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works by Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Salman Rushdie
Feriani, R.**

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Symbols and Worlds:
A Study of the Sacred in a Selection of Works
by Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Salman Rushdie

Rim Feriani

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requirements of the University of Westminster
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Abstract

This thesis provides a reading of the concept of the Sacred in a selection of texts by Assia Djébar, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Salman Rushdie. The aims of this thesis are threefold. The first aim is to demonstrate that the selected texts of the three authors creatively engage with the Sufi Islamic heritage through the use of symbolic expressions of the Sacred. The second aim is to argue that the symbols of the Sacred in the three authors' works ontologically project what are termed here "intermediate worlds" of the Sacred. And the third aim is to gain a hermeneutic understanding of the concept of the Sacred in the literary works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. In order to achieve these aims I adopt Paul Ricœur's hermeneutic approach which allows me to interpret the symbolic and ontological underpinnings of the Sacred in the three authors' works. Furthermore, I draw from the Sufi philosophy of Ibn Arabi, since locating this thesis within a Sufi conceptual and philosophical framework is essential given the Islamic tradition with which, as I argue, the three writers creatively engage.

The contribution of this thesis consists in seeking new lines of inquiry by expanding on the predominant postcolonial, postmodern and feminist approaches to Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's work. By tracing affinities between the three authors' selected texts, through a focus on the creative encounter with the Sacred, this thesis makes a new contribution to the study of the three authors in its aim of providing a broader understanding of their literary works.

The symbols that I interpret in this thesis are the journey, the "hidden", the "openings", "darkness" and "light". The choice of exploring the symbolic aspect of the journey is motivated by its link, as this thesis argues, with the Sacred journey of

the Prophet Muhammad as well as with the meaning of a Sufi spiritual journey. I also chose to examine the four symbols of the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light” because of their connection to the Sacred names of God in the Islamic tradition and to their structural relations, as signifiers, to the symbol of the journey.

In addition to the symbolic expressions of the Sacred, I explore in this thesis the ontological dimension of the experience of the Sacred in the three authors’ selected works. In this regard, I draw from Ibn Arabi’s Sufi concept of the *barzakh* which is an ontological concept that refers to an intermediate reality where the Sufi seeker encounters opposite worlds. My hermeneutic reading of the “projected worlds” in light of the concept of the *barzakh* highlights the creative encounter between the three authors’ selected texts and the Sacred. Hence, the Sacred is not presented as a definite and defined system of thought. On the contrary, it is argued that these texts oblige the reader to question philosophically how the Sacred is both expressed *in* the texts and experienced *beyond* the parameters of the texts.

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Author's Declaration

The work included in this thesis is the author's own. It has not been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institution of learning.

List of Abbreviations

Vaste est la prison (VP)

Loin de Médine (LM)

L'Enfant de sable (ES)

La Nuit sacrée (NS)

The Satanic Verses (SV)

Shalimar the Clown (SC)

Dedication

To the Hidden Saint of Sfax, my great grandfather, Boubaker Feriani.

Introduction

This thesis provides a reading of the concept of the Sacred in a selection of works by Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Salman Rushdie. This selection of literary texts, as I will argue, engages with the symbolic and ontological aspects of the Sacred in Islam.

The introduction to this thesis explains the aims, objectives and relevance of the study of the Sacred in this selected corpus, and then elucidates a number of factors that justify my choice of texts and decision to group together the three authors. Moreover, this introduction delineates both the methodological approach and the Sufi theoretical framework that will be drawn upon throughout this thesis, and outlines the connection between the choice of the corpus and the concept of the Sacred. The last section of this introduction provides an overview of the content and development of each chapter.

i. Aims and Objectives

The aims of this thesis are:

- To demonstrate that the selected texts of the three authors creatively engage with the Sufi Islamic heritage through the use of symbolic expressions of the Sacred.
- To argue that the symbols of the Sacred in the three authors' works ontologically project what are termed here "intermediate worlds" of the Sacred.
- To gain a hermeneutic understanding of the concept of the Sacred in the literary works of Djebar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie.

The objectives of this thesis are:

- To use Ricœur's methodological approach in order to interpret both the symbolic and ontological underpinnings of the Sacred.

- To undertake a hermeneutic analysis of the symbols of the “journey”, the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light”.
- To analyse the expressions and experiences of the Sacred in the light of Ibn Arabi’s Sufi symbols and ontological concept of the *barzakh*.

This thesis therefore seeks new lines of inquiry by expanding on the predominant theoretical approaches to Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s works. The contribution of this thesis consists in exploring the symbolic as well as the ontological interplay between the literary and the Sacred, as such echoing what David Jasper (1992: 8) defined as “a relationship both unstable and fertile, uncertain and living.”¹ By tracing affinities between Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s works, through a focus on the creative encounter with the Sacred, this thesis makes a new contribution to the study of the three authors in its aim of providing a broader understanding of their literary works.

ii. The Relevance of A Study of the Sacred

Amongst the findings of this thesis, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter I, is the argument that to date, there is no detailed analysis of the concept of the Sacred in a comparative study that encompasses the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. Previous critical readings of the three authors have drawn primarily on postcolonial, postmodern and feminist perspectives. These readings have therefore largely focused attention on the way the three authors and their works oppose and resist dominant discourses, whether these are religious, patriarchal, sexual, or colonial discourses. Even though it is clear that all three authors are concerned with

¹ Jasper is a distinguished 21st century scholar in theology. He currently occupies the position of Professor of Literature and Theology at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. His works have placed a particular emphasis on the concept of the Sacred within the framework of Judeo-Christian tradition. In Chapter I of this thesis I will explain how Jasper stresses the significance of an interdisciplinary approach to both literature and religion. See for example Jasper (1999), (2004), and (2009).

– and draw from – religious discourses, the creative interplay between the Islamic heritage and the texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie has been largely overlooked.

In relation to pressing contemporary issues pertaining to religion, the proposed study of the Sacred in the literary texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie provides a platform for calling attention to the spiritual dimension of Islam which challenges the widespread view on militant and fundamentalist religious fervour. In this sense, reading the works of the three authors through a Sufi prism offers a more dynamic understanding of the Islamic tradition.

While religious fundamentalism is not a new phenomenon, it has become an urgent topic in world affairs today especially since the 9/11 events.² The beginning of the 21st century has been marked by the increased surge of Islamic fundamentalism and the spread of religious terrorism which reinforces stereotypical and reductive views of Islam. For example, Charles Selengut in *Sacred Fury* calls attention to the way:

Religious violence is among the most pressing and dangerous issues facing the world community. The fervently faithful, acting in the name of religion, have in the last decades, murdered hundreds of thousands of people throughout the globe, and groups of militants, in various religious communities, are organized into terrorist networks. (2003: 3)

Instead of investigating the causes behind such a “sacred fury”, to borrow Selengut’s expression, this thesis proposes a rethinking of the Sacred by bringing a new appreciation of the intellectual richness of the Sufi Islamic heritage.

