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**American Orientalism and the Representation of Algeria in  
Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* (1949).**

*Extended Essay submitted to the Department of English as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Literature and Civilization.*

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# Dedications

To our dear parents, respectful sisters and brothers, and lovely nephew and  
niece,

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## Abstract

In the light of Orientalism, the present work investigates the representation of Algeria in American literature. It aims at examining the development of the American Orientalist writings about Algeria, along with using a postcolonial reading of Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* (1949). A historical study is used to highlight the nature of the Algerian-American relations as far as to analyze the evolution of the early American literary texts that put Algeria under scrutiny. Paul Bowles was among the most influential authors who lived in North Africa and produced many literary works, inspired by the exotic world of the Orient. Algeria was one of the Oriental places which captured Bowles' attention. Therefore, he produced his first novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), and eventually paved the way for different critical responses. In this respect, this research examines Bowles' depiction of Algeria, especially, the desert, in addition to the Orientalist aspects discovered in the novel. Algeria in early American literature was mainly represented in Captivity Narratives to enlighten the American public opinion about its strength and culture. As America followed the European Orientalist fashion, Algeria again appeared in American Literature under the lens of Paul Bowles. As a case study, *The Sheltering Sky* served as an illustration of Bowles' Orientalist penchant, portraying the Algerian desert and its inhabitants as exotic, backward, as well as dangerous. And these were the most crucial findings of the present research.

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# **General Introduction**



## General Introduction

Although people seemed to embrace the huge changes that the industrial revolution has brought to the world before the 20th Century, mainly, fast transportation, good products, and better health standards, they were still devastated by the cultural crisis caused by Colonialism. Their disappointments also included the rising amount of unemployment. Moreover, people were sandwiched between two choices; whether to preserve their national identity or to give up on it for the sake of social improvement and the pursuit of a better future, the thing which led to an increasing imbalance, immigration, and social classification, especially, in the urban colonized-nations. Some people even started to question their faith; they no longer believed or had to convert to other religions which suited their needs.

Followed by the outcomes of the first and the second world wars, Literature, in general, was highly influenced by authors who were mainly trying to reflect and depict the harsh realities of some Oriental societies that have completely changed from how they used to be in the past. Algeria is one of those many countries that were highly affected by Colonization. France claimed that the urbanized-Oriental land had to be under such European Influence for the sake of flourishing its backward civilization. However, their hidden intentions might be questioned if the huge natural resources of the Algerian desert are to be considered on such an occasion.

America is a democratic land that prioritized freedom of speech and liberty. Since Nationalism grew, America supposedly supported peace organizations to stop European imperial presence in the Orient. Algeria, and even some other Oriental countries, had to be categorized third-world nations. They were also considered inferior in all fields: Language, culture, economy, technology, and architecture. Among the American authors who tried to draw an image about Algeria is Paul Bowles in his first novel: *The Sheltering Sky* (1949). Thus, the following research aims at studying the development of the American Orientalist

writings about Algeria, along with using a Postcolonial reading of Bowles' *the Sheltering Sky* (1949). In an attempt to reach this aim, the work results in answering the following research questions:

- 1- How was Algeria represented in Early American Literature?
- 2- What were the main interests that Pushed Bowles to write about Algeria? And did he perceive Algeria from an Orientalist perspective?
- 3- How was the Algerian Desert depicted in Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky*?

Seeking to answer these queries, this work is going to be formed into two chapters. In the first chapter, it is important to explore the early encounters between the Regency of Algiers and the Newly-born United States, as far as to shed light on the different portrayals of Algeria in American Early fictional works, especially, Captivity Narratives. In addition, it is worth examining American Orientalism and its expansions in The Maghreb, mainly, in Algeria, in the light of Paul Bowles' writings. The second chapter is devoted to a critical analysis of the depiction of the Algerian Desert, unfolding its mysteries and impacts on western travelers in Bowles' selected Novel; a case study to illustrate the American Orientalist journey in Algeria, which blossomed in the postwar era.

The Research paper is centered on two main approaches. On one hand, a historical approach is used to highlight the early Algerian-American relations, the representation of Algeria in American Literary works at the time, and the development of American Orientalism. On the other hand, the present work follows a postcolonial approach to examine the perception of Paul Bowles about Algeria. In addition, it is important to demonstrate the extent to which his novel is similar to those of his Orientalist ancestors. The Algerian Desert is put under scrutiny as a crucial aspect to analyse the portrayal of the image of the Orient.

# **Chapter One: The Representation of Algeria in American Literature and Orientalism**

# Chapter One: The Representation of Algeria in American Literature and Orientalism

## 1.1. Introduction

In American Literature, Algeria shapes a background for Oriental studies. Different American Orientalists have been trying to represent the image of Algeria in their works since the establishment of the United States, such as Peter Markoe, Royall Tyler, and Paul Bowles. First, one of the first representations of Algeria in American Literature started with American Captivity narratives. The latter has formed the worst period in the history of Americans, mainly those who were suffering from corsair activities by Algerian pirates in the Mediterranean Sea. The second significant issue that draws attention is the American embracement of Orientalism. Unlike the way Orientalism emerged and developed in Europe, American Orientalism is rather an extension of what has been already present in both the Eastern and European worlds. The European world mainly ruled and controlled the MENA region in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. However, for America, there was a kind of shift in history that rendered its power over the Orient more obvious than ever before; i.e., the First and Second World Wars. Finally, the chapter ends up with a brief biography of one of the most influential writers, Paul Bowles, who stimulated an ambition for doing this research in the first place, and who showed a perception of Algeria in his two main works, *Without Stopping, an Autobiography of Paul Bowles* (1972) and *The Sheltering Sky* (1949).

## 1.2. Algerian-American Relations

After the American independence in 1776, The United States and Algeria have been building significant amity and peaceful relations. Algeria was one of the very first nations to recognize the United States as an independent country. However, American trade in the Mediterranean was hampered by Algerian corsairs and piracy. Since America became independent, it has no longer been

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able to count on the British Navy for protection. Thus, it has fallen prey to the Algerine seizure of American ships. “Algiers alone captured at least 15 American ships between 1785 and 1793 because they could not pay the required tributes and fees” (Ross, 6). It took over 10 years to reach a peace treaty with the Dey of Algiers in 1795. The Regency of Algiers, the powerful Barbary state in North Africa, signed the peace treaty in 1795, to ensure the safe passage of American ships as well as to release American Captives, in the condition that Americans pay costly tributes; this was the only feasible solution for the Congress. Algerian corsairs were renewed in the nineteenth century because the American naval force has grown at the time, so they refused to pay further tributes. Subsequently, US Commodores Bainbridge and Stephen Decatur were sent to the Mediterranean Sea, to confront the Algerian Navy and Ships in a sea battle that was known as “the forgotten war”. The battle lasted two days on which Rais Hamidou was martyred and his great ship “Meshouda” collapsed. As a result, a peace treaty was signed in 1815 and confirmed in 1816 causing the release of all American captives. However, the United States and Algeria have still been negotiating the matter, until they signed their long-lasting friendship and peace treaty in 1822.

After being at war with almost all European nations as well as the late American Naval force, Algiers has been bombarded by the British, following the American example. A few years later, the Turkish Empire has been removed by the French occupation of Algeria in 1830. Americans believed that the nightmare of Algiers has now vanished and the Barbary state has been paralyzed (westerners even compare the American and European resistance against the Barbary corsairs to nowadays war against terrorism). In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, travel and Tourism began in Algiers which was considered a ‘winter resort’, attracting a great number of Europeans, New Yorkers, and wealthy American families. As Travel increased, American

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Orientalists, following the European Orientalist movement, started to record their experiences in Algeria mostly in their paintings and travel writings. For instance, “Frederick Arthur Bridgeman, an American Orientalist painter, left many of his impressions on Algiers, in the drawings of ‘winters in Algeria’” (Ross, 14).

American stereotypes of Algiers as a Barbary state, which must submit to the French masters, have melted away as the Algerian revolutionists showed great resistance and wise reactions to the French colonizers. In a matter of fact, The Algerian revolutionist El Amir Abdelkader has immensely been appreciated by Americans and his name was immortalized in stones. The Embassy of America in Algeria (2015) noted that:

In 1860, Emir Abdelkader became the symbol of Muslim tolerance when he sheltered and saved...American diplomats and their families holed up in the American General Consulate in Damascus. Emir Abdelkader's brave demonstration of humanity and selflessness earned him appreciation and honors from U.S. President Abraham Lincoln (Algerian-American Relation, 1).

