothing to lose. Therefore, she decides to run away to the south. Nour does not have family to think about. At the beginning a confused conscience worked within her, but her decision was made instantly. She didn't waste any opportunity, in the absence of her husband she left her home and traveled great distances so he couldn't find her. Despite all this, she still thinks about what happened to her, she risked her life just to get away from all this suffering. She traversed deserts as a nomad without a tribe, without finding the end of her inner emptiness. Nour wandered through many oases, even though she knew that it is difficult to forget her past. Despite this, she did everything she could just to live in peace. She made her way far into the desert where she found the Ksar and settled there.

During all her life she has been alone, she has the personality of a good mother, even though she does not have children, but she plays the role to the children who help her in her daily life, she buys them everything they likes: “Khalti Nour, elle nous achète toujours des bonbons. Et puis on s’amuse bien avec elle. C’est une cheikha, khalti Nour. Des fois elle parle aux lointains avec des mots qu’on aime même si on ne les comprend pas (p.133). Moreover, Nour feels comfortable with her friend Sassi; they do everything together, and they help each other even if they are different at many things. Though she appears happy, she feels sad because of waiting her love who promised her to come back again. This passages is an illustration of her patience :

N’en parlons plus, s’il te plait...Est-ce que tu veux l’attendre avec moi. Je ne vois pas comment je pourrais y échapper, si tu continues à me bassiner de cette façon. Je veux dire l’attendre pour de bon, comme quelqu’un qui te serait cher. C’est une demande pour le moins...C’est important pour moi ! Je te le présenterai à son retour. Tu comprendras (p.47).

Nour had the image of a stranger woman when she escapes to the South; the inhabitants of the Ksar called her the foreigner and a free rebel woman. She adapts herself to the living conditions of the desert. Her efforts are made because she wants to be a free woman to enjoy her own life. The narrator seems to possess the same qualities as Nour. Malika Mokeddem left her family and run away to live in France because for her, the desert is the compound space that limits the freedom of women. The ksourians disapprove Nour's odd actions, yet they are intrigued by her solitude because they are not used to such unrestrained freedom. In the following passage the narrator explains the ideas of the Ksourians and their look towards Nour:

Nour s’était aperçue des regards et des propos tantôt intrigués, tantôt abasourdis des habitants du ksar. On l’appelait l’étrangère. On la qualifiait de rebelle, de singulière. On balançait à son égard entre crainte et respect. Entre compassion et condamnation, ou diffamation... Elle était une femme libre ! Elle en fut la première étonnée car ce mot, liberté n’était pas de son langage (pp 36-37).

Nour has the personality of the suffered woman in her society. Though she is a beautiful woman that a lot of men can desire, her infertility led her to flee her marital house and finds refuge in a deserted palace, situated in the desert. As the mysterious desert, Nour opts for living in a total silence; she keeps her previous events secret and tells her friend about her past life.

If we compare Kit and Nour's perceptions of the desert, we can observe some similarities and differences in their considerations of the desert. The first striking similarity between Kit and Nour is that both go to the desert to forget the constraints of their earlier lives. Both characters have problems with their husbands and think that crossing the desert will be the solution to find peace and harmony. Finally, the two characters enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of the desert. Moreover, Kit and Nour embody the image of a modern and independent women. Kit, for instance, does not engage in traditional domestic duties, such as cooking, she buys everything from the market, this passage exemplifies this:

Kit is a modern independent woman, she does not occupy home, she does not do even cooking and buy from the market on her table was a variety of groceries she had bought to take on the trip. Most of the items were black-market goods from England, and according to the labels they had been manufactured by appointment to H.M. King George VI. He opened a package of biscuits and began to eat one after another, voraciously (Bowles, 1949, p.40).

Nour like Kit, wants to be free, but she remains connected to the traditional role of illiterate woman. She takes pleasure in household chores, with cooking being one of her favorite hobbies: "Avec des gestes mécaniques, Nour allume le brasero devant sa maison et prépare du thé" (p.63). Additionally, she cooks with her friend, they enjoy this sort of work: "Sassi avait préparé des courgettes grillées, Nour un tajine d'aubergine a la tomate, mijotée avec cannelle, carvi et coriandre (p.105).

Kit used to read almost every day, even in her miserable fable when Port was dying "Then she rose, opened a bag, pulled out a fat French novel she had bought before leaving for

Boussif, and tried to read” (p.168) while Nour loves painting and she repaints the entire house with dedication. She thinks that painting serves as therapy for her loneliness. She imagines a lake nestled in a hollow of greenery where birds and fish danced a ballet between light and water, a time before deserts as described in what follows:

Nour a elle-même repeint les murs, avec une scrupuleuse fidélité à ce qu’en avait fait son propriétaire. Ceux de la chambre s’ornent de motifs géométriques, d’un ocre plus soutenu que celui de la terre, et s’étirent en arabesques sur un fond vert pale. En les découvrant, Nour avait imaginé un lac niché dans un creux de verdure où des oiseaux et des poissons danseraient un ballet entre lumière et eau. Une aube des temps. Un temps d’avant les déserts (Mokeddem, 1998, p.94).