My study of the Sacred, which draws particularly on Sufism, pays attention to the spiritual dimension of Islam. This is motivated by the fact that the fundamentalist Islamic movements that have spread terror in the last decades have

² For one study amongst several recent ones on religious fundamentalism, see Santosh C. Saha (2004).

eclipsed all forms of spirituality in Islam. In Nasr's words (2010: 109), Islamic fundamentalists have "weakened spiritual forces by opposing the dimension of inwardness, remaining satisfied with only the outward interpretation of religion, and being impervious or even opposed to traditional Islamic intellectuality." In a similar vein, Itzhak Weismann (2015: 9) remarks that the "fundamentalist estrangement from Sufism, and Islamic tradition at large, engendered a dialectics of unenlightenment culminating in the present radicalization of Islam."

The spiritual dimension is almost non-existent in the discourses that preach violence in the name of religion. Furthermore, politicians and the media place a great emphasis on the surge of Islamic fundamentalism thereby further accentuating a negative and stereotypical view of Islam. To echo the words of the contemporary Algerian scholar and thinker, Mohammed Arkoun (1994: 83), "Political analysts err in concentrating all their attention on the burning militant Islam in plain sight." Arkoun (1994: 83) also indicates that the "fundamentalist tendencies" are "obligingly observed, reported, and echoed in the Western media," adding that "other manifestations of Islam deserve to be more closely examined and better known to the public at large" (1994: 83). To borrow Arkoun's words, my own reading of the Sacred in the works by Djebbar, Ben Jelloun, and Rushdie through the prism of Sufism brings to light one of these overlooked "manifestations of Islam." If religion is synonymous with unleashing what Selengut termed "Sacred fury," could the literary works of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie provide an alternative way of rethinking the Sacred beyond the parameters of violence and from within the Sufi Islamic heritage?

iii. Choice of Authors

Djebar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie originate from apparently diverse cultural, social and geographical backgrounds. At this point one may wonder how the three authors can share a common ground. In this section I will delineate three common factors that justify my choice of grouping the three authors together, as well as my comparative approach to their work. Firstly, there is a relatively high level of equivalence and correspondence at the levels of the three authors' international reputation, the public reception of their work, and their own opposition to censorship. The first common denominator is the international reputation and the distinguished titles that all three writers received. Djebar was the first Maghrebian female writer to be elected to the Académie Française, in 2005.³ Ben Jelloun, in 2008, was awarded the title of the Cross of Grand Officer of the Légion d'Honneur, by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy.⁴ Similarly, in 2007, Rushdie received a knighthood⁵ from Queen Elizabeth II for his services to literature.⁶

In addition to the honorary titles, Djebar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie are recognised as established writers on the international scene and have to their credit a number of national prizes and international awards. Early on in her career, Djebar received the French Culture Award for her novel *Les Enfants du nouveau monde* in 1962. Amongst the renowned prizes that Djebar also received, in later years, are the

³ The Académie Française is an élite academy that was established in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu. It is composed of forty members. The Académie Française acts as an official custodian of the French language. For more details on its mission, refer to its website <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/>.

⁴ The Légion d'Honneur (the Legion of Honour) was originally created by Napoléon Bonaparte in 1801. It is the highest decoration in France. For more details on the history of the Légion d'Honneur, see Charles Saint-Maurice (1833).

⁵ Knighthood is a merit accrued to an individual for his or her significant service to a certain aspect of the British nation. It is considered as one of the highest honours and it is awarded by the Queen. For a definition of the term, see the Official Website of the British Monarchy <http://www.royal.gov.uk/>.

⁶ The title of knighthood triggered the outrage of Muslim communities in several countries including Iran, Pakistan, Kashmir, Malaysia and India. Mass demonstrations took place by Muslims recalling the controversy over the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. For more details on the repercussions against the honorary title of Rushdie's knighthood and the reactions by the British press, see Ana Cristina Mendes (2010).

Maurice Maeterlinck International Prize, in Brussels (1995),⁷ the Neustadt Prize for her contributions to world literature in the U.S.A. (1996),⁸ the International Prize of Palmi (*Premio Letterario Città di Palmi* or *Premio Palmi*) for her creative work in Italy (1998) and the prestigious Frankfurt Peace Prize in Germany (2000).⁹ This international reputation takes her a long way from her modest, although educated, rural background in Algeria.

Ben Jelloun is the first Maghrebian writer to receive the prestigious French literary prize the Prix Goncourt for his novel *La Nuit sacrée* in 1987.¹⁰ In 1994, he received the Maghrebian Grand Prix Littéraire. Additionally, in 2004, Ben Jelloun was awarded the Dublin International Literary Award¹¹ for his novel *Cette aveuglante absence de lumière*. In 2005, he received the French Prix Ulysse for the entirety of his works¹² and in the following year he was awarded the Prize for Peace between Europe and the Mediterranean, in Italy. In 2010, Ben Jelloun was granted the Argana International Poetry Award in Rabat, from the House of Poetry in Morocco. Like Djébar, Ben Jelloun's international recognition contrasts with his modest social background.

Likewise, Rushdie has won myriad prizes. In 1981, he received the international Booker Prize, for his novel *Midnight's Children*.¹³ The same novel was

⁷ This prize is named after the Belgian Nobel-prize winner Maurice Maeterlinck. Maeterlinck was a 20th-century playwright, essayist and poet who wrote in French. See for example Patrick McGuinness (2000).

⁸ This is an international prize sponsored by the University of Oklahoma. It was established in 1969. For example, Gabriel García Márquez won the Prize in 1972. For more details on this prize, see the Neustadt Prize website <http://www.neustadtprize.org/about-the-neustadt-prize/>.

⁹ This is also an international prize. For more details, see Peace Prize website <http://www.friedenspreis-des-deutschen-buchhandels.de/>.

¹⁰ In 2008, Ben Jelloun became a member of the jury at the Academy Goncourt which awards the Prix Goncourt. For more details, see the Prix Goncourt website <http://academie-goncourt.fr/>.

¹¹ This is an international award sponsored by the city of Dublin. It is held annually and it is awarded to books written in English or translated into English. For more details, see the Dublin Literary Award website <http://www.dublinliteraryaward.ie/>.

¹² This French award is held annually and it is organised by the French association Arte Mare. For more details, see the website <http://www.artemare.eu/spip.php/>.

