

Rethinking Mobility: Leïla Sebbar's *Sherazade* Trilogy

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Abstract

Challenging the classic image of Ulysses wandering the earth while Penelope remains at home, Leïla Sebbar's Shérazade trilogy – *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982), *Les Carnets de Shérazade* (1985), *Le Fou de Shérazade* (1991) – three novels set in the 1980s, trace the peregrinations of a *fugueuse*, an adolescent runaway. The daughter of poor Algerian immigrants living in the working class suburbs of Paris, Shérazade feels constrained at home by rules imposed upon her by her family and community. In response, she assumes the role of picaresque hero, abandoning home, school, and community, for a nomadic life of adventure. The first novel depicts her travels in and around Paris, the second, her journey across France, the third, her experiences in the Middle East. This article explores the hypothesis that the protagonist's journey is a transformative experience that leads her to affirm her sense of self, as she seeks her place in the world, a place she can call home.

In the introduction to *Exiles, Travellers and Vagabonds: Rethinking Mobility in Francophone Women's Writing*, editors Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré assert that women's identities are “irrevocably altered, if not constituted by the fact and experience of mobility” (9). Their collection of essays attests to the emergence of a body of Francophone literature which, as it depicts women protagonists leaving home – either by choice or for political and/or economic needs, and often never to return to their place of origin – explores the meaning of home in a highly mobile world, and, by extension, women's relationship to the homes they occupy and others they have left. Clearly, the experience of leaving home can be exhilarating or painful; it may expand one's horizons

or constrict them. Indeed, one may establish secure ties to a new place or never feel at home in the world again.

A place called home

The process of rethinking mobility begins with questions concerning definitions and descriptions of the space we call home: what is home? Is it a physical space, a psychological construct, or both? Probing these questions in a highly mobile world in which men and women often dwell far from the homes of their birth and childhood, a distance that is often psychological as well as physical, critic Carole Boyce Davies states: “Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it” (113). Displacement, therefore, becomes a key element in defining, or redefining home space in our highly mobile world. In this regard, Susan Stanford Friedman, in her essay “Bodies on the move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora,” probes the ambiguity of the phrase “there’s no place like home.” She writes:

“There’s no *place* like home” means home is *the* best, the ideal, everything that elsewhere is not. Places elsewhere can never bring the same happiness as home. Alternately inflected, the phrase turns into the opposite. “There’s *no* place like home “also means that no place, anywhere, is like home. Nowhere is there a place like home. Home is a never never land of dreams and desire. Home is utopia – a no place, a nowhere, an imaginary space longed for, always already lost in the very formation of the idea of home. (192)

Friedman’s remarks draw attention to the psychological situation of “bodies on the move” (205), men and women whose vision of home is often utopic and elusive, their identities shaped by displacement and exile.

In this same vein, the writings of two theorists, phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard and humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan provide important insights into the meaning of home from different disciplines, philosophy and geography. Bachelard and Tuan share an interest in “topophilia,” the Greek term that Bachelard equates with “des espaces aimés”

(17) [the space we love (xxxv)] and Tuan terms “the affective bond between people and place or setting” (*Topophilia* 4).

In his text, *La Poétique de l'espace* [*The Poetics of Space*], Bachelard explores the subjective nature of the relationship between human beings and domestic space, insisting that home is a person’s initial universe and one of the great powers of integration for thoughts, memories, and dreams. He writes: “Par les songes, les diverses demeures de notre vie se copénètrent et gardent les trésors des jours anciens” (25). [Through dreams, the various dwelling places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days (5).] Hence, although the home we inhabit in childhood and to which we return in dream and memory may no longer even exist in reality, it is at the very center of our intimate being. Therefore, we find comfort in the present by reliving memories rooted in our childhood space; memory grants us this refuge. Significantly, Bachelard cautions his readers not to remain bound to the past. With this intent, he praises oneiric homes, the dream houses we may never build (68), and rejects stasis for impermanence (69). Thus, he provides the individual exiled from home – be s/he nomad, expatriate, immigrant, or traveler – with the concept of a home away from home, one rooted in the subconscious.