Nour likes discovering colors and really be happy when she kneads clay, then she spread it on a green which is an enchantment. And when Sassi tells to her that he would love to have walls like that, she decides to tackle the walls of Sassi as soon as she finished: “Je suis en train de me découvrir une passion. J’aime beaucoup malaxer l’argile. L’étaler sur ce vert est un enchantement. J’attaquerai tes murs, dès que j’aurai fini ici.”(p.95).

The difficulty of Kit to cope with the desert is due to the fact that she brings her western customs and habits with her, such as smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol, which shocks the native people because such behaviors considered a shameful for a woman. This passage confirms the case:

The idea occurred to her that these were Moslems, and that the odor of alcohol on her breath would scandalize them almost as much as if she were suddenly to remove all her clothing. Stumbling over the crouched figures, she worked her way to one side of the windowless wall and leaned against it while she took out a small bottle of perfume from her bag and rubbed it over her face and neck, hoping it would counteract, or at least blend with, whatever alcoholic odor there might be about her (Bowles,1949,p.67).

What is important is that the two characters’ perception about the desert converge and diverge in many ways. Both characters come to this isolated open space to look for peace and find serenity. The mental states of the two characters influenced how they pursued their aspiration. While Kit’s experience turns into a nightmare with Port and Tunner’s deaths, Nour succeeds

to cope with the harsh environment by coping with its hard way of life. She learns with the help of Sassi to overcome her fears and the things which limit her ability to face life and interact with the world and the people around her. Kit like her husband Port, are unable to confront the hostility of the desert. They become unable to use logic to break free from this irrational, unjustified feeling because of their fears of omens. According to Hernnandez (1997), Port takes all the decisions and Kit blindly trusts him as it is shown in the following passage:

And in her personal life, in her relationships with her friends, these considerations reached monstrous proportions. She was capable of sitting all morning long, attempting to recall the details of a brief scene or conversation, in order to be able to try out in her mind every possible interpretation of each gesture or sentence, each facial expression or vocal inflection, together with their juxtapositions. A great part of her life was dedicated to the categorizing of omens. (p.33).

In contrast to Nour, who is a friendly woman that takes cares of her blind friend, she describes all the images of her surroundings to him. Whenever her friend needs her, he always finds her by his side, Nour cannot bear to leave her blind friend alone and every time he asks her a question, she responds to him. Mokeddem (1998) provides a scene in which a character expresses a strong connection to their inner thoughts and surroundings through contemplative dialogue and body language. The reference to "the night in your eyes" also denotes a deep emotional bond, emphasizing the intricacy of perception and cross-cultural communication. (pp. 14-15). From this we can say that Nour care of her friend. For her, what matters are her good actions: " Ce qui m'importe, c'est ce que j'en fais, comment je le vois" (p.121).

In conclusion, our examination has shown the disparate depictions of the desert by Paul Bowles and Malika Mokkedem through their protagonists. On the one hand, Mokkedem portrays the desert as a place of spiritual connection and resilience, while Bowles' portrayal stresses existentialism and alienation. Our understanding of how these various points of view

influence the stories has been aided by the theory of imagology, which also provides insights into more general themes of cultural representation and interaction.

Chapter two: The Representation of the Desert Through the two Novels'

Themes

In this section, we shall examine, from a comparative perspective, main themes of *The Sheltering Sky* and *La Nuit de la Lézarde*, by exploring their relation to the desert and through the lens of imagology, which allows to study how both authors examine these themes from their own perspectives. Basically, the setting of both novels is the desert. This environment is presented from two perspectives: one of a foreign traveler (American) with his external worldview and the second is that of an Algerian, who tells the story from the inside. So, what are the most important selected themes?

Throughout *The Sheltering Sky*, Bowles uses many themes in relation to the desert, which plays a significant role in the story. Its importance is due to the fact it is not limited to a space, it rather serves as both a setting and metaphorical background for the novel. It is linked to, for instance, the alienation of the main characters, their isolation, and their psychological degradation at the end of the narrative.

a. The Representation of the Desert as a Space of Alienation, Isolation, and desolation

The Sheltering Sky focuses on the desert as a vast open and unforgiving landscape, which reflects the characters' emotional and psychological isolation. Port, Kit, and Tunner, the main characters, experience a profound sense of alienation as they go through the desert. Their journey across the Sahara does not only cut them from the modern world, but also reflects their internal struggles and the breakdown of their relationships. The following excerpt illustrates, for example, Port's description of the desert as a dark place where travelers feel only desolation and alienation:

The wind, straight from the south, blew across the barren mountains that were invisible ahead of him, over the vast flat sebkha to the edges of the town, raising curtains of dust that climbed to the crest of the hill and lost themselves in the air above the harbor. He stood still. The last possible suburb had been strung on the street's thread. Beyond the final hut the garbage and rubble floor of the road sloped abruptly downward in three directions. In the dimness below were shallow, crooked canyon-like formations. Port raised his eyes to the sky: the powdery course of the Milky Way was like a giant rift across the heavens that let the faint white light through (Bowles, 1949, p.18).

This excerpt provides the atmosphere of the town where the protagonist, Port, finds himself.

The passage describes the barren mountains, the flat sebkha, the dusty wind blowing through the town, and the last neighborhood before the road gets messy and starts going downhill.