The Twentieth century witnessed a major turn in history. The United States showed a great influence in the two world wars and eventually became the most powerful country in the world, surpassing Britain, Germany, and France. As far as its relation to Algeria is concerned, Algerian Nationalism grew as a vital issue in the world, along with other colonized nations. Americans were still strengthening their relationship with the Algerian natives. As commerce increased, Christopher Ross, Ambassador to Algeria (1988-1991), in his research paper entitled “The United States Mission in Algeria, A Historical Sketch” states that:

By the 1920's...George W. Wickersham, writing in “spring in Morocco and Algiers” (New York, 1923), affirmed that “there is a growing commerce between the U.S. and ... Algeria...

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American victrolas warble the latest jazz music or topical song to Moorish and Arab ears in cloistered harems and nomadic tents... and American agricultural implements of various kinds increasingly are employed throughout North Africa (Ross, 15).

Simply put, the United States commenced extending its culture in North Africa. Thus, Algerians were developing awareness about the nature of their relation to America and the main aspects of it. As Nationalism grew, The US made early contact with Algerian nationalists such as Farhat Abbas who had several meetings with the consular of the American Embassy in Vichy France, Robert Murphy. In addition, President Kennedy showed clear support for Algerian independence which eventually took place on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1962.

In Sum, Algerian-American Relations have been through a series of troubles, negotiations, peace treaties, exchanged assistance, and eventually diplomatic improvements. Americans at first perceived Algeria as barbaric, scary, and a violent nest of pirates. In the nineteenth century, they became conscious of the French occupation of Algeria; they believed that colonization was the only solution to stop Algerine corsairs. As nationalist movements increased, they sided with all the nations under imperial rules, since they reminded them of their revolutions for freedom and liberty. Therefore, different American writers recorded their experiences with Algeria either from their concrete travels and encounters or the stereotyped images they perceived.

### **1.3. The Image of Algeria in Early American Literature**

The Algerian-American Relations and the events that marked the early encounters between the two nations have greatly shaped different perspectives on Algeria in Americans' minds. Indeed, the sovereignty of Algiers along with its hegemony over the Mediterranean shipping and trading represented a threatening monster for the United States as can be shown in this statement:

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“Algerian cruisers had a terrifying reputation among Christian seamen and the Americans were already bracing themselves for unknown horrors” (Barnby, 4-5). Moreover, the seizure of American ships as well as the piracy activities by the Algerines (as they were called at the time), have affected Americans' thoughts, in addition to the image they perceive about the Algerian people. As a result, most American writers, mainly those who were captured by Algerine pirates, started to record their experiences in Algeria through Captivity narratives; a literary genre that reflects the life and adventures of American captives in the Algerian prisons. Unlike the British and French literary accounts that put Algeria under scrutiny, American authors had few literary productions about it. However, though few accounts have been produced, all of them were significant and gave the American audience a great deal of knowledge about Algiers, The Barbary state. Some of them have been written out of fear, while other books were written out of adoration, mainly travel books.

### **1.3.1. The Algerine in American Captivity Narratives**

The Depiction of Algeria in American literature first appeared on the screen in Captivity Narratives. This genre, though overlooked in literary studies, has emerged in American writings as a way to express the life of American captives in British prisons first, then in the Orient after the American independence. As far as Algiers is concerned, American writers left significant accounts about the Algerian corsairs and their jails, along with some detailed recordings of the Algerian society, culture, and dialects, to enlighten Americans about Algeria. In his historical book entitled *The Prisoners of Algiers* (1966), Barnby provides many historical facts dealing with the Algerian-American encounters and wars that are rich in events. Another book that records the history of Algeria at the time is John B. Wolf's *Barbary Coast: Algeria under the Turks* (1979). In this stage, it is important to highlight the Representation of Algeria in two notable



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fictional works: Peter Markoe's *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787) and Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (1797).

One of the very first literary works to portray Algeria is Peter Markoe's *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787). Markoe is an American revolutionist, humanistic, and liberal man who supports freedom as well as Democracy. He is one of the early American writers to write about the Orient. Thus, he has produced literature that would eventually reflect his knowledge as well as his very acquaintance with the culture of the other, particularly, Algeria. His epistolary novel *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* is considered an important Source that records a great deal of information about The Regency of Algiers in the late eighteenth century; it is a fictional work that mirrors realistic events such as Captivity as well as white slavery in Ottoman Algeria. The story is about Mehmet, an Algerine spy disguised as a French man, who travels to the United States on a secret mission to explore American society, its economy, as well as its military strength. He eventually turns a Christian and settles in America where he finds peace, freedom of faith, and democracy.

Peter Markoe aimed to enlighten the American audience about Algeria and its perceived-to-be barbaric culture. Mehmet, the protagonist of the novel, is a symbolic character reflecting the Algerian man; his fanaticism of Islam, deception, and genius to delude others. However, once he becomes familiar with the American society and the Christian faith, he decides to abandon his Islamic religion as far as his Algerian belonging. In the 23rd letter (XXIV) addressing his Algerian friend Solomon, Mehmet writes: "RUINED, didt thou say? No I am preserved. I am free and delight in the freedom of others, and am no longer either a slave or a tyrant. Christian and a Pennsylvanian, I am doubly an advocate for the rights of mankind" (Markoe, 126). In this respect, Mehmet is convincing his friend that America has provided him with protection, liberty

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from Algerine slavery, and a Christian faith, in contrast to Algiers, where these human rights are absent. In parallel, the author is embodying his thoughts and beliefs in the character of Mehmet as a message to Algerians, in particular, and Muslims, in general, to break the chains of Islamic imprisonment, along with inviting them to embrace Christianity and to find refuge in democratic America.

A decade later, Royall Tyler, an American jurist, playwright, and novelist, published his artistically valued novel *The Algerine Captive* (1797). It tells the story of the scientist and physician Dr. Updike Underhill, the protagonist of the novel, who embarks on a journey to bring slaves from North Africa and ends up captured by the Algerine privateers. The novel is a record of Tyler's life and childhood hiding his reality, being Underhill. The narrator provides the reader with an account of the Algerines; their manners, language, costumes, religion, and faith. In a matter of fact, the primary purpose of the work was to enlighten the United States about Algeria and serve the American public opinion. In the second volume, which was devoted to Underhill's captivity in Algiers, the author describes the habits and costumes of the Algerines as follows:

The men wear next to their bodies a linen shirt or rather chemise, and drawers of the same texture. Over their shirt linen or silk gown which is girded about their Loins by a sash, in the choice of which they exhibit much fancy...The dress of the women, resembles that of the men, except that their drawers are longer, and their outside garment is like ouold - fashioned ridinghoods. Their more active amusements are riding and throwing the dart, they sometimes play at chess...but never at games...forbidden by the Alcoran (Tyler, 179-80).

In the light of the present passage, the narrator provides truthful details about the customs of the Algerian men and women at the time, along with mentioning interesting observations concerning their amusements and skills. Indeed, the

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descriptions reflect the strong attachment of Algerians to the Islamic culture. Tyler's fiction portrays real images of Algeria; he conveys a message to the American audience that Islam for Algerians is a way of life, i.e., it is not only sacred in Alcoran but also their manners, customs, as well as daily activities. To illustrate, the protagonist Underhill observes that even in their games, they are not allowed to play forbidden ones as he mentions: "They sometimes play at chess and draughts, but never at games of chance or for money, those being expressly forbidden by the Alcoran."

Eventually, it can be noticed that American captivity narratives mirror two different perspectives on Algeria. On one hand, authors like Peter Markoe paint misleading images about Algerians. Markoe claims that they have a negative vision of their own culture, from which they want to escape enslavement and have a better life in democratic America. In addition, he invites them to abandon Islam, and embrace Christianity; the religion of peace and liberty. On the other hand, Royall Tyler demonstrates that the Algerian society highly appreciates Islam; the faith of peace and mercy. Though his protagonist Underhill was not convinced, he believed that Muslims have wisdom in conveying the Islamic message in opposition to all the stereotyped depictions associated with them as being violent, cruel, and barbaric.

### **1.4. Paul Bowles and American Orientalism**

As a field of study, Orientalism firstly emerged in Europe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, Orientalism as a European ideological creation has far preceded the establishment of its field in different ways of expressing opposition as well as otherness, mainly in British and French literature. Following the European Orientalist fashion, America, when it started to appear as a powerful western country, strengthening its alliance with Europe, has also begun to

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produce Orientalist works to represent the Orient in self-serving images, seeking to feed the hunger for hegemony and the world's domination. In this respect, Orientalism in the United States has reached its zenith in the postwar era when it emerged as the most powerful country in the world and started to interfere in the Middle Eastern economic, political, as well as social affairs. Concerning North Africa, which was under European rule, American Orientalists have been travelling to the region and recording the plight of the natives in the shadow of European imperialism. Meanwhile, they kept the stereotyped depictions of those Orientals as being still uncivilized, Berbers, and exotic. Paul Bowles, the American Orientalist writer who lived the most of his life in Tangier, Morocco, has left a great number of accounts dealing with the Maghreb and describing the very details of its inhabitants. Though he settled mostly in Morocco, Algeria enjoyed a special place in Paul Bowles writings as recorded in different passages of his autobiography *Without Stopping* (1972). Moreover, he got even inspired by the Algerian Desert, making it the dominating setting in his first and famous novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949).