Turning to Tuan’s work, we find that in his texts, *Topophilia: A Study of environment Perception, Attitudes and Values*, and *Space and Place*, the geographer examines the ways in which space becomes place, insisting that the sense of place is a universal value. In this regard, he begins *Space and Place* by asserting that space and place are basic components of the lived world; space is freedom, place is security (3). He explains that although space is a more abstract notion than place, their meanings are intertwined; each requires the other for its definitions: “From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa” (6). Tuan’s analysis of space and place leads him to acknowledge a dialectical relationship between shelter and venture, security and freedom. He writes:

In open space one can become intensely aware of place; and in the solitude of a sheltered place the vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence. A healthy being welcomes constraint and freedom, the boundedness of place and the exposure of space. (54)

In his view, the pull between shelter and venture characterizes the human condition: from the stability of one, we long for the freedom of the other, and vice versa.

Both Bachelard and Tuan link women to the hearth, Bachelard using maternal imagery to depict the house as a comforting mother (20), and Tuan depicting the hearth as a peaceful, ordered world with woman at its center (“Introduction” 320). Yet, Tuan goes on to challenge the classic paradigm. Acknowledging that the hearth may be a “dollhouse prison” (320), he defends woman’s desire and right to escape from it:

Women should strive to escape, even if it is into danger and chaos. Why not? So what if one has to lose certain attributes of femininity, even discard them all and become a troll, so as to feel “at home” in the wilds? Why shouldn’t women, like men, become disheveled and carefree? (320)

The geographer’s reflection clearly engages with the specificity of gender, positing women’s experiences of leaving home as distinct from men’s, yet equally appropriate. Both men and women should have the chance to explore the world beyond the confines of home. Providing women with an alternate road map, one that calls for women’s full participation in public life, Tuan signals a path that leads to self-affirmation and empowerment.

Although Tuan challenges the classic image of Ulysses wandering the earth while Penelope remains at home, that paradigm is still a referent in many cultural spaces. For example, we find the specificity of women confined to the shelter of domestic space, as men venture out on the road, the high seas, the battlefield, or claim positions of power in public space, succinctly expressed in the Berber proverb: “man is the outer lamp; woman is the inner lamp.” By identifying women with the small, circumscribed, ordered and peaceful realm of home, family, and close-knit community, societies in general have tended to view any woman who challenged the established order by venturing beyond that realm--whether as exile, expatriate, nomad, or traveler – as iconoclastic, rebellious, and subversive.

It is within this theoretical framework that I turn to the Leïla Sebbar’s trilogy – *Sherazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982); *Les Carnets de Shérizade* (1985);

Le Fou de Shérazade (1991) – three novels, set in the 1980s, that retrace the peregrinations of a *fugueuse*, an adolescent runaway. The daughter of poor Algerian immigrants who, like many of their compatriots, live in the HLM (housing projects) in the working class suburbs of Paris, Shérazade feels marginalized in France because of her Maghrebian immigrant identity, and constrained at home by rules imposed upon her by her family and community. In response, she assumes the role of picaresque hero, abandoning home, school, and community, for a nomadic life of adventure.

The first novel of the trilogy, *Sherazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*, depicts her travels in and around Paris. The second, *Les Carnets de Shérazade*, charts her journey across France. The third, *Le Fou de Shérazade*, finds her in the Middle East. Adopting the concept of rethinking mobility, I propose to chart Shérazade's journey as I explore the hypothesis that the protagonist's outward journey is a transformative experience that leads the protagonist to affirm her sense of self as she seeks her place in the world, a place she can call home.

Leïla Sebbar occupies a unique position in Francophone literature. The daughter of an Algerian father and a French mother, she was born in Colonial Algeria in 1941, spent her childhood and adolescence in Algeria, and her adult years in France. Writing about North African immigrants in France from a unique perspective, at the intersection of Occidental and Oriental cultures, she explains in an exchange of letters with the Canadian writer Nancy Huston, that she defines herself as a *croisée*, a hybrid:

Je suis là, à la croisée, enfin sereine, à ma place, en somme, puisque je suis une croisée qui cherche une filiation et qui écrit dans une lignée toujours la même, reliée à l'histoire, à la mémoire, à l'identité, à la tradition et à la transmission, je veux dire à la recherche d'une ascendance et d'une descendance d'une place dans l'histoire d'une famille, d'une communauté, d'un peuple, au regard de l'Histoire et de l'univers. (*Lettres parisiennes* 138)

[I am there at the crossroads, serene at last, finally in my place; for I am a *croisée* seeking a connection; writing within a lineage, one that is always the same. It is tied to history to memory, to identity, to tradition, and to transmission, by

which I mean the search for ascendants and descendants, seeking a place in the history of a family, a community, a people with regard to History and the universe].