This negative description creates a sense of desolation and isolation, which is reinforced by Port's standing still and looking up at the sky. The Milky Way is described as a "giant rift" that lets in faint white light, adding to the overall sense of emptiness and vastness.

In addition to isolation and alienation, *The Sheltering Sky* explores some existentialist issues, as the characters confront the meaninglessness and absurdity of life in the face of the harsh and indifferent desert. The narrative follows the characters' search for meaning and purpose, their attempts to escape from the constraints of their previous lives, and their existential crises. Therefore, the desert plays a major role, as already mentioned, in the lives of the three American travelers through their quest for adventure and the meaning of their lives across the Sahara. As the narrative progresses, it becomes a place of their transformation. As they penetrate deeper into the desert, they are forced to confront their own identities and desires. The harsh environment pushes them to the limits of their physical and emotional capabilities, leading to self-realization that refers to a profound understanding or awareness of oneself, including their strengths and weaknesses.

Bowles' novel includes many instances of the clash between Western and Eastern cultures, as the characters interact with the local people in the desert. The desert serves as a

cultural and geographical boundary, highlighting the differences between the Westerners and the indigenous people, and the characters' encounters with the desert's inhabitants challenge their preconceived notions of the world. For the main character, “everything looked unfamiliar” (p.20). Moreover, the desert functions as a liminal space and a place on the threshold of existence, where conventional rules and structures break down. The character’s lack of understanding reduces the desert people’s conversation to “an uninterrupted flow of expressionless sounds” (p.26). He finds himself facing a strange space, in company of strange people and culture. The desolate and unforgiving landscape of the Sahara further reinforces the sense of Port’s despair and the absence of traditional meaning. The desert then instead of providing relief, underscores the characters' sense of disorientation and the blurring of boundaries between reality and illusion.

Furthermore, as the narrative progresses, the desert is portrayed as an inhospitable and indifferent setting, where survival is a constant challenge. This harsh environment reflects the main characters' struggles and their own inner desolation. The desert, for instance, becomes for Kit a mark of her own inner desert, the emptiness and desolation within herself:

Before her eyes was the violent blue sky-nothing else. For an endless moment she looked into it. Like a great overpowering sound, it destroyed everything in her mind, paralyzed her. Someone once had said to her that the sky hides the night behind it, shelters the person beneath from the horror that lies above. Unblinking, she fixed the solid emptiness, and the anguish began to move in her (p.251).

The quote describes a moment where Kit fixes the blue sky and feels overwhelmed by its vastness. The sky seems threatening because it has a paralyzing effect on her mind. The character insists that the sky hides the horrors of the night and this thought does not bring her comfort. Instead, she continues to stare into the emptiness and begins to feel anguish. Her state of mind conveys a sense of the character's depressive state and the impact of the desert sky to affect her consciousness. Therefore, the desert, in Bowles’ *The Sheltering Sky*

represents the unknown and uncontrollable forces in life. It is a place where the characters cannot fully understand or control their surroundings, reflecting the uncertainty and unpredictability of existence. The following passage expresses the impact of this strange environment on Port:

The ground was covered with large insects; their hard shells broke with little explosions that were quite audible to him even amidst the noise the dogs were making. He was aware that ordinarily he would have experienced a thrill of disgust on contact with such a phenomenon, but unreasonably tonight he felt instead a childish triumph. "I'm in a bad way and so what?" (p.17).

It appears then that *The Sheltering Sky* is a complex and evocative novel that uses the desert as a powerful space to explore Port's depression, which compels him to turn around and going back to the same place again and again. It also offers a profound and often bleak meditation on Port's haunting visions, which is a hard condition when he is faced in the vast, enigmatic, and unforgiving desert landscape. What follows expresses his state of mind: "A wind that was dry and warm, coming up the street out of the blackness before him, met him head on. He sniffed at the fragments of mystery in it, and again he felt an unaccustomed exaltation" (p.18).

Bowles provides, then, a portrayal of the desert through an American author's eyes and their perspective; he discussed the people, land and landscape. Throughout the narrative, the author provides a negative image of the Arabs. They are depicted as old-fashioned individuals who are primarily interested only by money and sex. A clear example of this portrayal can be seen in the introduction of Belqassim and his wives. The pejorative image of Belqassim, is that of a man presented as a savage, who is unable to control his sexual desires. He has four wives and when he sees Kit, he is immediately attracted by her; he attempts to get close to her to seduce her as Paul states:

Belqassim consoled her and then forced her savagely to the ground where he made unexpected love to her while the caravan waited. She had the impression, notwithstanding the painful thorns that remained in various parts of her flesh, that this was a usual occurrence, and she suffered calmly the rest of the night (p.223).

The passage describes a disturbing and a forced sexual encounter between Kit , an America married woman, with Belgassin, an Algerian a violent man who commits a kind of rape. The portrayal of a violent and forced sexual act, according to Paul's version, causes the victim to suffer silently throughout the night. Despite the painful and traumatic experience, Kit faces this disturbing instance of sexual violence with a sense of resignation to such abuse.