### **1.4.1. American Embracement of Orientalism**

First, of interest is to provide a notional introduction to Orientalism and its European origins. The term 'Orientalism' is epistemologically derived from the word Orient; the geographical area from which the sun rises. Therefore, Orientalism is the movement through which westerners delved into the Oriental world, seeking to explore its languages, cultures, religions, manners, and economics. The binary opposition of West/East or Occident/Orient was not a matter of geographical distancing, but rather a particular way of controlling, dominating, and ruling the other as Edward Said demonstrates precisely in the present passage:

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Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists... have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels...concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on (Said, 2-3).

Said continues:

My point is that Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient...From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II France and Britain dominated the Orient and Orientalism; since World War II America has dominated the Orient, and approaches it as France and Britain once did (Said, 4).

In the light of this passage, Americans experienced Orientalism later than Europe, which brings us to a crucial step to examine the American embracement of Orientalism. It is so logical an idea to say that American Orientalism is an extension of the British one. On one hand, the US has once been a British colony. Therefore, they share a myriad of ideological, political, and historical connections. On the other hand, American writers have been producing English travel books and literary works. Thus, their main source of inspiration, Orientalist discourse, and style of writing were mainly British works. According to the scholar Abdel Fattah Naoum:

In essence, the American school of Orientalism is an organic extension of the British school. Its roots were planted by English and Lebanese immigrants to America. They drew up the research methodology and style for the Americans who had a thirst for Arabic and Islamic studies. This school was interested in the entire East (Naoum, 10).

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Thus, following the British Orientalist fashion, the Americans as well had a thirst to get acquainted with the Orient; they have also been trying to dominate the Oriental regions, particularly, the Middle East and the Arab world. However, their control of the Orient differs from the European one in terms of physical hegemony. In other words, while the European experience with the East was represented in a colonial presence as well as a direct contact with the other, the American experience was more politicized (Edward Said on American Orientalism, 2017).

Second, Mark Twain is one of the first American Orientalists who recorded his travels to those regions in his book entitled “Innocents Abroad” (1869), where he suggested that the American perception of Muslims as “a people by nature and training filthy, brutish, ignorant, unprogressive [and] superstitious” (p. 13). Thus, he continues defining American Orientalism as “a tendency to underestimate the people of the region and to overestimate America's ability to make a bad situation better” (Little, 8). However, this definition tells so little about what American Orientalism stands for since there were more travels to the MENA regions by the turn of the century. For instance, Women found a refuge in the exotic Orient where they could have more freedom than ever before. Unlike British Orientalists, Americans focused more on the image of the desert, which was strongly associated with easterners. The symbol of freedom; the desert, was the positive reflection of American authors about the East in which westerners fled away from the repression of their conservative countries towards a new world full of unknown adventures. Yet, their negative aspect lies in the exoticism and eroticism that were drawn by American Orientalists as inseparable entities of the Orient.

Third, after centring Algiers in American captivity narratives and providing various portrayals of the Algerines in the Ottoman era, American concrete

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Orientalist experience with Algeria started when it became a French colony. Indeed, Americans began intensively visiting Algeria in the late nineteenth century, when Algiers was a winter resort attraction. As tourism grew, many American travelers visited Algeria, leaving several souvenirs such as *Algerian Memories: A Bicycle Tour over the Atlas to the Sahara (1895)* by Fanny B. and William H. Workman, or the drawings of Fredrik Arthur. Moreover, American Ambassador Sheller (1830s) has also been writing his diaries in Algeria with detailed recordings and descriptions. However, it was until the postwar era that Algeria appeared on the American literary scene under the Lens of Paul Bowles.

### **1.4.2. Paul Bowles' Biography**

Paul Bowles, in full Paul Frederic Bowles, born on December 30, 1910, in New York and died on November 18, 1999, in Tangier, Morocco, is an American composer, short story and songwriter, and a novelist. Bowles learned wisdom as well as boldness from his psychologically-troubled infantile experience; He had always been feeling bound in the prison of his family's rules. Therefore, at an early age, he started to break the chains of familial imprisonment and embark on trips to Europe, Africa, and Latin America. He has been passionate about music and poetry, searching heartedly for ways to unleash his talents, develop his ambitions, and start a living from his opera, songwriting, as far as music composing. From his various travels, he has been making different friendships, the thing that provided him with many opportunities as far as chances to progress. Like a great number of American expatriates, Paul Bowles visited Paris, the centre of artistic, literary, and cultural prosperity at the time; he learned French and even wrote some short poems as well as song lyrics in the French language.

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In the middle of his journey, Bowles married the American novelist Jane Auer in 1938. Both he and his wife contributed immensely to the production of significant American literary works. On one hand, after becoming an important musician and short story writer, Paul Bowles shoot to fame when he developed his penchant for writing novels and produced *The sheltering sky* (1949); his first and most notable piece of literature. In addition, he continued writing novels such as: *Let it come down* (1952), *The Spider's house* (1955), and *Up above the world* (1966). Most of Bowles' novels and stories dealt with the experience of westerners in exotic places, existentialism, and themes that highlights the internal part of individuals. On the other hand, Jane Bowles, who as well dedicated her life to authorship, wrote her only published novel *Two serious Ladies* (1943), along with her play entitled "The Summer House" which was staged in New York a decade later. The Couple has traveled to different countries including Mexico and France, but they settled in Tangier, Morocco; the place that inspired Paul Bowles and represented the stage of his departure to the Orientalist journey. Bowles recorded all the diaries of his life in his autobiography *Without Stopping* (1972); an interesting source to read about Bowles' childhood memories, artistic and literary career, as well as several accounts of the travels he made, especially in the Maghreb and North Africa.

### **1.4.3. Bowles' Perception of Algeria**

Bowles is one of the American writers who had a concrete encounter with Algeria. He made several trips in different Algerian cities such as: Oran, Algiers, Laghouat, Ghardaia, Bou Saada...etc. Most of his journeys took place in the Sahara. At this stage, it is interesting to divide Bowles' experience with Algeria into two parts. The first part is going to be devoted to his perception of the Algerian places, mainly the desert, while the second one highlights Bowles'



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depiction of the Algerians as far as the way they were perceived and described in his autobiography *Without Stopping* (1972).

On one hand, Paul Bowles discovered that the Algerian lands, nature, and desert were greatly influential and stunningly magical. He expresses his first impressions as follows:

Straightway I felt a great excitement; much excited; it was as if some interior mechanism had been set in motion by the sight of the approaching land...certain areas of the earth's surface contained more magic than others. Had anyone asked me what I meant by magic...a secret connection between the world of nature and the consciousness of man, a hidden but direct passage which bypassed the mind (Bowles, 125).

Bowles first encounter with Algeria was magical as he notes; he shows that the Algerian mountains, air, and views create a sensitive connection between nature and the mind of the visitors. In other words, heading straight forward to Algeria is paralleled with a continuous journey to the inner self. Indeed, for most Orientalists, travelling to the Orient was always the result of an internal desire to discover the self. To illustrate, the latter was reflected in Robert Hichens' *The Garden of Allah* (1905) where the protagonist went to Biskra in search of freedom and inner peace. On his second voyage to Algeria, Bowles notes that:

When the weather grew unpleasant and I began to dream once more of North Africa...The first night in the bar I talked with a group of French army officers, one of whom told of a place in the desert called Ghardaia, which he recommended highly for a winter sojourn. "Il y a une palmeraie qui est une merveille." He said with enthusiasm...I was entirely delighted with the place, and set about trying to find a house (Bowles, 155-56).

Simply put, for Paul Bowles, being in France was not as inspirational as coming to the North African Charming world. Indeed, The American expatriate

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felt an intimate contact with the Algerian place. Under the French rule, the Algerian cities, especially Algiers, along with the Saharan Oases had a spectacular attraction for a winter sojourn. Thus, advised by the French army officer, Bowles embarked on a trip down to Ghardaia; one of the most mesmerizing as well as ancient cities in the Algerian Sahara. He eventually found that the place was interesting and the adventure was enjoyable. Bowles has visited other Saharan cities including Laghouat, Adrar, and Timimoun. While the places seemed magical and inspirational, the Algerian people had an opposite impression in the Author's view as will be shown in the next phase.