Identifying as a *croisée*, Sebbar uses the craft of writing not only to inform her readers about the world of Maghrebian immigrants in France, but to come to understand her own place in the world and to attenuate her own sense of exile.

Exile, as defined by Edward Said is “the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (49). The Palestinian-American scholar and critic believes, however, that plurality of vision compensates, at least in part, for the psychological dislocation: “Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal” (55). Adapting to a new place, a new environment, the exile finds new customs, activities, language, and linguistic expressions that, as they occur against the memory of the old, result in contrapuntal juxtaposition. Thus, although the exile lives in a world that is admittedly decentered and nomadic, he or she can find enrichment through a greater sense of potential – a new way of seeing, hearing, and experiencing his or her surroundings. In other words, exile can be productive. Said, of course, speaks for himself; others may not view a decentered, nomadic world quite the same way. As experiences differ, so do the various literary expressions that emerge from them, resulting in a wide range of exilic and nomadic voices. Yet, Sebbar, through her writings in general, her trilogy in particular, joins Said in viewing exile as potentially productive, with contrapuntal awareness its stimulating and enriching reward.

Sebbar’s writing on Algerian immigrant culture is not self-referential in the sense that she, herself, is not a Maghrebian immigrant. Yet, she deftly depicts the quest of adolescent *Beurs*, children of Maghrebian immigrants in France, to find their place in the world. In their search for empowerment, self-affirmation, and a new space situated at the intersection of Occidental and Oriental cultures, some, like her protagonist, Shérazade, pass through a nomadic phase; they become *fugueurs*, adolescent runaways. As Sebbar explains: “Fuguer c’est aller vers le croisement, la fugue est le mouvement de l’exil. Les enfants rejouent l’exil parental à travers la fugue pour sortir du ghetto, et pour aller vers

l'autre.” (Hugon 37) [To run away is to go toward the crossing; running away is the movement that characterizes exile. The children reenact their parents' exile by running away from home, and they do so to escape the ghetto and go toward the other.]

Sherazade leaves home

Sherazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts charts the first leg of an outward journey that begins when, towards the end of her senior year of high school, Shérazade disappears from home. Her motives are unclear to her family, and to the reader at first as well. Shérazade does not fit the typical profile of the runaway. She suffers neither physical nor psychological abuse; her family is not dysfunctional. Rather, her quest is existential. Rejecting the limited life that awaits her, she sets out to discover the world beyond Aulnay-sous-Bois, the working class Parisian suburb that has been her childhood and adolescent home.

As glimpses of Shérazade's past emerge, several factors foreshadow this outward journey. The first is a seemingly banal incident in her early childhood. Playing a game of “Cowboys and Indians” with her brothers – a game in which the children reenact an attack upon an Indian camp by a band of cowboys – the little sister is ordered by her brothers to play the role of an Indian squaw. She assumes the role willingly until the day they declare that an Indian squaw must not leave her teepee. Refusing to abide by the rules that confine women and their children to their tents while the men courageously fight off their aggressors, she angrily leaves the camp, refusing to ever play the game again. Hence, the young child affirms her rebellious spirit as she demands the freedom of movement denied the Indian squaw, and by extension, the women of her own culture. Significantly, as an adolescent, she will show the same determination and demand the same freedom of movement. Her motto will be: “J'irai où je veux, quand je veux, et ma place est partout”(88) [I go where I wish when I wish and my place is everywhere].

Another significant experience originating in her childhood occurs when she and her sister, while still in elementary school, spend an entire year in Algeria with their grandparents. During that period, their grandfather initiates his granddaughters to linguistic, cultural, and religious elements he deems critical to their Algerian identity and unavailable to them in France. These include knowledge of Algerian folklore, literature,

and history, including the events of the war of national liberation. Thus, in her formative years, Shérazade learns to value her Algerian heritage.

Upon leaving home, Shérazade joins a group of runaways. Young people of diverse backgrounds, African, Caribbean, Maghrebian, Eastern European, they are living together in a squat, an abandoned building in Paris. There, she tests her resourcefulness as she acquires the survival skills necessary to live independently. Significantly, during her stay, she becomes aware of the dangers involved in living clandestinely with few economic resources. Some of her housemates engage in pornography, others in prostitution, still other in drugs, and terrorism. Except for one robbery – parodied as an *auto-reduction* – some occasional shoplifting, and her attempt to obtain false identity papers, she steers clear of illegal activities. Shérazade, like her namesake of the *Arabian Nights*, lives by her wits and imagination, and manages to elude the authorities. If they were to catch her, they would send her home.