In addition to the stereotypical image of Belgassim, his three wives are also misrepresented. They are materialistic since they always look only for jewelry, Paul said: "One of them jumped up and approached her to feel among the folds of her flowing white robe, apparently in search of the jewelry" (p.237). They hate Kit because Belqassim offers their jewelry to her in order to seduce her. It is important to point out that Paul Bowles does not only provide negative images of the desert but also sensationalist ones to attract the Western readership. There is a mixture of attraction and repulsion regarding to the temperature, or the people of the country, he narrates the journey and describes the environment simultaneously. When Kit and Tunner take a train to Bou Noura, Paul paints a vivid image of it and says: " It was a very old train. From the low ceiling in the corridor of their carriage hung a row of kerosene lamps that swung violently back and forth in unison as the ancient vehicle rocked along." (p.61). He also provides a vivid description of the hospital where Port stayed, there were no means available, and it did not offer the basic necessities that a patient requires. He states:

He will be as well off here as anywhere else this side of Sidibel-Abbes," said the soldier. "With typhoid all you can do, even in a hospital, is to keep the fever as low as possible, and wait. We have little here in Sha in the way of medicine, but these" (p.164).

Bowles (1949) talks about Mohammed's hotel, which lacks even the most basic living conditions. He offers an image of a windowless room looks like a well during lunch. The

absence of windows contributes to the room's darkness, and when Port, attempts to illuminate the space with an overhead electric light, it does not work. (p.94).

From our analysis of characters perception of the desert that, throughout *The Sheltering Sky*, Bowles describes the desert landscapes, skillfully, intertwining the American character's emotions with the attractive, barren, and alienating landscapes. For example, Kit's feelings undergo significant changes within this landscape .This passage illustrates the complex interplay between the characters' emotions and the harsh desert environment:

In a landscape made gray by too much light, the few hundred palms at first were no more than a line of darker gray at the horizon—a line which varied in thickness as the eye beheld it, moving like a slow-running liquid: a wide band, a long gray cliff, nothing at all, then once more the thin penciled border between the earth and the sky. She watched the phenomenon dispassionately, extracting a piece of bread from the pocket of her coat which lay spread across the ungainly shoulders of the mehari. The bread was completely dry (p.218).

Concerning *La Nuit de la Lézarde*, Malika Mokeddem provides a portrayal of the desert through the lens of an Algerian woman point of view. The desert has many connotations; it is, for instance, a representation of a psychological space that protects the narrator from the constraints of the outside world. The narrator gives images that affect him in her surroundings through her experiences. In most of her novels, Mokeddem explores the desert's influences on people's way of life; the narrative voice affirms:

Là-bas, dans le désert, l'horizon n'était que l'ultime claustration. Il symbolisait l'infranchissable de ma vie. L'insondable abîme qui me séparait du monde. De la liberté. Plus je grandissais, plus le vide du désert me serrait à la poitrine, à la gorge. A scruter ce néant immuable, ses paysages fossilisés qui cernaient notre pauvreté, la brutalité des traditions, j'avais parfois des crises de désespoir à en crever tant il me paraissait impossible que je ne puisse jamais décamper de là. Leur échapper. (Mokeddem, 2006, p.161).

In the above excerpt the desert is presented as a physical and metaphorical barrier, symbolizing confinement and separation from the outside world. The vast expanse of the desert becomes a representation of the protagonist's isolation. The use of language such as "ultime claustration" underscores the depth of her experiences. It expresses the character's

feeling of confinement and despair experienced in the desert. This latter becomes the horizon, which stands for the insurmountable barrier separating Nour from the world and freedom. As she grows older, the emptiness of the desert becomes increasingly suffocating, leading to desperate conflicts at the thought of never being able to escape its fossilized landscapes and the harshness of traditions. This paragraph also conveys a feeling of the woman character entrapment and hopelessness in the desert, emphasizing the emotional impact of this hostile environment on her sense of freedom.

In addition, the author shapes the desert, in *La Nuit de la Lézarde*, as a silent place that is composed of amounts of sand and stone, stretching all over the horizon and consuming the light. It takes over everything, even the air and the nightmares that the night haunted them. The use of colors like silver, vermilion, and delicate pinks evokes a surreal, otherworldly atmosphere, emphasizing the sense of disconnection from the familiar. This imagery creates a feeling of being in an alien environment, where the natural elements appear both captivating and distant. This passage stands as an illustration :

Le ciel est d'un argent aux reflets vermeils. La dune alterne des roses et des bruns délicats. Il règne ce silence particulier au lever de jour dans le désert. Un silence qui semble sourdre du sable et de la pierre, tendre l'espace à le rompre, consumer la lumière, s'emparer de tout, même de l'air et des pensées, des rêves ou des cauchemars qui, la nuit, les ont hantés (p.63).

Malika Mokeddem, in this excerpt, captures the reader's attention on the essence of the desert, its beauty, and the tranquility it offers. She refers to the sky as a reflection of silver with red highlights, which covers the dune, alternating between rose and brown shades. The silence is particular to the desert, as if emerges from the sand and stone, filling the space and consuming the light, taking hold of everything, even the air and thoughts, dreams, or nightmares that haunted people in the past. The desert in the calm of the morning, becomes a piece of art where nature creates a symphony of colors and silence that attracts both senses

and imagination. The author uses vivid images to make her audience involved in the scene, creating a sense of being present in the desert at sunrise.