¹³ Other names of renowned authors who also won the Booker Prize include Nadine Gordimer (1975),

awarded the Best of the Booker Prize both in 1993 and 2008. In addition, *Midnight's Children* earned Rushdie two other British awards, The James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction),¹⁴ and an Arts Council Writers Award.¹⁵ In 1984, Rushdie won the French Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger for his book *Shame*.¹⁶ Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* won another U.K based award, the Whitbread Novel Award, in 1988¹⁷ and in 1995, respectively. In the first chapter of this thesis I shall discuss the lives and works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie in further detail. What concerns me for now is to highlight the honorary titles that they received as well as the significance of the prizes and awards that gave them international recognition, which constitute a common element between all three authors.

This privileged position, as internationally recognised authors holding distinguished honours, did not come without a price. This takes me to the second common denominator between the three authors: they have each faced negative, at times even fierce public reactions to a certain number of their works. Because the three authors have written about themes germane to Islam and included sacred figures from Islam in their works, they have trodden on contentious ground. Rushdie's perceived denigrating of the Qur'an and the Prophet in *The Satanic Verses* have earned the author the title of an apostate¹⁸ and resulted in the public burning of

J. M. Coetzee (1983), Kazuo Ishiguro (1989) and Michael Ondaatje (1992). For more details, see the Booker Prize website <http://themanbookerprize.com/>.

¹⁴ For more details, see the University of Edinburgh website <http://www.ed.ac.uk/events/james-tait-black/about/>.

¹⁵ For more details, see the Arts Council Award website <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us-0/>.

¹⁶ This is a prize awarded for best foreign books that have been translated into French.

¹⁷ In the same year it was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

¹⁸ An apostate is a person who either rejects his or her Muslim faith or commits acts that can be judged as signs of unbelief. Daniel Pipes (2003: 88) argues that "expressions of unbelief" could be "words, deeds or even intentions." Apostasy, according to Pipes (2003: 88), ranges from "denying the existence of God, denying the Qur'an as the word of God, denying Mohammad as the last prophet" to "throwing the Qur'an in the trash or invoking God's name while drinking wine." In relation to Rushdie, Pipes (2003: 88) observes that the derision of both the Prophet and of his wives in *The Satanic Verses* constitutes an act of apostasy. However, Pipes questions the basis of Khomeini's *fatwa*. Pipes (2003: 90) contends that in order for someone to be declared an apostate, he or she needs first to go on trial in order to prove that he or she is guilty of such an act. In Pipes' view, Khomeini's

his book and the imposition of a *fatwa*.¹⁹ In the UK, more particularly in Bradford and Manchester, Rushdie's novel was met with resistance and burnt in public in 1989.

Similarly, the rewriting of Islamic history from a feminist perspective in Djébar's *Loin de Médine* met with strong public resentment in North Africa. While Djébar's *Loin de Médine* was positively received in France, it has attracted opposition in the form of public protests that took place in Morocco and Algeria.²⁰ Clarisse Zimra (1992: 165-166) indicates that: "*Médine* has already been the subject of a documentary film shown twice on French television and distributed throughout Europe. In Algeria and Morocco, people took to the streets when excerpts were published." For example, in her study of Djébar's novels, Valérie Orlando (1999: 8) observes that Djébar is a "subversive" author who joined the ranks of myriad Algerian intellectuals and journalists who "have been forced either into hiding or exile, sometimes even murdered" for their refusal to abide by the political order and religious norms. In this sense, Djébar is very similar to Rushdie since they both have put their lives at risk due to the sensitive topics that they have explored through their writing.

fatwa did not give Rushdie the opportunity to defend himself. In this sense, Pipes (2003: 90-91) argues that Khomeini abused the Islamic laws pertaining to the protection of individuals, indicating that the "Islamic law protects the defendant with extensive and detailed rules for procedure." Exposing the shaky grounds upon which Khomeini based his *fatwa*, Pipes (2003) maintains that the Islamic law or *Shari'a* dictates specific regulations when it comes to dealing with the issue of apostasy. Hence, Pipes (2003: 91) strongly questions the grounds and legitimacy of Khomeini's death sentence and observes that it was a decision based on "television news or even a few passages from a book read out of context" rather than "established through careful legal enquiry." For more on the Rushdie Affair and apostasy, see Pipes (2003).

¹⁹ John Esposito (1992: 190) discusses the riots that took place in Iran and Pakistan as well as "the threats against the book's publishers and bookstores in Britain and the United States." A number of Muslim countries like Egypt, and other countries like India where there is a Muslim minority banned the book.

²⁰ According to Zimra (1992), Djébar's daring interpretation of Islamic history finds its foundations in a feminist agenda that counters the restrictive discourse of religion. In Chapter I, I will examine in more detail how previous critics have addressed the feminist aspects of Djébar's works.

It is worth noting here that the contemporary Kuwaiti Muslim scholar Muhammad Al Awadhi²¹ decries the Frankfurt Peace Prize granted to Djébar. Without reference to any particular work, Al-Awadhi (2009) refers to the Algerian writer as a “Westernised” and “secular” intellectual. He perceives (2009: n.p.) Djébar as a writer who “speaks against the rights of Muslim women and who has tampered with the Shari’a laws,” and claims that it is of paramount importance to preserve “the unity of Muslim community” against what he called the infiltration of “those who insult the Prophet of Islam.” Al-Awadhi refers to Rushdie who, like Djébar, is complicit with the Western secular ideals. Al-Awadhi insists that Islam and Muslim countries need to defend themselves against those who have aligned themselves with the West.²²

Likewise, Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable* was met with resistance. In this regard, Odile Cazenave (1991: 449) notes that *L’Enfant de sable* is a “controversial text” due to the fact that it “underlines the dangers of opposing norms and being different.” Additionally, Patricia Geesey indicates that the positive critical reception of Ben Jelloun’s work in France differs from the reactions in Morocco. Ben Jelloun, according to Geesey (1999: 151), “has been the subject of controversy because of what he writes and because his works find a longer audience abroad than in Morocco.” Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable* is a novel that sparked controversies²³

²¹ Al-Awadhi is an Islamic scholar and preacher. He is a member of the International Founding Committee of the World Islamic Media which is part of the League of Islamic World in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. His lectures are available from Seeds of Guidance website <http://seedsofguidance.com/sheikh-mohammed-al-awadi-arabic-audio-lectures/>. According to Marwan Kraidy (2010: 44), Al-Awadhi is a “representative of Wahhabiyya” which is an Islamic reformist movement that preaches a literal interpretation of the Qur’an. For a definition of Wahhabiyya and references to its founder Muhammad Al-Wahhab, see Mathieu Guidère (2012) and John Azumah (2008). For a list of bibliographical references on Wahhabiyya, see Natan DeLong-Bas (2010).

²² The video of Al-Awadhi is in Arabic. Here I am providing my own translation. See Muhammad Al-Awadhi (2009).