As a keen observer, she recognizes that although the members of the squat try their best to offer one another the comfort and stability of a caring family, they cannot. Staunchly independent, she views salvation as an individual's responsibility. She also distinguishes herself from her housemates through her intellectual interests. A voluminous reader and writer who spends hours in libraries and fills her notebooks with poetry and prose, she finds no one in the group with whom to share this world. Yet, shortly after moving into the squat, a chance encounter with a young Frenchman of *pied-noir* origins, fills that void. The relationship between Shérazade and Julien evolves as a cultural exchange in which Shérazade tells Julien stories drawn from Algerian popular culture – tales she presumably learned from her grandfather – and he, in turn, introduces her to Orientalist painting, specifically the Odalisques of Ingres, Delacroix and Matisse.

Studying Orientalist paintings, Shérazade focuses on the confinement of the Oriental woman as conveyed through the pictorial representations of the odalisques, women enclosed in the harem. Acknowledging her ties to the odalisques as women of the Orient whom she views metaphorically as her sisters, she nevertheless distances herself from them through the objective stance of the observer. This is most evident when she sequesters herself one night in the Beaubourg Museum and studies Matisse's *Odalisque à la culotte rouge*. Standing before the painting, she first enters a description of it into her

notebook, noting the reclining semi-nude figure clad in bright red bouffant trousers, sprawled on a bright green and gold striped sofa in a room whose walls are decorated with multicolored arabesques. Here, her objective description translates the visual representation, yet her emotional response is never articulated. However, we readers are aware that in the enclosed space of the museum, Shérazade comes to feel the full force emotionally – even if she cannot yet articulate it – of the Oriental woman defined by the Western gaze as an exotic object forever confined, an image she fiercely rejects. Gazing at the painting, she resolves to leave for Algeria.

On the road: *Les Carnets de Shérazade*

In the second novel of the trilogy, *Les Carnets de Shérazade*, the voyage, as critic Françoise Lionnet aptly notes, not the origin or the destination, takes prime importance; it defines her life at this point in time (183). After a near fatal automobile accident, Shérazade, presumed dead by the French police, is free to forge a new destiny. When the reader once again encounters the intrepid voyager, she has climbed aboard a truck parked at the Marseille docks. Yet, rather than take the boat to Algeria from Marseille, she pursues an alternative itinerary, retracing the path of the “*Marche des Beurs*,” the antiracist march that left Marseille on October 15, 1983, to travel 1500 kilometers on foot, before arriving in Paris December 3 of that same year. There, President François Mitterrand met the marchers with the promise that their status as immigrants would indeed improve. They would receive residence cards and work permits valid for ten years, witness the promulgation of a law against racist crimes, and be able to vote in local elections. Clearly, the *Marche des Beurs* transformed the debate concerning the place of North African French immigrants in contemporary French society. By choosing to follow the route of the march and postpone her trip to Algeria, Shérazade reveals the importance she grants her identity as a *Beur*--the child of Maghrebian immigrants.

In Marseille, where she meets Gilles, a truck driver who agrees to take her back to Paris with him, she spins yards in exchange for free transportation just as the legendary Shéhérazade of the *Arabian Nights* invented tales for the Sultan in exchange for her life. Her very name linking her to the renowned storyteller, Shérazade entertains Gilles during the seven days they spend on the road with stories, some true, others imagined, some of

which she reads from her notebooks, others told from memory. Her inventiveness transforms the transport vehicle in which they are traveling into a magical theater where the imaginative power of the storyteller holds sway. In this regard, she spins yarns of fictional encounters with diverse individuals: the American diva, Jessye Norman, the Trinidadian novelist, J.S. Naipaul, as well as stories of how she escaped – through pure luck or by wit – from myriad potential male aggressors. And, she recounts the lives of two nineteenth century writers who were travelers like herself: Flora Tristan, with her utopian vision of universal community, and Arthur Rimbaud, with his revolt against the constraints of bourgeois society, fleeing Europe for Africa, where he created the myth of Rimbaud, the errant poet turned arms dealer in Abyssinia. As she recounts their adventures, she links her nomadic spirit to theirs.