However, the desert also portrayed as a dangerous space. The lack of water is what made people flee that area, which is the most significant challenge in the desert. The author refers to the lack of water, which forces people to dig the well, which they gave the name (Hassi El Ghazi) in relation to the name of the man who discovered it who is called (El Ghazi). But, even if he had discovered it, there is still lack of water. Over time, the water became less abundant because the resident did not care. This passage explains the idea clearly

Peu à peu, l'eau s'est faite moins abondante. Les seaux se sont écrasés au fond du puits, en ont raclé la terre, l'ont mélangée en boue. Hissée, ils avançaient par grandes saccades, balançaient, s'entrechoquaient, emmêlant leurs cordes. Et les causettes des femmes ont tourné en disputes (p.68).

The author gives the image of a place marked by abandonment. She portrays the Ksar as a timeless space where the past and the present intersect in a way which reflects the imagery and perception of a particular place. The theme of desolation is vividly portrayed through the imagery of dwindling water resources and the ensuing conflicts among the women. Mokeddem (1998) explains that the silence seems pressing down and smoothing the sky and the earth. Within the ksar, another roof gives way. The crimson colors of the walls became violet as the day gets shorter. Night has already taken hold of the broken glass and cracks (p, 34). As a result, the ksar assumes an unsettling resemblance to a necropolis, where the passage of time gets tangled with the destructive consequences of neglect. The market setting serves as a symbolic representation of the local environment, and convey a sense of economic hardship.

To the impact of silence and time, Mokeddem paints a bleak picture of the desert environment, which conveys a difficult way of life and many hardships. In the desert, adolescents have no meaningful activities to do; they just spend their time holding walls, they stand like rag dolls as what follows illustrates:

Le souk est fermé. Au pied des arcades, une multitude d'enfants et d'adolescents, désœuvrés, « tiennent les murs ». Certains n'ont même rien à tenir. Et rien qui les tienne sauf, peut-être, une petite flamme qui vacille dans leurs yeux, et parfois s'éteint. On redoute alors de les voir s'affaler au sol, comme des poupées de chiffon. Mais non. Ils restent debout. Juste un peu plus tassés (p.184).

The quote reveals the vulnerability and precariousness of life in the desert. The author mentions young people by emphasizing their resilience despite their difficult circumstances. She stresses the challenges faced by these youth in the context of the closed market, conveying a sense of concern and empathy for their plight.

Mokeddem in her novel "L'Interdite" argues that it is important to distinguish that sand is not the same with soil, but it contains the essence of sunlight, leading her to believe that it descended from the sun rather than originating from the earth. Furthermore, sand is remarkably movable, it permeates every space. The dune, a captivating landscape formed by sand, exhibits a dynamic nature. It is always changing, sometimes taking on the expansive chest of an enormous mother, at other times reflecting her gentle curves. There is the sand's airborne quality. It rises into the sky, carried by the wind. Sand travels in the wind, calling attention to itself with cries, shouts, and gracefully dances. The erg described as the sea of dreams, becomes a realm where the people of dreams ascend to the heavens and descend back to earth, creating light and persisting in an external existence. (Mokeddem, 1993, pp. 101-102).

The author portrays the dune as mother's body parts with its shifting shapes. This imagery may be interpreted as the representation of the surroundings relating it to maternal qualities. She describes the erg as the sea of dreams, it contributes to the creation of a symbolic space. She employs vivid pictures to create a unique symbolic representation of the desert landscape.

After analyzing Bowles and Mokeddem's representations of the desert, we reached the following points of comparison. The desert is perceived from the exterior and the interior;

each author portrays it according to his objectives. Paul Bowles, for instance, shapes the desert as an open, hostile, and alienating space; he gives it a meaning based on how the strangers perceive it, from a western or American point of view. It is based on the idea of the desert as a place of otherness, where the westerner is confronted with the unknown and the exotic. On the other hand, Malika Mokeddem's representations of the desert are more nuanced and complex. She portrays the desert as a space of transformation, both physical and psychological, for her characters. The same negative image is displayed in Malika Mokeddem's novel. The author offers a bleak representation of this confined and suffocating space where people endure the hardships of the weather, lack of water. In both novels, the desert represents an obstacle for human happiness. What differs is that the American writer depicts the desert according to a "western eye" while Mokeddem tells her story from "inside". She depicts in her novel the main characters experiences as a reflection of her own nomad life. The desert for her is the narrow place that limits people's opportunities, their freedom, and their progress. She highlights various forms of suffering, especially that of women and young people who have no sense of purpose in their lives.

b. The Desert as a Space for Escape and Self-Discovery

Paul Bowles and Malika Mokeddem explore a common theme of "escape" in their works, the escape of the two women the: American Kit and the Algerian Nour. All of them fled from the respective hardships in order to find their own happiness and freedom. In *The Sheltering Sky*, the theme of escape is prominent throughout the novel. The main characters, Port and Kit, travel to North Africa in an attempt to escape their mundane lives and refresh their relationship. However, their journey becomes a descent into an acute crisis and they find themselves unable to escape their own thoughts and emotions. The title itself, *The Sheltering Sky*, refers to the idea that Westerners use to convince themselves that they are safe and secure, when they flee their modern American society, but the time spent in the Algerian

desert fails to protect them from the harsh realities of life. The two characters' attempts to escape their problems are ultimately futile, as they are unable to escape themselves and their own inner turmoil. Kit, for instance, tries to escape a miserable life when Port fell sick, she was totally alone, she has no support, she did not find a good condition that helps Port, she stays in his room and watches him dying, the Captain Broussard also treated her badly.