²³ Ben Jelloun observes that a Syrian and a Lebanese publisher requested that necessary amendments relating to the offensive traits of his work need to be made if they were to publish his novels: “It was unbelievable. Every time the word ‘sex’ came up it has to be taken out; every time there was a

due to the openly sexual nature of the novel²⁴ and to the protagonist's mistreatment of the Sacred Qur'anic text.²⁵ In this regard, Hédi Abdel-Jaouad (1990: 35) remarks that *L'Enfant de sable* epitomises a "sacrilegious discourse". According to Abdel-Jaouad (1990: 35), the androgynous character Ahmed/Zahra represents "a means of transgressing social, moral, religious and linguistic taboos." *L'Enfant de sable* as well as *La Nuit sacrée*, in Abdel-Jaouad's view, vehemently subvert the patriarchal discourse as well as all forms of Islamic conservatism.

Tackling sexual and religious taboos has therefore triggered oppositional reactions to Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable*. What lies behind such reactions, according to Ben Jelloun, is the key issue of misreading, which is why a number of writers like him are unjustly condemned. In an interview with Thomas Spear, Ben Jelloun (Spear 1993: 43) states that "Muslim Fundamentalists, for example, don't read. All one has to do is say to them, 'Hey, there's a writer who insulted Islam.'" In this regard, Ben Jelloun identifies with Rushdie's experience of censorship and reveals that his own work has also come under obtrusive criticism. Ben Jelloun confirms Spear's statement about "the number of people in Moroccan religious circles who are strongly opposed to my work," admitting that:

I am not well liked at all. There are sermons against me in the mosque. I am occasionally the *bête noire* of integrationists. Whether they are political or religious fundamentalists. It's self-evident. It does not surprise me. I have never asked a fanatic to like what I've written. (Spear 1993: 42; emphasis in original.)

reference to Islam, that could potentially offend Muslims, Fundamentalists...Finally I said no, thank you, I'd rather not be published" (Spear 1993: 36).

²⁴ See Hedi Abdel-Jaouad (1990).

²⁵ For example, Ahmed/Zahra explicitly tampers with some Qur'anic verses and adds some amendments which lead the main storyteller to shout "heresy" (*ES*: 94). Edna Aizenberg (2002: 112) compares the way Ben Jelloun "tampers with the holy Koranic-Islamic tradition" with Rushdie's subversive "handling of the holy writ wherein the scribe, named Salman, changes the verses dictated by the prophet." For a brief comparative discussion of Ben Jelloun and Rushdie in the context of transgressive writing, see Edna Aizenberg (2002).

Ben Jelloun (Spear 1993: 42) further adds that “without even reading my books, they attack me in the mosques.” The Moroccan writer exposes the censorship and “surveillance” that targets artistic creativity in a number of Arabic countries. Ben Jelloun (Spear 1993: 35) unambiguously observes that censorship, in its “political” and “moral” forms, has hampered the publications of his novels: “I know that certain books of mine in Arabic don’t make it into certain countries.”

Having to face negative public reactions led the three authors to speak openly about their right to speak. Hence, the third common denominator is the three authors’ opposition to censorship and defence of artistic freedom. In this regard, Rushdie (2002: 104) stresses how “the freedoms of art and the intellect are closely related to the general freedoms of society as a whole.” Throughout his writing career, Rushdie has unfailingly defended the right of intellectuals’ freedom of thought which defies all forms of repressive power. As Rushdie puts it:

[...] may a voice still be heard celebrating literature, highest of arts, its passionate inquiry into life on earth, its naked journey across the frontierless human terrain, its fierce-minded rebuke to dogma and power, and its trespassers’ fearless daring. (Cited in Pessô-Miquel 2007: 159)

The public outrage and the death sentence issued by Khomeini are amongst the well-known consequences of Rushdie’s publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988. Defending Rushdie’s fundamental right to speak, myriad voices in both the East and the West have condemned the censorship of *The Satanic Verses*. It comes as no surprise that the names of Djébar²⁶ and Ben Jelloun²⁷ figure amongst the contributors

²⁶ For the full article, see Assia Djébar (1993).

²⁷ For the full article, see Ben Jelloun (1993) and (1989).

to the collection of essays (1993) entitled *For Rushdie: Essays by Arab and Muslim Writers in Defense of Free Speech*.²⁸

Djebar perceives Rushdie's *fatwa* as a form of intellectual repression from which Muslim writers, and in particular female Muslim writers, suffer. Djebar's condemnation of the *fatwa* is steeped in a gender politics as she expresses her awareness of the status of women writers who are deprived of the right to movement, let alone the right to speech. For Djebar (1993: 125), "the most vulnerable among us," are both "modern writers born Muslims" and the "Muslim woman". Djebar underscores the resilience of Rushdie, his "enforced confinement," in the face of an imposed silence:

Salman Rushdie resists as a writer should; he writes in order to live; his writing, first produced under the banner of an affirmation of total freedom, and in a blaze of intelligence all his own, has assumed a much greater and more serious kind of significance now. I sense in it much heavy labor – denoting suffering, denoting the proud and poignant desire of someone who is carrying on, who is not giving up, even though he cannot see how it is all going to end. (Djebar 1993: 124-125)

For Djebar, writing is synonymous with the right to speak and live. Djebar speaks of Rushdie's "suffering" in the sense that he was forced into hiding in order to escape the death sentence. Djebar admits that prior to the Rushdie Affair, she was simply an avid reader of Rushdie but since the furore over his work she began to admire his position as a writer. Djebar (1993: 125) parallels the "profound isolation" of Rushdie to the status of Muslim female writers who grapple with the ordeal of both physical and psychological oppression. In a poetic gesture, Djebar (1993: 125) metaphorically describes Rushdie's "solitude" as "a sun with blackness". Despite this sense of isolation and experience of confinement, Djebar invokes the spirit of resistance along

²⁸ Amongst the prominent names that figure in this collection are Edward Said and Leila Sebbar. Said is a 20th century Palestinian-American thinker who is best known for his key work *Orientalism* (1995). Sebbar is a renowned 20th-century Algerian-French author best known for her novel *Sherazade* (1982). See Said (1995) and Sebbar (1982). See also Anouar Abdallah (1993).

the lines of a sense of empowerment, in the face of “darkness”, that can be made possible if one continues to write.

In a similar vein, Ben Jelloun condemns the *fatwa* and insists that it goes against the ethos of Islam that preaches tolerance rather than oppression. According to Ben Jelloun:

a book should never be the pretext for an incitement to murder. No book should ever be the cause of a death sentence being pronounced upon its author. The very idea is intolerable, inadmissible. It bears no relationship to the tolerant Islam I was taught. (1993: 100)

Ben Jelloun (1993: 100) observes that the reason behind the *fatwa* was not religious, but rather political, motivated by the links between Pakistan and Iran. In the words of Ben Jelloun (1993: 100), nothing can justify a death sentence against a writer even if: “Salman Rushdie may well have gone too far and produced something actually shocking to people’s faith and convictions.” Ben Jelloun questions Al-Khomeini’s death sentence which he sees as showing that the latter is passing judgments in the name of God.