On the other hand, Bowles' negative perception of Algerians has been noted in his descriptions. As he voyages to Laghouat, the writer records specific scenes. He notes that:

The driver, a European, suggested that I return to Laghouat to spend the night...he ordered a tall Algerian to put me on his back, he himself clambering onto the shoulders of another, and together we were carried to dry land... I had been thinking about my valises and trunk, but that was only because I did not yet know the French Sahara, where, as the driver said, one could leave one's watch on a rock and find it a month later (Bowles, 156).

The present passage highlights two Orientalist aspects. Firstly, the French enslavement of Algerian natives attached to the idea that the western man is to be served. Simply put, despite the scenes of carrying Bowles and the European driver on Algerian backs and shoulders in an act of serving, what should be paid attention to is the word "ordered". Usually, the driver is a layman who works and serves all passengers without an expected authority. However, stressing opposition, Bowles enjoyed clarifying and identifying to the reader: the European driver; the master who orders, and the Algerian man; the one who should serve. Secondly, the writer uses a critical concept in the passage which is

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the “French Sahara.” In fact, though they are in the Algerian Sahara, the writer referred to it as being French, since it is secure and no visitor can be robbed or tricked. The discourse used here can be perceived as an allusion to the opposition between the Algerian Sahara, where someone should be cautious of theft, and the French Sahara where these barbaric habits are not common.

As Bowles continues his journey, he provides the audience with a particular depiction of the Algerian woman, he writes:

When he mentioned Ouled Nail girls who would dance naked for us, we relented and let him arrange it...There was only one good-looking girl in the establishment; she was about sixteen, and she made a great show of being very shy. To have taken her to bed would have cost each of us fifteen francs; to see her dance naked, however, was going to cost seventy-five... Whatever she did with her body was esthetically satisfying (Bowles, 159).

In this respect, Bowles associates Nudity and eroticism with the Algerian girls. As the event progresses, Bowles' parody when he says: "she made a great show of being very shy.", and in other lines that followed, Reflects that the Oriental woman, though erotic and lustful, can be so tricky behind a shy as well as a shown-to-be embarrassed person. In addition, in these lines, “To have taken her to bed would have cost each of us fifteen francs; to see her dance naked, however, was going to cost seventy-five”, the author claims that, for Oriental women, dancing to men is considered costly than their virginity; a representation often associated to western women instead. Bowles’ Depiction enriches the Orientalist discourses that juxtapose the Oriental woman in the circle of prostitution. Moreover, the Orient, especially the Algerian desert, has been always portrayed and recorded as a world of Pleasures, dancing harems, eroticism, and exotic beings.

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In sum, Paul Bowles' Perception serves as a twofold criticism. Initially, Bowles views Algeria as a charming place in terms of beauty and inspirational nature. He finds that travelling to the exotic world of Algeria is like flying to a different space in which the desert, as well as the natural view, reflects comfortably upon one's psyche. Finally, He perceives the Algerian people as backward, enslaved by European masters, and erotic. He eventually selects Algeria as the context and the inspirational catalyst of his notable work *The Sheltering Sky*.

### **1.5. Conclusion**

The Representation of Algeria arose in American Literature from the beginning of their encounters. Many American authors have produced different works about Algeria; either from their concrete experiences there or through the stereotyped images they perceived from others, Ones were written out of adoration, while others were written out of fear, especially, American captivity narratives. Hence, Algeria is the sword with two edges in American Literature. For American writers and Orientalists, travelers should be really careful about what the Barbary state might hold as a danger, but at the same time should not give up on benefiting from its endless natural beauty. Paul Bowles is one of those American Orientalists who showed his position when it comes to his perception of Algeria. Therefore, a detailed analysis of his first novel *The Sheltering Sky*, which features the image of Algeria, is going to be extended in the next chapter.

**Chapter Two: The Depiction of the  
Algerian Desert in Bowles' *The  
Sheltering Sky* (1949)**

## **Chapter Two:** The Depiction of The Algerian Desert in Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky*

### **2.1. Introduction**

In his Orientalist journey, Bowles visits Algeria and eventually gets inspired by its magical landscapes and mesmerizing desert. Thus, on his trip to the Sahara, Bowles started to write his first and best novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949). It is about an American couple, accompanied by their friend Tunner, who travels to the Orient, escaping American modernization and its mechanized age, to develop their psychologically-troubled relationship as well as their paralyzed marriage. As they voyage deep into the heart of the desert, their life turns into a tragedy as they lose their identities, sanity, and eventually their connection.

*The Sheltering Sky* is Bowles' most enigmatic work. It deals with thematic issues that make the reader question existence, psychological complexities, and the intricacies of human life. The desert is mainly the fuzziest place on earth; it hides a myriad of secrets behind its vast landscapes, magical atmosphere, and the blowing winds that hold plenty of mysteries, human successive histories, and existing marvels. In the following lines, it is interesting to show the American's Inspirational preconceptions about Algeria as a paradisiacal place, and the contrasting reality they face once they encounter it.

Bowles created his Orientalist fiction, enriched by different stereotypical representations concerning the Algerian desert and its inhabitants, to provide his American audience with an intended depiction of these Oriental people. He claims that although these lands are magical and charming, one should be careful of what they may hold as a danger. Moreover, he sheds light on the portrayal of the Arab man in association with different Orientalist aspects, mainly violence, eroticism, and savagery. For this reason, this part of the

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research is going to be highlighting these Orientalist visions using a postcolonial critical analysis of the novel.

### **2.2. Synopsis of the Novel**

The *Sheltering Sky* is the first novel by Paul Bowles, published in 1948 and considered a model of existential fiction. It is as well a portrait of Innocents Abroad who experienced a new adventure in an unfamiliar land. The story is about three American travelers who chose to be part of an unknown civilization in post-war Africa. Yet, they found themselves as described by the author in "an adventure that takes place on two planes simultaneously, in the actual desert, and the inner desert of the spirit" (Sheikhzadeh & Bejarzahi, 233).

Port and Kit Moresby, accompanied by their friend George Tunner, first arrived at Oran, Algeria. Although Port and Kit are a married couple, their marriage doesn't seem to be vivid with love; the reason for which they decided to take on this adventure. Through their frustrating relationship, Tunner finds an open door to seduce Kit. Nevertheless, this seems to upset Port just a little as he suspects their growing affection for each other, but excuses himself to take a walk and ends up in bed with an Arab girl named "Lala Marhnia", who tried to rob him.

The Morsebys met two other westerners from Australia: Eric and Mrs. Lyle; a repulsive mother and her disturbing son, who eventually offered Port a ride in their car to Boussif. He accepted their offer without even asking for his wife's opinion, hoping by doing so; he would get rid of Tunner because the car can't carry all of them. On one hand, Port is trying to save his marriage. On the other hand, Kit does not approve of his decision and leaves with Tunner on the train. Here, Kit could not but surrender to Tunner's sexual advances.

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From Boussif, the three Americans make their way further to Ain Krorfa; a dreary isolated wasteland that is full of disturbing flies. Port intended there to separate Tunner from Kit, simply, by arranging for him to leave for Messad with the Lyles. Meanwhile, the Morsebys take the bus to Bou Noura. As far as they arrived at Bou Noura, Port discovers that his passport went missing. After that, a Lieutenant d'Armagnac, commander of the local military post, calls Port and informs him that it has been sold on the black market in Messad. Port did not seem to be confused as he realizes that Eric Lyle is the actual thief. D'Armagnac gives the passport to Tunner to return it with him then hand it back to Port in Bou Noura. At this point, Port starts to feel ill but insists on Kit that they must leave for El Ga'a immediately just to avoid Tunner.

On their road to El Ga'a, Port's health condition grew worse to the level that he could not even walk anymore. When they arrived, Kit is shocked that the local hotel was shut down because of a meningitis epidemic. Hence, she was obliged to pay the driver again to take them to nearby Sba. There, Port could finally get tested at the hands of the military infirmary where he was diagnosed with typhoid. This sickness tired him so much that he began catching his last breaths. Until one night, he could no longer resist and dies, while Kit sneaks out to camp to meet Tunner who was arriving from Bou Noura. Yet, Kit gets so confused and frustrated that she lost her way in the desert. Then, she was picked up by a trading caravan. Kit becomes the lover of a Sudanese trader named 'Belqassem', who marries her. But later on, he locks her in his house kept a sexual slave. Kit decides to escape, especially after Belqassem's wives' agony over her. By the end, she could finally arrive at the American Consulate in Oran again; shaking and unresponsive over what happened to her. The story ends with an aid trying to help Kit to meet Tunner again in the local hotel where he was



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supposed to be, however, she chose to disappear into the streets while the aid was distracted.