Kit first escapes from the hospital to Daoud Zozeph's shop. She convinces Daoud Zozeph to let her spend the night at his house with his wife. She told him that her husband was looking for her, and she did not want to see him that night. He gave her a room where she could sleep, but she did not sleep and she fled, the following passage indicates how she

From time to time she sighed deeply. Once she got up to turn down the wick of the lamp. When her watch said ten o'clock, she went again to the door and listened. She opened it: the court glowed with reflected moonlight. Stepping back inside, she picked up Tunner's burnous and flung it under the bed. The resultant swirl of dust almost made her sneeze. She took her handbag and the valise and went out, taking care to shut the door after her. On her way through the inner room of the shop she stumbled over something and nearly lost her balance. Going more slowly, she moved ahead into the shop, around the end of the counter, feeling lightly along its top with the fingers of her left hand as she went. The door had a simple bolt which she drew back with difficulty; eventually it made a heavy metallic noise. Quickly she swung the door open and went out (Bowles, 1949, p.200).

When Paul Bowles finished describing her escape, he did not mention Kit again until the third book entitled "The Sky", he makes the readers curious to know where she had gone.

Tunner was so sad about the escape of Kit; he felt lost and could not stop thinking about what he would tell Kit's family. He could not go back without her. The following passage explains his state: "I knew the other one was having trouble with his wife, and this was the trouble," said the lieutenant to himself when he glanced up and saw Tunner's unhappy face. (P.205). Kit was subjected to cruel treatment by Belqassim and his wives. Paul said: "Her lip was cut; the sight of the blood on her finger fascinated her and she sat quietly for a long time,

conscious only of the music. Sitting quietly seemed to be the best way to avoid more pain.” (p.232).

Belqasim is the Arab man who saved her in the desert and took her to his house, where he used her as an object, exploiting her for sexual purposes, she succeeds to escape from his house, Paul has explained how she did it and said:

Then she lifted her little valise out of the chest and quietly stepped over to the door. The woman still slept. “Poison!” whispered Kit furiously as she turned the key. With great care she managed to close the door silently behind her. But now she was in the absolute dark, trembling with weakness, holding the bag in one hand, and lightly running the fingers of the other along the wall beside her (p.236).

The same theme of escape appears also through Nour in Mokeddem’s novel. The crumbling walls reflect the dissolution of former identities and beliefs, paving the way for Nour's journey of self-discovery. The author represents the desert as a refuge, which protects Nour from the social constraints. Through her life in the abandoned palace is characterized by anxiety and loneliness, but it allows her to live peacefully with her friend Sassi as this passage expresses it:

Un vide découpé, comme pour être démultiplié, et ouvert aux vents. Une excavation faite aux dépens de toute vie. Les murs se fendent et peu à peu tombent en poussière. Terrassé, le ksar ne lui renvoie plus que les ruines d’un monde qu’elle a fui. Le désert les endort, dos à dos, sans parvenir à apaiser Nour. (Mokeddem, 1998, p.39).

Nour finds harmony in the time she spends in her garden planting and harvesting various vegetables. She loves her job because it brings her tranquility and peace of mind. Nour thinks that she has escaped from the difficult environment where she used to live, where her life was difficult, and she starts doing housework and gardening as a way to decompress after distressing experiences. Mokeddem (1998) explains that Nour’s daily life had been intricately shaped by the unrelenting demands of her labor, which had not only left physical wounds on her body but also linked his mind to hopelessness. But over time, her outlook of the desert

change a lot. The once meaningless area started to resonate with echoes, creating compositions of silence. During this period, Nour was about to become an expert in mastering the delicate art of hope (p, 36). When Nour decided to escape from her husband, she didn't think about the obstacles that she might encounter along her way. Instead, she only thought about staying away from this pessimistic life. When Nour thought turning away, a still confused consciousness was working inside her. Nevertheless, her decision was made, she didn't desire anything else except stay away. Nour seeks to find freedom; then learns to embrace hope by working hard. The protagonist's relationship with work is depicted as oppressive, symbolized by the phrase "le travail avait arraché son corps et son esprit." This suggests a sense of entrapment and exhaustion, highlighting the need for escape. The desert becomes a physical manifestation of this desire for liberation, offering a space where the protagonist can retreat from the demands of everyday life as it is explained in the following passage:

Le travail avait arraché son corps et son esprit a son désespoir et structure ses jours. Peu à peu sa perception du désert avait changé. Le vide des terres avait retrouvé résonances, ses partitions de silence et de vents, ses symphonies minérales. Les éthers lui devenaient une attente sans impatience. Nour apprenait enfin l'espérance. (p.36).