In his defence of Rushdie, Ben Jelloun invokes the inalienable right of freedom of speech. In this sense, the attack against Rushdie embodies a larger and wider aggression unleashed against the artistic creativity of any author. As such, Ben Jelloun (1993: 100) argues that “freedom” lies at the heart of “artistic creation” and if a writer is denied the right to freedom then “there is no life.” What is crucial to literary works, Ben Jelloun writes, is:

To attempt to act upon the hidden face of reality, to spin out unbelievable tales (and those included in Salman Rushdie’s novels are surely that), to invent strange and improbable situations, to try to rise above the hard facts of reality, to confer importance upon dreams and upon extravagances occurring in dreams – all these things are possible only when one is free. (1993: 100)

The death sentence against Rushdie, in Ben Jelloun's view, epitomises a threat against all artists and creative writers. In a previous article that appeared in *Index on Censorship*, Ben Jelloun (1989: 17) defends the right of writers in general and that of Rushdie in particular "to create" and "to imagine," which constitute the fundamental pillars of "a democratic society". Ben Jelloun (1989: 17) denies the fact that a novel, deemed to be "blasphemous," is capable of annihilating "a religion as prestigious and alive as Islam." As such, all three authors share opposition to censorship and stress the importance of a writer's right of speech.

The three common denominators between all three authors discussed so far emphasise the significance of the titles and prizes that Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie won, which enabled them to achieve international recognition. What these commonalities also show is that whenever the three authors tackled matters pertaining to religion, and sacred themes in Islam, their work has sparked controversies. Such tension, I argue, represents what Jasper (1992: 8) termed the "uneasy relationship" between literature and religion. As Chapter I of this thesis will show, previous critics have explored this tension from different theoretical angles, the most prevalent of which are the postcolonial, postmodern and feminist angles. However, despite the seminal importance of this tension between the literary works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie and matters relating to Islam, an in-depth study of the Sacred in their work has not previously been carried out, and I will address this theme in the fourth section of Chapter I.

Bearing in mind the three common factors delineated thus far and the resulting tension between the three authors' works and matters pertaining to religion, this research, at its inception, set out to define the meaning of transgression in relation to the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. My aim was to examine

the transgressive features that their works display vis-à-vis Islam.²⁹ As my research progressed, I started to realise that evidence of transgression with regard to religious discourse and in particular to the Sacred, by the three authors, was already apparent in previous literary analyses and in their texts, while a detailed study of the Sacred itself presented a promising research area that has not attracted much critical attention.

To the best of my knowledge, the only book-length study which compares the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie and which also considers the question of religion in relation to their writing is John Erickson's *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative* (1998). In his introduction, Erickson explains that his choice of grouping three Maghrebian authors, Djébar, Ben Jelloun, and Abdelkebir Khatibi, with Rushdie is determined by the postcolonial narrative strategies that all four authors employ. Erickson (1998: 1) argues that the four authors' works display an oppositional model of writing that counters "totalizing, universalizing systems and reductive processes, in whatever society they may be found, which threaten to marginalize individual and minoritarian dissent." Erickson devotes a chapter to each writer and shows how their novels resist both Islamic religious discourse and dominant Western forms of narrative. This thesis takes a fundamentally different approach. Instead of focusing on the oppositional stance that the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie display towards Islam, this thesis aims to explore the creative encounter that takes place between their literary works and matters pertaining to religion, and in particular to the Sacred.

²⁹ My understanding of transgression here is aligned with the Foucauldian definition of the term. Transgression in this sense is indicative of a crossing of prohibited lines. Foucault (1977: 33-34) defines transgression as an "action" that "has its entire space in the line it crosses." Foucault's definition of transgression is heavily influenced by George Bataille's theorising of this complex and problematic concept. Bataille's understanding of transgression was mainly construed in anthropological terms. Bataille (1996 and 1998) explored the fine lines between social prohibitions, limits, law and the Sacred. For a reading of Bataille's work on transgression, see Michele H. Richman (1982).

Accordingly, this thesis aims to break new ground by tracing affinities between Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie with a particular emphasis on the symbols and what I define here as “worlds” of the Sacred. Hence, the three main interrelated questions that this thesis will try to answer are: Is there a dimension in their works whereby the literary and the Sacred engage in a creative encounter which is not necessarily an oppositional one? If so, how do the three writers’ literary works creatively engage with the Sacred? Therefore, can the literary texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie also provide access to a philosophical understanding of the Sacred?

iv. Methodological Approach and Conceptual Framework

There are a number of different methodological ways to approach the study of the Sacred. Amongst the most established of these is Mircea Eliade’s phenomenological work on religious symbols, rites and myths.³⁰ In Eliade’s works *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (1952) and *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1959) the concept of the Sacred figures prominently.³¹ The phenomenological method of Eliade seeks to describe and thereby understand the Sacred as a phenomenon³² that manifests itself in natural elements. Additionally,

³⁰ Phenomenology is a philosophical practice that focuses on the human world. The German philosopher Edmund Husserl is recognised as the forefather of phenomenology at the beginning of the 20th century. He emphasised the study of human consciousness. See Husserl (1962) and (1965). For more on the definition of phenomenology and its conceptual framework, see Herbert Spiegelberg (1994) and Dermot Moran (2005).

³¹ Eliade’s works are considered as forming part of religious phenomenology which differs from Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology. For a detailed study of the different phenomenological methods, see John Dadosky (2004).

³² To understand the meaning of “phenomenon” one needs to refer here to Immanuel Kant. Kant differentiated between two concepts: the “noumenon” which refers to “a thing in-itself”, and the “phenomenon” which refers to “a thing-as-it-appears” (Dadosky 2004: 8). According to Kant, the only knowledge possible is that of the objects as they appear to us in our experience. In Kant’s words “what the objects are by themselves would never become known to us” (1781: 35). For critical studies

Eliade describes the rites and myths that are interconnected with such a phenomenon. Eliade (1959: 11) defines the Sacred as “the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural ‘profane’ world.” For Eliade, the Sacred is manifested in natural elements such as trees, mountains, skies and deserts. The religious symbol, in Eliade’s view (Allen 1998: 134), is compared to a “bridge” for it “uses specific, concrete, ‘natural,’ phenomena in its expression and enables the [religious person] to relate that which is ‘other’ to her or his particular existential situation.” Hence, the religious symbol mediates between the natural elements and the Sacred.³³

What characterises Eliade’s method is that he describes the Sacred as a phenomenon that can be comprehended through a structural analysis of religious symbols. In this regard, Douglas Allen (1998: 141) stresses the “structuralistic nature of [Eliade’s] phenomenological approach.” Thus, Eliade interprets religious symbols by showing how their structural associations make up a system. As Eliade (Allen 1998: 143) puts it: “we are faced with, respectively, a sky symbolism, or a symbolism of earth, or vegetation, of sun, of space, of time [...] We have good cause to look upon these various symbolisms as autonomous ‘systems’.” Although, this thesis places emphasis on a structural analysis of the symbols of the Sacred, unlike Eliade I am not concerned with symbols of the Sacred that are manifested in nature. Even though I accept Eliade’s phenomenological understanding of the Sacred, the proposed structural analysis of the symbols of the Sacred in this thesis is focused on symbols that are found in literary texts. Therefore, Eliade’s approach is not relevant to my study of the concept of the Sacred in Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s, and Rushdie’s

on Kant and for a definition of the concept of “phenomenon”, see Paul Guyer (1992) and Dadosky (2004).