Gilles, who listens attentively, becomes her guide through rural France, a region that Shérazade, a daughter of the Paris suburbs, did not know at all. Discovering the countryside, she encounters its residents, among them a young peasant girl who, like her, is a runaway. Francette, “seule tout le temps avec les bêtes, la fourche, et le tracteur” (227) [alone all the time with the animals, the pitchfork, and the tractor], explains why she has run away from home: “à la télé je voyais des femmes, des filles de mon âge, et moi à côté” (227) [On TV, I saw women, young girls my own age, and I was left behind]. Poor, marginalized, trapped in an extremely limited life, Francette sees no alternative but to leave. Her decision, like Shérazade’s, does not stem not from an abusive or dysfunctional family situation but rather from the realization that she is trapped by circumstances in a sorely limited existence. Recognizing their common bond, the two runaways affirm their friendship by bathing together in a stream, thereby recreating the ritual of the *hammam*, the Moorish bath, but moving it into open, liberating space.

As Shérazade recounts her adventures to Gilles, she confirms her independence by controlling the narrative, choosing what she will reveal, hide, or invent. In this regard, the truck driver may believe that he is freely choosing the itinerary, but in fact, Shérazade is sending him along the path she has chosen, the *Marche des Beurs*, yet keeping her project secret from him. As the novel draws to a close and she takes leave of Gilles, Shérazade confirms that she truly embraced her motto: “J’irai où je veux, quand je veux et ma place est partout” (88) [I go where I wish, when I wish, and my place is everywhere].

Dangerous crossings: *Le Fou de Shérazade*

As they chart the voyages of a protagonist on the move, the first two novels present itineraries that never cross a French border. Shérazade may express the desire to return to Algeria, but she does not act upon it. The third novel, in contrast, while still postponing the projected trip to Algeria, nevertheless crosses frontiers. Shérazade heads for the Middle East, first to Beirut and then to Jerusalem.

Widening the geographic scope of her journey to include the Middle East, Sebbar's nomadic protagonist reveals that she seeks her place within the Arab world. Yet, by moving into a geographical area that she does not know, and doing so without a support system such as the one she had in France – the members of the squat, Gilles, Julien – she faces enormous challenges. Lebanon, in the 1980s is in the midst of a civil war. During the same era, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict intensifies as Israel continues to expropriate Palestinian land for its settlers and the settlement construction in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip give rise to the Palestinians' first Intifada. Sebbar assumes that we, her readers, are knowledgeable in Middle East politics, but depicts a protagonist who is clearly politically naïve, seemingly unaware that the country is caught up in a civil war. It is not surprising that shortly after arriving in Beirut, Shérazade is taken hostage by Lebanese militiamen convinced she is spying for the Israeli secret service. In Lebanon, her courage is tested through a harrowing ordeal of confinement.

Le Fou de Shérazade provides a harsh corrective to the traveller's motto: "J'irai où je veux, quand je veux et ma place est partout" (88) [I go where I wish, when I wish, and my place is everywhere]. In point of fact, a young woman adventurer, no matter how intrepid, cannot always go where she wishes without encountering great risk, particularly in areas, such as the Islamic world, where cultural and religious traditions can severely limit a woman's mobility. Shérazade, who, in the previous novels, emerged unscathed from potentially dangerous situations, fares less well in this context. Indeed, the novel takes a particularly dark turn when she is imprisoned, beaten, and tortured by her captors. As a captive, she is forced to use her wits and imagination not to entertain but in an attempt to save her life. In truth, however, she cannot rescue herself. Shérazade is finally liberated when her photo, taken in captivity, is released to the world media. Ironically, the

young woman who viewed the odalisques as an objective observer, suddenly becomes a modern day odalisque, her image, not painted, but photographed, reaching viewers far and wide, and through its dissemination via modern media, saving her life.

The experience of incarceration, with its physical and psychological abuse, force Shérazade to recognize her vulnerability and to realize that as captive, she, like the storyteller of the *Arabian Nights* and the odalisques in Orientalist art, is hostage to male whims, desire, and violence. Nevertheless, she shows her courage and fortitude in prison by reading, writing, escaping into memories of earlier freedom, and attempting to establish contact with her jailors. Yet, while held captive, her inner resources – physical and psychological stamina, courage, and self-reliance – are sorely tested. Perhaps the most difficult experience for her occurs when the militia commando orders the several books she has been carrying in her knapsack ripped up and burned. Here, Shérazade voices her protest against censorship:

–Trois livres, c’est rien, il faudrait brûler tous les livres, partout dans le monde. (...) et même si vous les brûlez tous, un incendie planétaire ne suffira pas...Il en restera au moins un, caché, qui vous aura échappé...Et le dernier homme ou la dernière femme, même si vous les avez rendus fous, sauront dire des vers que vous n’aurez jamais lus ni entendus... (37).