The quote focuses on the main character's transformation. She overcomes her despair by working and appreciating the desert's silence, its winds and stones, which become for her like symphonies. Nour finds in the desert a shelter where she discovers the value of hope and expectation. In other words, the desert provides Nour the beauty, the stability, and solace she seeks for. The desert, therefore, contributes to character's transformation and her self-discovery.

C. The Representation of the Desert as an Othering Setting

The other important feature that connects the two-selected narratives is the representation of the desert as a “space of othering”, by which we mean a place where social, cultural, and political dynamics of power and identity are played out, shaping the way people interact and perceive each other. The concept of “otherness” is also very important in the theory of Imagology as well as comparative literature.

In Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky*, the desert appears through the eyes of the American characters, Port, Kit, and Tunner as a “space of othering” in the sense that all of them are confronted with the unfamiliar and the unknown, which increases their sense of disorientation and alienation. The desert is portrayed as a harsh and inhospitable environment, inhabited by “strange” nomads who are seen as the "other" and the exotic. Their portrayal of the local populations reinforces the idea of the desert as a space of alterity, where the Western characters are forced to confront their own limitations and express their prejudices. This passage tells more: “The fourth-class passengers, all native Berbers and Arabs, were milling about in the midst of a confusion of bundles and boxes, piled on the dirt platform under the faint light of a bare electric bulb” (Bowles, 1949, p.67). The process of othering is clearly expressed because the narrator (American) separates himself from others (Arabs and Berbers), which were perceived as different. In other words, the fourth-class passengers, who are native Berbers and Arabs, are “othered” by the speaker who is likely from a different cultural and ethnic background.

Moreover, the use of the word "native" suggests that the speaker is not from the same place as the passengers and the description of the scene as a "confusion" implies a sense of chaos or disorder that is associated with the "other." This type of language reinforces the idea that the passengers are not only different but also inferior to the speaker, perpetuating a cycle of othering that can lead to prejudice and discrimination. Paul Bowles also describes how Port

and Kit are immersed in a vast barren landscape as they ride through the desolated desert. This isolation and exposure to unrelenting natural world created a sense of otherness. They are confronted with an environment that is alien to their usual urban lives, and the desolation of the desert magnifies this sense of otherness. Also, the barking dogs and women who turn away, covering their mouths underscores the cultural otherness. The author also explores delves into the concept of otherness through the character of Kit in her experiences in the desert. Kit, as an American, finds herself in a foreign environment where cultural norms, traditions, and ways of life significantly differ from what she is accustomed in the United State. Closely linked to “Imagology, also known as image studies, Bowles analyses, in his narrative and rhetorical cross-cultural representation of various the Algerian desert by providing images and stereotypes of this space and its inhabitants.

As far as Malika Mokeddem’s *La Nuit de la Lézarde* is concerned, the desert stands as a space, which allows the main characters to end with their “otherness”. This open space contributes to improve the life of the main characters. Nour for instance, longs for a life of freedom and peace; she wants to free herself from the family and social obstacles. She left her husband and fled to the South because she got married just to forget the wounds. She wonders why she should continue playing this role despite being alone and does not even have a family to reflect on her decision. Nour, much like the author, desires freedom. This 'othering' is further reinforced by her journey through deserts, traditionally depicted as harsh and unforgiving landscapes that symbolize existential challenges. This passage clarifies the point:

Nomade sans tribu, elle traversait des déserts sans arriver au bout de son vide intérieur. Tout au contraire. Les immensités du Sahara semblaient porter ses angoisses à la démesure. Errant d'oasis en oasis, Nour s'était enfoncée de plus vers le sud, avec la terrible sensation de n'être plus rien, puisque rien ni personne ne la retenait nulle part (p.35).

She seeks to find her freedom as a woman by running away to the South where she resides in the desert with her friend. Far away from all the worries, she experienced in her past.

Mokeddem identifies the desert as the place where lifestyle of deserted nomads is difficult because of traditions, which restrict women's freedom. The author refers to another female protagonist who is named Dounia, whose personality resembles that of Nour. She always stays alone, she loves reading books and discovering other worlds. She has a great human mind, but she lacks relationships with friends. Her name means (life) or (world) in Arabic. She has a great human mind, she lacks friends, and the pages of her books are her only companions. Dounia's sanctuary, represented by her collection of books, serves as a symbolic space of refuge and identity. It represents a world that is distinct from the external environment inhabited by "les galopins donnait un coup de pied dans son edifice de papier" who are described as disruptive and hostile towards her sanctuary. And their act demonstrates a physical intrusion into Dounia's safe space. This passage asserts it:

Dounia défendait farouchement son sanctuaire. Si parfois, de rage, l'un des galopins donnait un coup de pied dans son édifice de papier, éparpillant les livres, Dounia s'asseyait, les feuilletait, semblait déguster quelques passages. Lun deux finissait par la retenir et l'absorbait. Au bout d'un instant, elle le déposait avec soin dans un coin, se hâtait avec fébrilité de redresser les autres en barrière. Autour d'elle. Puis, le visage comme tenaillé par une insatiable faim, elle reprenait sa lecture (p.89).