³³ Eliade, according to Douglas Allen (1998: 132), considers religious symbols as an “‘opening out’ to the transcendent” which escapes the “limitations of temporal and historical conditionings.” See Allen (1998).

texts. While much can be gained through Eliade's religious phenomenological study of the Sacred, this thesis requires a different approach. In this thesis, the Sacred will be interpreted via the path of language; therefore my concern is not to describe it as a "thing" or as an object of study, but as an experience that invites philosophical reflection.

Hence, this thesis on the one hand interprets the symbolic expressions of the Sacred in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected literary texts, and on the other examines the "worlds" of the Sacred that the texts project onto the reader. The concept of "worlds" will be examined in depth in both Chapters II and VI. Particular emphasis will be placed on the connection between what I call here the "worlds" projected by the texts and Muhammad Ibn Arabi's Sufi concept of the *barzakh* in Chapter VI. The concept of *barzakh*, which can be translated as an intermediate reality, is a useful ontological concept that will allow me to clarify the similarity between what I have termed the intermediate "worlds" in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's texts, and the experience of the Sacred.

In this regard, this thesis needs an approach that takes into account close textual analysis, but at the same time is not confined to the limitations of the textual parameters of a literary text. In his definition of the Sacred, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1989: 135) indicates that it is a concept which is expressed through the language of symbol; hence "symbolism remains the key for the understanding of" the Sacred. Bearing in mind this close connection between symbolic language and the Sacred, I propose to draw upon Paul Ricœur's hermeneutic methodology. What makes Ricœur's hermeneutics especially interesting is that it underscores the relationship between symbolic language and the Sacred.³⁴ Ricœur's hermeneutic interpretation is

³⁴ In *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, Ricœur shows how he departs from a phenomenological approach to the Sacred to adopt a hermeneutic approach. Ricœur (1995: 48)

thus relevant to this thesis in that it allows a reading of the symbols of the Sacred in the literary texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. His approach is also appropriate since it allows this thesis to reflect philosophically on a concept that exceeds the boundaries of textual explanation. Nevertheless, the movement of philosophical reflection is guided by the reading of the inner symbolic relations in the structures of the texts. By adopting Ricœur's hermeneutic reading, this thesis will not only bring to the fore the significance of interpreting the symbols of the Sacred in Djebbar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected texts, but it will also show how the three authors creatively engage with the Sufi philosophical tradition. The methodological grounding of this thesis will further be outlined in Chapter II, where I will look more closely at the key concepts that will inform the hermeneutic reading in this thesis. Amongst the concepts that I will employ are explanation, structuralist reading, symbols, worlds and the possible.

In conjunction with the hermeneutic approach to the Sacred, the context of a Sufi philosophical conceptual framework is also essential given the Islamic tradition with which, as I argue, the three writers engage. Locating this thesis within the Sufi perspective of Ibn Arabi's works provides an invaluable platform for interpreting the symbolic connotations of the journey, the "hidden", the "openings", "darkness" and "light" in the selected works of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. It will also allow for a philosophical reflection on the close connection between Ibn Arabi's concept of the *barzakh* and the experiences of the Sacred in the three authors' works, as will be addressed in Chapter VI.

emphasises the connection between hermeneutics as a process of "interpretation and reinterpretation" that centres on the linguistic aspect of symbols. For Ricœur, Eliade's phenomenological method de-emphasises this aspect since it inscribes "the sacred in a level of experience beneath that of language." See Ricœur (1995).

The choice of Ibn Arabi amongst other Sufis is motivated by three main reasons. The first reason is that he has an influential legacy which is known to both Muslim and Western audiences. This will be clarified in Chapter III. The second reason is that the language of his Sufi philosophy is impregnated with symbolic vocabulary that has its roots in the Sacred, and this will allow for a Sufi reading of the symbols of the Sacred that will be explored in this thesis. The third main reason is the particular attention that Ibn Arabi pays to the names of God and to the spiritual journey in his philosophy. This offers the conceptual tools that will help in analysing the connection between the three names of God, The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light, and the Sufi dimension of the journeys that I have chosen to study in this thesis.

The choice of exploring the symbolic aspect of the journey is motivated by its link, as this thesis will argue, with the Sacred journey of the Prophet Muhammad as well as with the meaning of Sufi spiritual journey. Furthermore, I chose to examine the four symbols of the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light” for two main reasons. The first reason is, as Chapters IV and V will demonstrate, their connection with the Sacred names of God which are: The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light. The relation between these symbols and the Sacred will also be addressed in Chapter III, where I consider Ibn Arabi’s Sufi interpretation of the names of God. The second reason is their associative relation as signifiers with the meaning of the journey. I will also clarify this aspect of the relation when I analyse, in Chapter II, the hermeneutic methodology adopted in this thesis, in particular when I elucidate the first structural stage that informs the textual study of the symbols of the Sacred.

Bearing in mind that this thesis examines both the symbolic and the ontological dimensions of the Sacred, I will also use Ibn Arabi’s ontological concept

of the *barzakh*. The *barzakh*, according to Ibn Arabi, is an intermediate reality where the Sufi seeker encounters two opposed realities; it is therefore the site *per se* of the experience of the Sacred. I will define this term in more detail in the third chapter of this thesis by tracing its roots in the Qur'an and explaining how Ibn Arabi used it in his Sufi philosophy. The *barzakh* as a Sufi concept will provide an essential point of reference to the discussion of the experiences of the Sacred in the final chapter of this thesis and will eventually help in reaching an understanding of the "worlds" projected by the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. A detailed consideration of the conceptual and philosophical framework that informs this thesis is provided in the third chapter, immediately preceding the close textual analysis.