### **2.3. The Inspiration of the Algerian Desert**

The desert represents the dominating space in most fictional works set in the Orient. Different Orientalist writers have greatly been inspired by the spiritual aura and sublime impressions of the Sahara desert, making it the protagonist of their literary works. For instance, at the dawn of the twentieth century, Robert Hichens' *The Garden of Allah* (1905) reflected the great impacts of the desert on western visitors, in addition to its significant role in shaping travellers' new personalities as well as becoming the spiritual healer of their internal psychological paralysis.

Paul Bowles, in his trip across the Algerian desert, has been captured by its magical spell put on him, turning these impressions into ink and producing his notable work *The Sheltering Sky*, in which the desert represented the spiritual container of the characters. Bowles expresses his feelings noting that:

It is a unique sensation...Here in this wholly mineral landscape lighted by stars like flares, even memory disappears...A strange, and by no means pleasant, the process of reintegration begins inside you, and you have the choice of fighting against it, and insisting on remaining the person you have always been, or letting it take its course. For no one who has stayed in the Sahara for a while is quite the same as when he came (Bowles, 129).

Simply put, the desert has its unique magic upon one's psyche; it can effectively attract any traveler and fulfil their inner desire to discover themselves. Moreover, as people advance deeply to the heart of the Sahara, they cannot but

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get captured by its spiritual Charm and grandeur; they can neither escape it nor stay the same persons they were before coming there. Bowles continues:

Perhaps the logical question to ask at this point is: Why go? The answer is that when a man has been there and undergone the baptism of solitude he can't help himself. Once he has been under the spell of the vast luminous, silent country...no other surroundings can provide the supremely satisfying sensation of existing in the midst of something that is absolute. He will go back, whatever the cost in time or money, for the absolute has no price (Bowles, 129).

Indeed, the writer here explains the reasons that led him passionately to travel to that alien desert. He maintains that the immortal solitude of the Sahara has an unresisting appeal so that no one can control himself against its magic. In addition, the desert is observed as a superior side of the world that can satisfy one's needs to feel alive and understand the meaning of existence. Thus, in one way or another, if he ever leaves this place, he will certainly come back no matter how much it costs.

Port Moresby, the main character of the novel, is the only personage who has been to North Africa before the war; thus, he embarks on another journey to the Orient, inviting his wife, Kit, as well as his friend Tunner to join him in a trip to Algeria. The three Americans, inspired by the exotic landscapes and otherness of the Algerian desert, traveled "with a great deal of luggage and the intention of keeping as far as possible from the places which had been touched by the war" (Bowles, 8). In other words, the anxiety and the psychological breakdown in the aftermath of the war had pushed a great number of westerners to leave their countries and move to places where they can find peace, liberty, and relief. In parallel, the American couple and their friend Tunner discovered that North Africa is the most suitable destination, especially, in the magical silent space of the desert. Port convinced his wife that "Everything's getting gray, and it'll be

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grayer. But some places'll withstand the malady longer than you think. You'll see, in the Sahara here" (Bowles, 10). In this respect, for Port, the Sahara, under the sheltering sky, is the lifeboat that will certainly get them to the shores of inner peace and redemption. Therefore, he considers the Algerian desert as a utopian space and a paradise that will revive their paralyzed relationship and heal their psychic turmoil.

### **2.3.1. The Desert as a Utopian Space**

For Paul Bowles, western civilization in the postwar era seems to have lost its prosperity. Technology, modernization, and social chaos have transformed human life into a contaminated world. Bowles views America as "a huge monster, 'non-culture', a non-civilisation, [. . .] an apocalypse" leading the planet to its inevitable destruction." (Hout, 113) Thus, the only feasible solution was to escape to a different place seeking to find stability and inner comfort. In her book *Utopian Studies (2000)*, Syrine C. Hout mentions:

In "Without Stopping" he [Bowles] confesses: "Like any Romantic, I had always been vaguely certain that sometimes during my life I should come into a magic place which, in revealing its secrets, would give me wisdom and ecstasy, perhaps even death...Taghit is "probably the most intensely poetic spot [he] had ever seen"...he links El Oued to "a city one has dreamt about some time just before waking, and whose sweetness is prolonged into waking (Hout, 116).

Simply put, from the many places that he traveled to, Bowles selects North Africa as the most appropriate place to settle in. Moreover, he considers the Algerian desert as an unfamiliar, unearthly, and peculiar space that is stunningly a utopian world. A "'utopia' is a society or community setting wherein the people experience the ideal and most perfect life possible. There are nothing called rules; humanity is given full freedom to explore everything possible."

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(Madhusudana, 88) Indeed, Bowles travels to the desert to discover freedom, love, satisfaction, and the perfect way of life he can achieve. In this sense, “utopia is, further, defined as an image of desire grounded in dissatisfaction with the present or, as Ruth Levitas calls it, “the expression of the desire for a better way of being” (8)” (Hout, 114). In Parallel, Bowles’ ideals in *The Sheltering Sky* are mirrored in the main character ‘Port’, who as well seeks refuge in the Algerian Sahara, considering it as the utopia of his world in which happiness and comfort lie. He expresses:

The happiness, if there still was any, existed elsewhere: down on the docks, out at the edge of the sebkha in the tents...beyond the mountains in the great Sahara, in the endless regions that were all of Africa. But not here in this sad colonial room where each invocation of Europe was merely one more squalid touch; one more visible proof of isolation; the mother country seemed farthest in such a room (Bowles, 44).

The American couple’s journey was inspired by Port’s burning desire to travel to the Algerian desert to decode its mysteries as well as the encrypted messages it hides in its vast space. In their preconception, before moving to the very heart of the Sahara, they believed that, in the desert, they will “save their 12-years-old and now sexless marriage in exotically therapeutic North Africa” (Hout, 120). Furthermore, they imagined that the Sahara would be the paradise they have been dreaming of, in which all troubles, pains, and mental disorders would vanish. However, this inspirational utopia in their fantasy was faced with a surprising tragedy in their reality once they encountered the desert.

### **2.4. Unfolding Westerners’ encounter with the Algerian Desert**

Bowles’ Fiction highlights the very difference between the imagined Orient and its reality. As western characters travel to the Orient, they had a preconceived idea

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about the desert; they thought it is a new planet full of interesting adventures where they can transform their psychological breakdown into an active, positive, and creative psyche. However, following Orientalist fashion, Bowles shows that these preconceptions are just imaginative, whereas the real darkness of the desert is yet to appear. To enrich the Orientalist and fictional style of his work, the author uses several foreshadowing symbols and tales that indicate the traumatic results of the desert on western characters. In addition, he depicts the desert as a place that leads to nihilism and nothingness, portraying that love is one of those aspects that are concerned with the latter. Moreover, the Americans' encounter with the desert played a significant role in paralyzing their identities as they move deeper into the heart of darkness, or simply, the Sahara. Therefore, the imagined utopian desert in their fantasy becomes a dystopia that has stolen their life and sanity.

### **2.4.1. Foreshadowing the Mysteries of the Sahara**

The Orient in English Literature is always depicted as a world of magic and fantasy. Thus, a great number of Orientalist authors enrich their narratives using Dreams and Oriental tales in their plots as foreshadows for the upcoming events. Bowles, in *The Sheltering Sky*, has firstly used Port's dream as a Foreshadow for the tragic hardships he would face and eventually his terrible death in the Sahara. As the novel opens, the narrator tells: "Later he would climb down from the high bed and fling the window open, and at that moment he would remember his dream... The evening wind would cool his face as he stood looking, and at that moment the dream would be there" (Bowles, 7). Indeed, Bowles' emphasis on showing that the dream was purchasing Port's memory, as he could not stop thinking of it, highlights different perspectives. On one hand, dreams are mainly the product of the subconscious, and Bowles is demonstrating that both subconsciousness, as well as consciousness, are inseparable entities of the human mind, and both systems matter in his life and the future. On the other hand, Port

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in the novel is the main character whose thoughts are given a voice, in addition to his perspectives and beliefs about life and how he follows them blindly, without previous experiences or concrete encounters; He was only moving, fantasizing, and imagining his path to the unknown until he died. As the events progress, Port eventually remembers his dream and tells it to Kit and Tunner, he narrates:

I had a strange dream yesterday. I've been trying to remember it, and just this minute I did... It was daytime and I was on a train that kept putting on speed. I thought to myself. 'We're going to plough into a big bed with the sheets all in mountains... and I was thinking that if I wanted to, I could live over again-start at the beginning and come right on up to the present, having exactly the same life, down to the smallest detail (Bowles, 11).