We understand that the desert for Malika Mokeddem is a setting that symbolizes the confinement of women and limits for her freedom, it is the subject that she speaks about in all her novels. In *La Nuit de la Lézarde*, she emphasizes that the desert is a place where everything is threatened with extinction, even houses are covered in sand. The description of the dunes forming and defying the sky further reinforces this sense of otherness, as the natural landscape transforms the human-made structure into something unfamiliar and alien:

En effet, quand le Ksar ne sera plus, les vents araseront son squelette de torchis et de briques de terre. Les sables en rempliront les creux comme on pense une plaie. Ils finiront par le façonner en dunes. Avec des arêtes qui défient le ciel dont elles volent l'habit de lumière (p.86).

Nour ventures into the desert searching freedom, she moves with no other goals just to go further to the South, even though she passes very difficult times in her way, but she remains

patient. She remembers everything that happened to her in her life. Nour has a personality akin to Malika Mokeddem's; she is an independent woman. Despite being married, she left her husband to be free. And for her, the desert represents the ideal destination, a beautiful and calm place for new life. Nour in the desert feels comfortable with her friend Sassi.

Towards the conclusion of the novel, the author delves into Nour's illness, she spent a brief period in the hospital, but she couldn't bear. Consequently, she made the decision to go to the ksar. Going barefoot, she wanted to feel the sand of the desert at the tips of her feet. Upon her arrival at the ksar, Nour chose solitude, enveloping herself in vastness of her surroundings, she stays alone. In a poignant moment, Sassi arrived and held her in his arms, and closed her eyes to endless dreams. She had emerged from the world of earthly experiences into the world of endless possibilities.

V. Conclusion

In the course of the foregoing comparative analysis between Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* and Malika Mokeddem's *La Nuit de la Lezarde* through the perspective of Imagology theory as presented by Manfred Beller and Joep Leersen, we reached the following concluding points. Despite the two selected authors' distinct backgrounds, they have in common their interest and a fascination by the desert, which they represent as a basis to portray their characters' perceptions of this space. Both authors view the South as a representation of their characters in their respective novels. The two authors focus on the various exotic images, which they present through the two principal characters Nour and Port and their experiences in the Algerian desert; and both novels center on characters, which are attracted by this open setting for different reasons. The analysis reveals that despite their differences, Bowles and Mokeddem converge on the theme of the desert, stressing it as an enigmatic and challenging terrain that mirrors the struggles of their characters. The shared theme of the desert acts as a unifying thread between Bowles and Mokeddem, illustrating the vastness and mysteriousness of the Sahara.

Moreover, despite their diverse cultural origins, both Bowles and Mokeddem succeed in creating a similar representation of the characters who are hopeless, even though they come from different cultures and regions. Their imagology and points of views about the desert is mainly inspired by their individual experiences with that area. Both describe the role of the desert in their works as a space of transformation, either positive or negative, both physical and psychological, for their characters. Bowles views the desert as a paradoxical space, he believes that it is a wondrous and terrifying on earth at the same time, a sentiment echoed by Mokeddem. They both present the Sahara as an escapable yet captivating landscape. We have found that both Bowles and Mokeddem address the same theme, which is desert. This common theme is what brought them together, even though their representation of the South

as a vast place with many secrets that someone can't discover in a short time. Additionally, we have observed that similar backgrounds might result in similar literary works. In our research, we focused on the different forms and portrayal images. The many lessons we have learned from conducting this research project is the discovery of the works of the traveler Paul Bowles and the Algerian novelist Malika Mokeddem. Both authors are similar in their depiction of the desert in their descriptions of the landscape. Even though they are completely different, but they share one topic related to their lives.

Our research has highlighted the convergence of these writers' depictions of the desert and encourages further exploration by future scholars. We suggest investigating the influences of Bowles and Mokeddem's life experiences on their works, as well as going deeper into the concept of Imagology in these novels. In addition, there are several perspectives for future studies on Paul Bowles and Malika Mokeddem concerning the desert and its imagery. One possible approach is to examine the intertextual links between their works and other authors who wrote about the same desert, such as the French, Antoine de St-Exupéry and Isabelle Eberhardt. To sum up, the study underscores the significance of understanding how authors, despite their differences, converge on similar themes in their literary representations.

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Summary :

This dissertation compares two notable literary works, Paul Bowles' "The Sheltering Sky" (1949) and Malika Mokeddem's "La Nuit de la Lézarde" (1998). Despite obvious differences in their authors' backgrounds, languages, periods, and narrative focuses, the two novels share one critical feature: their depiction of the desert. Bowles, an American writer, and Mokeddem, an Algerian Francophone author.

The central question in this dissertation is how to compare Bowles' and Mokeddem's literary representations of the desert. Bowles' story follows American expatriates navigating the Sahara, delving into themes of alienation, existential conflict, and the search for self-discovery. In contrast, Mokeddem's story focuses on the cultural and identity complexities faced by an Algerian woman against the backdrop of the modernizing Algerian desert and her ancestors' traditional nomadic lifestyle. This study uses Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen's imagology theory, which examines literary representations of national stereotypes, to investigate how both authors depict the desert. It investigates how their differing perspectives—one as a foreigner and the other as a native—influence their portrayals and stories about their characters' experiences and perceptions of the desert.

Key words: Algerian desert, Stereotypes, Representation, Imagology.