For now, the point I want to emphasise is that the choice to embed the Sufi Islamic heritage as a point of reference is further influenced by the views expressed by Kenneth Harrow and Christopher Gibbins in a compilation of essays entitled *The Marabout and the Muse: New Approaches to Islam in African Literature* (1996). Both Harrow and Gibbins revealingly reassess the significance of the Islamic influence in the works of Maghrebian and African writers.³⁵ In Harrow's view (1996: xxiii), a study of the interplay between the religious and literary texts by African and Maghrebian authors demonstrates "Islam's pluralist heritage." Similarly, Gibbins (1996:23-24) calls for a "critical justice" and a reinterpretation of "the rich Islamic textual traditions" in order to "address an apparent lacuna" evident in postcolonial studies of the Maghreb. Gibbins challenges the limits of "colonized Francophone discourse" which tends to ignore the resonances of Islamic tradition in the works of Maghrebian writers. The "lacuna" that Gibbins (1996: 23) alludes to is traced back to the prejudiced European colonial discourse which "had little or no interest in the

³⁵ It is worth noting here that the first chapter of this collection of essays is devoted to a close study of Islamic influence in Maghrebian literature with a particular interest in Djébar's *Loin de Médine*. See Kenneth Harrow (1996).

cultural complexities of the sites in question and needs to be challenged.” The major problem that Gibbins (1996: 23) draws attention to is the prevalent tendency to interpret Maghrebian Islamic culture as a “cohesive” unit. The implication of this tendency is that the “plurality and diversity of Islam” is disregarded.

I therefore agree with Harrow’s and Gibbins’ views on re-evaluating Islamic borrowings and adaptations in postcolonial and francophone literatures. Such a re-evaluation is likely to shed light on the complexity and depth of the Islamic intellectual heritage which is far from being a fixed and a-temporal entity. Although Harrow’s and Gibbins’ commentaries are mainly focused on Francophone and African literatures, their observations are as relevant to my reading of Rushdie’s writings as to those of Djébar and Ben Jelloun. However, in my study of the three authors’ selected works I will not provide a comprehensive outlook on Islamic influences such as is carried out in Harrow’s collection of essays. Instead, I will focus primarily on the three authors’ engagement with the symbolic and ontological dimensions of the Sacred in Islam.

v. Choice of Corpus

For the purposes of this thesis, I have selected six novels: Djébar’s *Loin de Médine* (1991) and *Vaste est la prison* (1995), Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable* (1985) and *La Nuit sacrée* (1987) and Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2006). The selection of the ensemble of works is determined by the explicit and implicit textual references to key concepts and themes from Islam which deserve close attention and which allow this thesis to analyse the symbolic as well as the ontological aspects of the Sacred.

My starting-point is the titles of the novels *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *The Satanic Verses*.³⁶ The title of Djébar's *Loin de Médine* is a direct reference to the sacred city of Medina, situated in Saudi Arabia. It is the location of the first mosque established by Muslims and of the Prophet Muhammad's grave.³⁷ *Loin de Médine* evokes, through a multiplicity of female voices, the life of the Prophet Muhammad during the early years of the rise of Islam. Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, and Aicha, the Prophet's wife, are two sacred figures in Islam that appear in Djébar's novel. Chapter V of this thesis pays particular attention to the symbolic significance of the stories of Fatima and Aicha in relation to the concept of the Sacred.

The title of *La Nuit sacrée* is a direct reference to the first night that marked the revelation of the Sacred Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammed.³⁸ In Chapter III of this thesis I will define further the meaning of this night and its significance in the Qur'an. The novel's storyline revolves around Zahra who battles against the suffering and pain that her father bequeathed. On the Sacred Night, Zahra's father dies, thus signalling the beginning of Zahra's liberation and newly-found freedom.

The Satanic Verses' title refers to the early years of Qur'anic revelation to the Prophet Muhammad.³⁹ Similarly, the salient figure of the Archangel Gabriel⁴⁰

³⁶ Considering the entire body of literary works produced by the three authors, there is, in addition to the titles of *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *The Satanic Verses*, the title of Ben Jelloun's novel *La Prière de l'absent* which is suggestive of a link with the Sacred. It is explicitly indicative of the sacred act of "prayer" performed upon a dead person. As the analysis I envisaged required a selection of two novels per author I chose to limit my choice to the two novels by Ben Jelloun, *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*.

³⁷ For a detailed study on the city of Medina, see Harry Munt (2014).

³⁸ For a definition of the meaning of the Sacred Night in Islam, see Cyril Glassé (2003) and Juan Campo (2009).

³⁹ Muhammad Ibn Jarir Tabari is amongst the influential Muslim historians and exegetes of the 10th century who produced forty volumes on the life of Muhammad and the history of Islam. Volume VI is of particular importance here since it sheds light on the opposition that Muhammad faced when he openly announced the faith of Islam. This historical event underlies the narrative of *The Satanic Verses*. For more details, see Montgomery Watt and Michael McDonald (1998). Ibn Sa'd (or Ibn Saad) is also another influential historian who wrote about the Prophet's life. In Chapter V, I will note that Djébar directly refers to her readings of both Ibn Sa'd and Tabari's chronicles. Ibn Sa'd was a 9th

appears in the title of the first chapter. Gabriel is the Angel of Revelation and he is therefore revered by Muslims.⁴¹ The plot of the novel revolves around the story of two Indian migrants, Gibreel and Chamcha, who fell from a plane and landed in London. Their story is interspersed with the controversial story of the “Satanic Verses” which were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and which incited him to accept the three pre-Islamic goddesses.

In addition to the explicit references to sacred locations and figures in the titles of the novels above, there is a direct mention of Sufis in *Vaste est la prison*, *L’Enfant de sable*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *Shalimar the Clown*. For example, two prominent Sufi philosophers, Ibn Arabi and Mansur Al-Hallaj, are mentioned directly in both *Vaste est la prison* and *L’Enfant de sable*.⁴² In *La Nuit sacrée*, Zahra also compares her marginal status to the Sufi Al-Hallaj (NS: 83). In *Shalimar the Clown*, the life of Boonyi’s daughter, known at first as India and then as Kashmira, is evocative of the concept of *kashmiriyat* (SC: 110) that was predominantly influenced by the interaction between Sufi and Hindu philosophies. I will return to these significant references in both Chapters IV and V.

Taking as a point of departure the explicit references to the Sacred and Sufism in the selected novels, this thesis explores further the symbolic layers of the

century historian who produced an eight-volume work on the lives of the Prophet and his companions, entitled *al-Tabaqāt al Kubrā* (*The Book of Major Classes*). See Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd (1904).

⁴⁰ The belief in angels in general and in the Archangel Gabriel in particular, is seen as one of the pillars of Islam. In Islam, the Archangel is considered to be amongst the sacred figures who directly transmitted the divine message to the Prophet Muhammad. See Karima D. Alavi (2007: 5-42). For a description of Gabriel in Islam, Christianity and Judaism, see Richard Webster (2005). See also George Braswell (2000).

⁴¹ For a study of the Archangel Gabriel from a Sufi perspective, see Annemarie Schimmel (1963).