[–Three books are nothing. You would have to burn all the books, everywhere in the world. (...) and even if you burn them all, a fire on the whole planet would not suffice. There would always be one, hidden, that would have escaped you...And the last man or woman, even if you had made them crazy, would be able to recite the verses that you would never have read nor heard...]

Thus, if incarceration awakens her to her own vulnerability, it also grants her a new political consciousness with respect to problems of the Arab world, including pernicious censorship of word and thought.

Emerging from this admittedly harrowing experience with greater political awareness, Sebbar’s intrepid traveler finds her way to Palestine where she encounters a group of Palestinian women who have assembled in peaceful protest to protect their olive

grove from Israeli bulldozers: “Assises au pied des oliviers, gardiennes de l’arbre de vie, l’arbre de Dieu, elles passeront la nuit dans le champ jusqu’à la relève organisée par les vieilles des maisons”(196) [Seated at the foot of the olive trees, as guardians of the tree of life, God’s tree, they spend the night in the field until their replacements arrive, a changing of the guard organized by the old women of the community.] Joining the group of Palestinian women defending their land – which they do successfully – Shérazade comes to value women’s solidarity. Clearly, the journey to the Middle East is instructive in crucial ways. It grants her a better understanding of the world in general, the Middle East in particular, and her problematic place as both insider and outsider. The Algerian Arabic that she speaks is a clear marker of otherness, of alterity within the Arab World.

Significantly, before leaving Jerusalem, Shérazade sends her father a postcard, a first gesture to renewing the links with her family. She then joins Julien and his film crew to assume the role he has written for her. Surprisingly, he has given her the role of an Israeli journalist who loses her life in a bombing raid. Does Shérazade’s cinematic demise signal Julien’s willingness to put an end to his Orientalist fantasies and view Shérazade through a corrected lens? Has “*le fou de Shérazade*,” the modern day Orientalist who has pursued Shérazade so ardently, photographed her so obsessively, written multiple scenarios for her, consistently using his extravagant imagination to transform her into his version of a contemporary odalisque, finally come to recognize the inadequacy of his representation? Similarly, has Shérazade reached a place from which she can negotiate an appropriate relationship with both her Maghrebian father and her French lover? In other words, is she now able to replace her initial response of flight from the men who wish to control her, with dialogue with those who, until now, have sought to limit her world – a Maghrebian father who believes that it is his duty to control his daughter’s movements and a romantic Orientalist intent on bringing her into his colonial fantasy? Finally, is the intrepid traveler ready to make the trip to Algeria, a trip that, like her voyage to the Middle East, will grant crucial understanding of her place in the world, and hopefully destroy the myth of Algeria as a utopia, for utopia is, as Susan Stanford Friedman reminds us, is “a no place, a nowhere, an imaginary space longed for, always already lost in the very formation of the idea of home” (192).

These and other questions posed in the three novels would be answered were the novelist to transform the trilogy into a quartet. However, when Sebbar published the third novel, in early 1990s, her protagonist's return to Algeria would have been thwarted by political events. Entering the *Décennie Noire*, the dark decade of the 1990s that set the Algerian army against the Islamists in violent confrontation after the government declared null and void elections that would have brought the Islamists to power, the country was no longer safe for travel, and would remain so for a decade. Sebbar, upon leaving the trilogy behind, has continued to write fictional works that depict the lives of individuals with links to the Maghreb, and to engage in autobiographical writing as well. Her Shérazade trilogy, however, will most likely never become a quartet.

In conclusion, by retracing the journey of a protagonist who discovers her sense of self through displacement, fleeing her home and taking to the open road, I hope to have shown that Sebbar's trilogy confirms the importance of the journey and its resulting encounters to the process of self discovery and empowerment. In this respect, the three works reflect elements of both the picaresque novel and the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of initiation, literary genres in which self-discovery and maturation occur through a series of fortuitous encounters. However, as the work of a postcolonial writer, "a *croisée* seeking a connection", the trilogy seeks to reconcile what critic Françoise Lionnet terms the *rêve d'habiter*, the dream of belonging and inhabiting, with the fate of being relegated to the margins in one's own country by one's family origins (171). In this regard, although Shérazade's outer journey has made the inner journey to self-understanding and empowerment possible, her negotiations with France and Algeria – one the former colonizer, the other the formerly colonized; one the land of her birth, the other the land of her ancestors – are destined to remain an ongoing process.

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