In this initial part, Port's dream reflects his life; The daytime for Port has been always the best time where the sky seems to protect him from the unknown darkness and where the train of life keeps moving speedily. While dreaming, he thought that it would be interesting to go back to his very first beginning and start it up again. This flashback mirrors Port's nostalgia for his past and childhood. Port continues:

So I said to myself, 'No! No!' I couldn't face the idea of all those God-awful fears and pains again, in detail...And then heard myself say: 'Yes!' Because I knew I'd be willing to go through the whole thing again just to smell the spring the way it used to smell when I was a kid. But then I realized it was too late...The train had stopped and I held my teeth in my hand, and I started to sob (Bowles, 12).

In the final part of the dream, Port's thoughts turned to sorrow. He explains that just after being happy with his dream he feared going back in his life and

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experiencing those tragic details again, since life is a margin of happiness and misery, he doubted returning to the past again. Then, he thought of coming back only "to smell the spring the way it used to smell when I was a kid." In parallel, there is always a burning desire in Port to go back to the past to experience one interesting thing again even if it was costly, i.e. even if he would face those pains and fears again. However, he knew that it was too late when the train stops and he held his teeth in his hands. In this respect, teeth that fall out in dreams are interpreted by Freud as either the death of a connection or the pressure of sexual repression (Freud, 122). In parallel, this interpretation is but a representation of Port's real sexual failure with his partner Kit and a Foreshadow of his pitiful death.

On his road to the desert, Port recalls his dream:

As he watched the heat-covered landscape unfold, his thoughts took an inward turn, dwelt briefly on the dream that still preoccupied him. At the end of a moment, he smiled; now he had it. The train that went always faster was merely an epitome of life itself (Bowles, 58).

In this respect, Port's dream seems to appear in reality. On his way to the desert, he went on the same scene that he dreamt of; the car as the train, the view of the mountains and trees, and the inspiration he got. All the thoughts that Port was creating in his mind while dreaming foreshadow the journey to the Sahara and its upcoming mysteries. When he says: "I knew I'd be willing to go through the whole thing again just to smell the spring the way it used to smell when I was a kid.", Bowles reveals indirectly Port's desire to come back to the desert again; though exotic, gothic, and harsh, he wanted only to get that fresh inspiration (the spring smell) again whatever the cost is. As the dream continues, Port's desire failed as the train stops and his teeth drop out; an allusion to his tragic future life.

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Another interesting element used by Bowles to foreshadow the mysteries of the desert was the story of the three girls: "Outka, Mimouna, and Aisha." The story resembles the Oriental tales written by Orientalist authors to represent and portray the exotic world of the Orient. Most of these tales are inspired by the imaginative book of the *Arabian Nights* or the *Thousand and One Nights*; a fictional Oriental work, whose author still anonymous, represented in a collection of tales such as *Aladdin*. The book impressed western authors, after the translations of Burton and Galland, in the enlightenment era and paved the way for a great number of Occidental writers to widen the scope of their imagination and give birth to the Romantic Movement (Wazzan, 63). Romantic authors, like Walter Scott, and Gothic Writers, like Edgar Allen Poe, have got the inspiration from the *Arabian Nights* to produce their literary masterpieces. In the same vein, Bowles employs the tale of the three Oriental girls to develop his Orientalist fiction.

When Port entered the tent of Marhnia; the beautiful Saharan girl whom he had an affair with and who tried to rob him, accompanied by Smail; the Arab man whom he met after leaving the hotel and taking a walk at night in the streets of Oran, she was trying to seduce him while Smail was narrating the story. It is about three Algerian girls 'Outka, Mimouna, and Aicha'. They dance to men in the cafes of Ghardaia, but they are always sad, for the men in the M'Zab are so ugly and they want to have tea in the Sahara. As the events progress, the girls meet a Targui man, who is handsome and appealing, and they eventually fall in love with him as he gives each of them a silver piece. The girls' disappointment intensified and they are eager to go to the Sahara. So, whatever the cost was, they embark on a trip down to the desert with a caravan. Once they arrive, they leave the caravan and search for the highest dune to stay on and have their tea there. As they approach each dune, Aicha, finally, finds the highest one and



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informs them that it is the closest dune to the Targui's home. Many days later, a caravan passes and sees on the highest dune the three girls lying there, and their glasses of tea were filled with sand.

The tale holds different secrets behind its deep and foreshadowing meanings. Indeed, the three Oriental girls, who followed eagerly their expected love, in addition to their burning desire to have tea in the Sahara, are a foreshadowing illustration of Port and Kit's encounter with the desert. As the Oriental girls believed that they will finally attain their passions in the Sahara where their happiness, Love, and eternal desire lie, The American couple as well, traveled to the desert with the same inclinations. Unfortunately, the three girls lost their way in the vast Sahara and died as they were waiting for their fantasized love; "That was how they had their tea in the Sahara" (Bowles, 30). In parallel, Port and Kit Moresby wanted to heal their paralyzed marriage and improve their love as well as their sexual relationship, they also fell prey to the haunting monster of the desert as Port dies and Kit loses her sanity. Thus, Bowles' employment of the tale is an allusion to the couple's upcoming misery and horrific end.

### **2.4.2. Love as a bridge toward the Nihil**

The *Sheltering Sky* is about segregating one's self from the world and the beloved ones, by going through the nihilistic tendencies that spur characters' souls into both emptiness and redemption at the same time. In this respect, Johannes Bertens reveals in his book entitled *The Fiction of Paul Bowles* that "human relationships, love, as a counter force to the Nihil" (Quoted, 13). Simply put, love is illustrated by Paul Bowles as a big lie, or at least it is just based upon a burning desire and it is mainly a materialistic thing. For him, love doesn't exist, as in the foreshadowing story of the three Algerian girls "Outka, Mimouna, and Aisha".

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The Oriental girls fell in love with a 'targui man' after he gave them money. Then, tracking their lover or driven by their burning desire, they chose to search for him in the big desert holding with them just a teapot, a tray, and three glasses. However, they lost their way between the big dunes and died in the Sahara eventually. Hence, their death was a result of going after a fake love although it might be considered more or less a sacrifice to meet their lover again, still, the question is: does it worth it? The answer should be to examine the three girls' reaction again to the Targui man if he didn't give them money in the first place, only then, a clear idea might be set. Moreover, the story includes a love triangle that created a knot between Tunner, Kit, and her Husband. The faithless marriage of Port and Kit had render it very hard to know the kind of love relationship the two characters are having,

Sometimes she thought he meant that it was his only hope, that only if she were able to become as he was, could he find his way back to love, since love for Port meant loving her...And now for so long there had been no love, no possibility of it. But in spite of her willingness to become whatever he wanted her to become, she could not change that much...he was unable to break out of...the cage he had built long ago to save himself from love (Bowles, 82).

In other words, Kit somehow gives all women a bad reputation as Bowles featured her through her irrational, weak, stupid, hysterical, unfaithful, selfish and overly emotional characteristics. For instance, she avoids her husband; Port, despite his passionate proclamations of love then blames him for his lack of interest in loving her and has sex with their friend Tunner. There was no true love between her and Tunner but a way to avoid her lacks in being a good wife to Port, and for Tunner to fulfil his desires; it is the kind of love that was based on benefits only. Meanwhile, Port still tried to fight for his love. It is shown in his plan to separate his wife from Tunner, "Since the day he and Kit had gone

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bicycling together he had felt a definite desire to strengthen the sentimental bonds between them" (Bowles, 87). "But there's plenty of time," he said to himself. "The only thing is, I must get rid of Tunner" (Bowles, 88). Yet, he has the same faith as the three girls from the story of Tea in the Sahara. Indeed, fighting for this love only took him to his inevitable death in the end.

### **2.4.3. The Breakdown of Western Identity**

The *Sheltering Sky* represents a conflicting Identity of Port and Kit Moresby. In addition to their cries of despair to fit into the Oriental world; first, through explaining how the protagonist of the novel 'Port' came to Algeria intending to discover how his western identity is influenced by the American civilization, and how it might be transformed into a new one if affected by the Algerian civilization.

For, as he claimed, another important difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his 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 facet of the mechanized age he wanted to forget (Bowles, 8).

Hence, Port started, from the beginning, to search for elements that did or did not seem accurate to his own American identity. The war was something that he did not accept as being an American man who believed in liberty and the right to freedom. Yet, he still had his colonialist French-like ideology when he thought of Algeria as he said. "Not for me. I feel that this town, this river, this sky, all belong to me as much as to them" (Bowles, 98). Regardless of Port feeling superior, civilized, or being more in command of this exotic land, he still could not fit with the Algerian people there; the natives around him. Neither their religion nor their language seemed to be understandable, "They have no religion

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left. Are they Moslems or Christians? They don't know. They know money," (Bowles, 16), "Port was intrigued by the girl, but the language barrier annoyed him, and he was even more irritated by the fact that Smail and she could converse together in his presence" (Bowles, 28). Moreover, the mixture of languages that created the Algerian dialect caused Port to prefer not to learn or interfere in such a language; "The few scattered people sitting at the tables were for the most part silent, but when they spoke, he heard all three of the town's tongues: Arabic, Spanish and French" (Bowles, 17). Port confesses that he doesn't need a passport to prove his American identity when:

He raised his voice and went on. "I don't have to justify my existence by any such primitive means. The fact that I breathe is my Justification. If humanity doesn't consider that a justification, it can do what it likes to me. I'm not going to carry a passport to existence around with me, to prove I have the right to be here! I'm here! I'm in the world! But my world's not humanity's world. It's the world as I see it (Bowles, 78).

Port still felt annoyed after losing his passport, Port almost died of fear "however since I discovered that my passport was gone, I've felt only half alive. But it's a very depressing thing in a place like this to have no proof of who you are, you know." (Bowles, 129), "When he considered it, he realized now that it rather suited his fancy to be going off with no proof of his identity to a hidden desert town about which no one could tell him anything" (Bowles, 138). The simplest equation here is that Port could not fit or be part of Algeria and he needed his passport to prove his American identity. After all, Port was the kind of American citizen who cared a lot about his European-like appearance and for the most part, was interested to show that Americans are punctuated about time

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management. For example, he insisted on Kit that they must go on time to meet with Mr. Chaoui;

He had unearthed some Arab who expected them both to tea at six. He had impressed it upon her that on no account must they be late. It was typical of him to insist upon punctuality in the case of an anonymous shopkeeper in Ain Krorfa, when with his friends and with her he behaved in a most cavalier fashion, arriving at his appointments indifferently anywhere from a half-hour to two hours after the specified time (Bowles, 105).

Port's separation from his American identity was identified by the pleasure he was trying to attain in Algeria. He gave up on his American prestige and self-respect while trying fulfilling his desires. For instance, Port wanted to interfere sexually with a blind Algerian girl in the most indulgent, exotic, and Oriental ways

And in bed, without eyes to see beyond the bed, she would have been completely there, a prisoner. He thought of the little games he would have played with her, pretending to have disappeared when he was really still there; he thought of the countless ways he could have made her grateful to him (Bowles, 115-116).

Although Port tried to accomplish this mission, however, he could not succeed. Bowles' story ends up with another Algerian man named; 'Belqassim', who rather succeeded in this mission; he could make what Port had wished for, by making Kit his slave of pleasure. The idea Bowles simply tried to convey here is that the Oriental identity of Belqassim made him able to captivate Kit. Thus, one of the conditions to own an Oriental identity is by turning to an animal of pleasure. The thing Port died searching for. Kit, on the other hand, was convinced in the beginning that she would never adapt to such an Oriental

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identity or place. She said: "It'd be abnormal if I were able to adapt myself too quickly to all this. After all, I'm still an American, you know. And I'm not even trying to be anything else" (Bowles, 130). Indeed, Kit tried everything possible in the beginning to survive her American Identity; she was a liberated American lady who wore good clothing, smoke cigarettes, drank Champaign...etc. Nevertheless, she was obliged to neglect all these western identical features. Such as, when she left smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol was not a casual thing for Oriental women to do, as reflected in the present excerpt:

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...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, 67).

"At one point she asked Port in English for a cigarette, but he frowned, and she understood that it would shock the others to see a lady smoke" (Bowles, 106). In the simplest words, the second condition to having an Oriental identity is preventing Kit from such luxuries in life, whereas her western identity gave her feminist empowerment. All these aspects were still in the beginning when Kit did not realize that the western identity had also dimenized her role by being just a hysterical lady, while her husband Port's objection was being productive instead, "Helena Rubinstein," she said aloud, and it made her laugh. "I'm going to be hysterical in one minute," she said to herself" (Bowles, 106). Later on, after being captivated for so long in the Algerian desert, she could finally break down with her self-hysteria. "As she immersed herself completely, the thought came to her...I shall never be hysterical again... That kind of tension, that degree

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of caring about herself, she felt she would never attain them anymore in her life" (Bowles, 202). Unless she could detach herself from her western identity, Kit was stuck in the hysterical aspect associated with women. The only link that connected her to this latter is perhaps the Valise as it always reminded Kit of a vanished civilization when:

She had her little valise brought her, and in the privacy of the bed she set it on her knees and opened it to examine the objects inside. Automatically she used her compact, lipstick, and perfume; the folded thousand-franc notes fell out onto the bed. For a long time she stared at the other articles: small white handkerchiefs, shiny nail scissors, a pair of tan silk pyjamas, little jars of facial cream. Then she handled them absently; they were like the fascinating and mysterious objects left by a vanished civilization (Bowles, 233).

In this process of breaking down the western identity and trying to fit in a new one, Port lost his life while Kit disappeared in the Oriental desert. Therefore, the desert served as a catalyst to the collapse of American Identity in the Orient. Thus, the Algerian Sahara, from an inspirational space, turned into a dystopian Spot, driving all western travelers to the Nihil, or simply, to death; the death of souls, dreams, love, identity, and faith.

### **2.5. Stereotypical aspects in the Novel**

Following his Orientalist ancestors, Bowles' fiction contains different stereotypes and clichés associated with the Orient as far as the Oriental people. Though he criticized western civilization and the mechanized age it drove the world in, Bowles still believed that the Orient was a place of exotic settings, strange cultures, inferior people, and erotic men. Despite the elements of exoticism mentioned above, such as the superstitious tale of the three girls,

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Bowles employed different mythical aspects in his work, as will be shown in the following lines.

### **2.5.1. Myth and Exoticism in the Algerian Desert**

Orientalist authors like Paul Bowles could neglect neither the past situation of some colonized countries nor keep mourning their present. Hence, searching for a unity that draws back both from their past but, at the same time, connects them to the post-colonial era. This tendency is through the employment of myth and exoticism such as, in Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* (1949).

First, the Algerian people in this novel were perceived as ignorant, backward, and uncivilized. They liked also to spy on other people's matters. Described by filthy Arabs whom you feel insecure around them;

Those filthy Arabs have done their work here, the same as everywhere else." "Work? What do you mean?" said Port. "Why, their spying. They spy on you all the time here, you know. That's the way they make their living. You think you can do anything without their knowing it?" She laughed unpleasantly. "Within an hour all the miserable little touts and undersecretaries at the consulates know everything (Bowles, 55).

Situated in North Africa, The Algerian desert for Bowles is perhaps the most exotic place where he set this novel. One means of transport to travel in the Algerian desert is the camel, but even this animal, though domestic enough to human beings, is described as a beast; "A caravan comprising two dozen or more camels laden with bulging woolen sacks appeared coming down the Oued toward her. There were several men walking beside the beasts" (Bowles, 217). Bowles is trying to show that the Algerian desert contains a lot of elements that define it as a forbidden area, which no one should think of going to without the



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right experience /cautions. The novel includes some specific concepts that serve the employment of myth, to name but a few, Ghoulish, Djinn, and Serpent. All these words are a representation of a particular myth in the Orient. The word Ghoulish, from Arabic Ghoul, is defined as an evil spirit that robs graves and feeds on corpses, from ghala: "seized" (Online Etymology Dictionary). Bowles used this specific word in this novel as a reminder of the superstitions that his western characters had to go through in the Orient; "Port began to resent his not knowing better how far to go with his listener, but he let it all pass, and was delighted with the ghoulish pleasure the young man took in describing the dead bodies in the river at Douala" (Bowles, 46). According to Cambridge Dictionary, Djinn, in Arab and Muslim traditional stories, is a magical spirit that may appear in the form of a human or an animal and can take control of a person. Again, this Arabic mythical figure adds to the superstitious and exotic elements of the Orient, "Soon a solitary thing detached itself from the undecided mass on the horizon, rising suddenly like a Djinn into the air" (Bowles, 218). The association of Snake within western literature seems like a refugee to many western authors throughout history, including, Shakespeare. The father of Modern Literature had symbolized one of his well-known female characters to/with a Serpent before. 'Cleopatra' is called by 'Anthony' as the 'Serpent of Old Nile'. In the same way, another female character in Greek mythology, 'Medusa'; a mythical figure that features a woman with venomous snakes on her head instead of normal hair. However, this representation perhaps appeared first with Eve's temptation to Adam in the book of 'Genesis, which is central to the Christian cultural heritage of the western world. Like his antecedents, Bowles followed a similar path to those western authors by attributing this word to describe Kit, "In the early morning for a short while the steel-yellow sun glittered distantly in the sky, fixing her like a Serpent's eye as she sat propped up against the cushions staring out at the rectangle of impossible light" (Bowles,

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227). Therefore, the employment of myth and exoticism within this novel is a living proof of Paul Bowles' Orientalist vision of the Orient, mainly, the Algerian desert.

### **2.5.2. Clichés associated with the Arab man**

In Orientalism, most of the misleading representations are concerned with the people rather than the Orient itself. While the Landscapes and the places are magically charming, the Orientals are stereotypically observed as savages, exotic, and erotic. These depictions serve the western Imperial presence in the Orient; for if people are not suitable for those spectacular places, then they must be either civilized, under an Occidental rule, or kicked out as devils from those paradisiacal lands. In this respect, Bowles' novel reflects different clichés associated mainly with Muslim men. In this part of the research, it is interesting to highlight the stereotypical aspects selected by the author to represent the Arab man, embodied in the Character of Belqassim; the only central Oriental figure playing a role in the work.

After the death of Port Moresby, his wife, Kit, decides to leave her western belongings and continues her way to the desert. There, she feels a new inspiration blossoming in her psyche, and a different "kit" is being born. Bowles is preparing his female character for a new adventure in the Sahara; he erases the western masculine connection from Kit's life and replaces it with an Oriental one, creating for her a twofold Marriage experience; the first with her dead husband Port, and the second with her new Arab husband: Belqassim. Therefore, the representation of the Arab man is mainly going to be discovered from Kit's encounter with him.

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When Kit was picked up by the caravan, she now felt weak, the only solution to survive was to follow the caravan and obey its masters. As she became part of them, the author describes the men's treatment of her, he writes:

When it was ready she ate heartily and found everything delicious; still she did not do enough to please her two hosts, who continued to force food upon her long after she could eat no more... The younger one promptly seized her and held her in a fierce embrace. She cried out and attempted to sit up, but he would not let her go (Bowles, 219).

In an act of violence, the men of the caravan were trying to make her forcefully eat even after she got full. This reflects the barbaric behaviors associated with Orientals in Orientalist writings. Once they finished eating, the younger men embraced her violently and she could not resist it. Indeed, the writer shows that Kit started her imprisonment journey from this moment onward; she is now alone in the vast Sahara with these 'other' human beings, so she gives up and is ready to surrender to any pressure, harm, or slavery. In the following passages of the novel, her enslavement increased and resistance weakened as "she realized her helplessness and accepted it" (Bowles, 220). In addition to violence, Kit experiences savagery and oppression as the writer notes:

There was an animal-like quality in the firmness with which he [Belqassim] held her, affectionate, sensuous, wholly irrational-gentle but of a determination that only death could gainsay... everything he did, all his overpowering little attentions were for her. In his behavior, there was a perfect balance between gentleness and violence that gave her particular delight. The moon came up, but she did not see it (Bowles, 220).

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Bowles uses an Orientalist discourse with purposefully-selected concepts to paint the intended image of the Arab man, Belqassim. Indeed, describing Belqassim's attitudes as animal-like, sensuous, and irrational-gentle, parallels what Said mentions in *Orientalism* about Alroy's view that "the Arabs are unregenerate savages" (Said, 308). Simply put, for Orientalists, the savagery manners of Arabs, in this sense, Belqassim, are irresistible and unique qualities in the "Other". Thus, it can be noticed that Kit's affection towards him was not real but only for the fact of her disillusionment and surrender; she could not but exchange the same reactions. Moreover, his violently gentle person gave her a sense of delight. Therefore, she can, at least, feel safe and protected from the unexpected and horrific mysteries of the Sahara.

As Belqassim's affection and desire for Kit grew, he decided to take her to his house. There, "he guided her through the maze, deeper and deeper into the immense dwelling... they had bent over and entered a small room...locking the door behind him" (Bowles, 226). In this regard, Bowles reveals that Kit has fallen prey to Belqassim's sexual enslavement; another stereotype to portray the erotic Arab man. Eroticism was highly associated with Belqassim as the writer notes: "When Belqassim undressed her he saw the red welts and was angry because they marred the whiteness of her body, thus diminishing greatly the intensity of his pleasure" (Bowles, 223). Indeed, this excerpt highlights that Belqassim's love was but an evil affection driven by lust and sexual desire. Thus, he joined Kit in his harem as an object of pleasure. Furthermore, the issue of harems and polygamy was an inseparable cliché of the Oriental man. In another passage, the author mentions that:

She also knew that Belqassim, in spite of his youth, had a wife in Mecheria and three here in the house, and that with his own

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wives and those of his father and his brothers, there were twenty-two women living in the establishment, exclusive of the servants. And these must never suspect that Kit was anything but an unfortunate young traveler rescued by Belqassim as he was dying of thirst, and still not fully recovered from the effects of his ordeal." (Bowles, 228)

Inspired by the Oriental tales of the *Arabian Nights*, in which men are represented to be enjoying harems and many wives, Bowles uses this element to orientalise his fiction. Polygamy is considered 'Halal' in Islamic societies. This latter was perceived as part of the Orient's exotic aspects. Thus, whenever an Arab or a Muslim man is depicted in a literary work, he is always expected to have more than a wife, though, in reality, Muslims usually do not marry more than two women as a maximum consideration.

### **2.6. Conclusion**

Paul Bowles perceives Algeria as a world that has the most beautiful nature. Yet, one should stay away from doing what is wrong and follow the right path there. So, under the sheltering sky of Algeria in the beginning, a successful journey might happen by the end. This latter was not accomplished by Kit and Port as one of them died eventually while the other lost her way in the big continent. Their cries to find love, fit with the natives and uncover the mysteries of the Algerian desert were blocked by a wall of despair. The author emphasized indulgence, myth, exoticism, and sexual gratification in this novel, where people can achieve their life's pleasures but without the right knowledge or experience, there will be no treasure. Therefore, one should think like a sailor in Algeria and has to be a good captain while sailing on the massive dunes of the Algerian desert because if not careful enough, he/she might lose his/her way and die eventually.

## General Conclusion

Nowadays, neither the Americans have come across Algerian corsairs' attacks anymore nor the French colonialism still exists in Algeria. This present situation has stamped mutual interest, love, and peaceful relations between Algeria and the United States. American Orientalism stands for trying to put third-world nations under scrutiny. Their language, culture, or even religious beliefs are important things to study about. In this way, The Americans embraced Orientalism. Paul Bowles was mainly the leading figure of American Orientalism.

Paul Bowles is one of those authors who experienced the Algerian continent and tried to feature its people, culture, language, and especially its desert. As an American, he believed that God did not create human beings in vain, indeed, they had a mission. His adventure to Algeria was his own, similar to the first American settlers who went for an adventure into the unknown. Despite the entire struggle and the hardships they had to go through, they still believed in the dogma of the Manifest Destiny and being chosen by God for a specific mission; to purify the Church of England from corruption, to be rewarded by heaven or by the holy land as providence for their suffering in the end. Bowles' mission was indeed his travel to Algeria where he presented his first novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949).

The Algerian Desert is the most interesting set in which Bowles created this story. It presented an exotic place where the western characters, mainly Port and Kit had their pilgrimage to discover their inner-self, find love, and uncover the mysteries of the desert. However, their mission could not be fulfilled. Most of the author's ideas somehow neglected the strength of the Algerian Civilization. The people were exotic, backward, and uncivilized, while Algeria was a world of pleasure, indulgence, and sexual gratification. Hence, Bowles' perception of Algeria and the Algerian people created a stereotypical aspect that rendered its

reality wrong. The misleading pictures about them did not represent any aesthetic aspects or even meaningful criticism.

Each human can criticize, but only a few achieve professional criticism. Paul Bowles followed an Orientalist vision where he indirectly prioritized his American Civilization in favour of the Algerian one. Yet, he was still clever enough to produce solid work that sprang from the beautiful nature of Algeria. *The Sheltering Sky*, this title itself is a magnificent one that revealed the natural elements of the novel. Algeria could not and will never present a shelter to the western civilized nations. It may lead them towards self-revelation, discovery, reliance, and improvement but never protects them from death, sin, exoticism, and eroticism.

Thus, it can be argued that representing Algeria was a central thematic issue in American Literature. At the beginning of the Algerian-American encounters, American authors wanted to write about their captivity experiences in Algerian prisons to enlighten the American Public Opinion. The Regency of Algiers was depicted as a Barbary state that represents a terrible nightmare for western nations. A few years later, Algeria became a French colony; its sovereignty has been controlled and its piracy has diminished. As America followed the Orientalist movements, American authors started to travel to the Orient and record their experiences. Bowles, indeed, has shown an intimate acquaintance with the Orient, in addition to a passionate interest as well as a burning desire to be part of this exotic world. He did love the Maghreb and the Oriental desert. However, his visions and depictions of those people cannot but be considered as an Orientalist stereotyped representation of the other.

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