⁴² Al-Hallaj is an influential Sufi poet and thinker. In the 10th century, he was sentenced to death. As Abdul C. Qadir (1988: 95) puts it: “A Sufi of great repute, al-Hallaj was charged with holding and preaching heretical doctrines, as he had said in a state of ecstasy, ‘Ana al-Haqq’ (I am the true One or Allah). He was accordingly arrested and ordered by the Caliph to be whipped and decapitated.” Similarly, Fatima Mernissi (1993a: 19-20) notes that because Al-Hallaj “insisted that the human being is the depository of *haqq* “truth”, and that each person reflects divine beauty and as a result is necessarily sovereign,” he ended up being burnt “in Baghdad in year 390 of the Hejira” (the 11th century A.D.). See Mernissi (1993a) and Qadir (1988). See also Herbert Mason (1979).

concept of the Sacred. The choice of the six novels is first and foremost prompted by such unequivocal references to sacred elements in Islam. Moreover, what also determined the choice of the corpus is the expression of the journey which on the one hand is a common thread between all six novels, and on the other is impregnated with Sufi symbolism. In Chapter III, I will define the meaning of the journey in relation to the Prophet Muhammad's night journey and I will explain how Ibn Arabi incorporated the symbolic aspect of journeying in his writings from a Sufi perspective.

On a literal and thematic level, the narratives in all six novels follow the movement of constant journeying. In Djébar's *Vaste est la prison* and *Loin de Médine*, the narratives revolve around female journeys. The female voices and bodies in both of Djébar's novels are in a constant state of movement. Their journeys cut across the limits of time, history and geographical space. In a similar way, the narratives in *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée* are built around multi-layered stories and multiple storytellers who are constantly looking for the truth behind Ahmed/Zahra's story. With Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the reader is exposed to the journey of Gibreel and Chamcha who fell from a bombed aeroplane and landed in London. In *Shalimar the Clown*, the plot revolves around India/Kashmira's quest for her lost mother and the killer of her father. Like their fictional characters, the lives of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie have been marked by constant movement. Djébar left Algeria, returned to it for a short of period of time, left it for France and then settled in the United States. Ben Jelloun left Morocco to go and live in France. Rushdie travelled between India, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

On a symbolic level, and as this thesis will argue, the journey is an expression of the Sacred in a Sufi sense. To analyse the symbolic dimension of the journey, Chapters IV and V will rely on four key symbols: the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light”. In relation to the “hidden”, Chapter IV will demonstrate how *Vaste est la prison*, *L’Enfant de sable* and *The Satanic Verses* are permeated by a sense of mystery and secrecy. This sense of the “hidden”, I argue, is inextricably linked to revelatory “openings” that are suffused with a sacred dimension. Similarly, the Sufi symbolism of “light” and “darkness” that I will interpret in Chapter V and in conjunction with *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *Shalimar the Clown* will expose the relationship between the three authors’ novels and the concept of the Sacred. I will show that the journeys of the female narrator in *Loin de Médine*, Zahra in *La Nuit sacrée* and India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown* entail a passage through “darkness” and a quest for illumination.

vi. An Overview of the Thesis Structure

The first chapter conducts a literature review of the prominent critical approaches to Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s selected corpus. This chapter will explore the main lines of interpretation that have placed the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie within postcolonial, postmodern, and feminist theoretical approaches. As will be shown in this chapter, critics like Orlando, Goellner, Calle-Gruber, Mortimer, Hiddleston, Kelly, Hayes, Woodhull and Zimra underline, amongst other issues, Djébar’s defiance of patriarchal norms, her recovery of silenced voices, her creative blending of autobiography and history and her feminist reading of Islamic history. In the readings of Erickson, Orlando, Hayes, Hess, Maazaoui and Hamil pertaining to Ben Jelloun’s texts, the questions that are treated are Ben Jelloun’s oppositional

narrative to both Colonial and patriarchal discourses, the author's search for an empowering position both for his marginalised characters and for Maghrebian authors writing in French, and his transgressive stand vis-à-vis sexual and religious taboos. As for Rushdie's fiction, the critical studies by Erickson, Bhabha, Reif-Hülser, Dutheil de la Rochère, Sanga, Stadtler, Siddiqi, Pessó-Miquel and Choudhuri discuss Rushdie's subversion of Colonial discourse as well as Islamic religious discourse, his negotiation of a hybrid identity, his transgression of the Sacred, his rewriting of history and his more recent political reflections on terrorism and oppression.

Chapter II presents an overview of the methodology proposed in this thesis and delineates the contours of the two stages of my hermeneutic reading. This chapter begins by defining the hermeneutic concept of explanation and clarifying its relevance to the study of the symbols of the Sacred in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected novels. The hermeneutic explanation proposed in this thesis will demonstrate how the symbols of the Sacred on the one hand are internally related in the structures of the selected texts, and on the other have a double-intentional dimension. The double-intentionality of a symbol implies that its signified is not of a linguistic nature. Moreover, this chapter delineates the meanings of the hermeneutic concepts of understanding and world. The movement from the explanation of the texts to an understanding of their ontological dimension is guided by the referential aspect of the symbolic expressions. It is argued that the symbols of the Sacred studied in this thesis are not self-contained; on the contrary, they "project worlds" that bypass the textual boundaries of the selected corpus. Chapter VI will further illustrate this theoretical point by exploring what I have termed here the intermediate

“worlds” projected by the three authors’ selected texts. I will compare these “worlds” to the sacred concept of the *barzakh* that I adopt from Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy.

Chapter III presents the conceptual and philosophical framework that informs the close textual readings in this thesis. This chapter begins by identifying the main sources of the Sacred in Islam: the Qur’an, the Prophet and the *Shari’a*. Next, this chapter moves on to introduce Ibn Arabi, situating his works within the Sufi Islamic heritage. Then the chapter deals with understanding the sources of the Sacred that underpin Ibn Arabi’s philosophical works, as a necessary step that will help clarify how the three authors engage with Sufi symbols that are anchored in the Sacred. In this regard, I will consider the symbolic meanings of the journey, the “openings”, the “hidden”, “darkness” and “light” by referring to the works of Ibn Arabi. Following the discussion of the symbolic expressions of the Sacred, the final section of this chapter will define Ibn Arabi’s concept of the *barzakh*. This ontological concept will inform the hermeneutic reading in Chapter VI, where I will argue that the symbols of the Sacred in Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts project intermediate “worlds” that are akin to the *barzakh*.

Chapters IV and V provide a hermeneutic explanation of the symbols of the journey, the “openings”, the “hidden”, “darkness” and “light”. The aim of these two chapters is to demonstrate the creative engagement between the symbols of the Sacred in the selected corpus and the Sufi Islamic heritage. To achieve this aim, Chapters IV and V will apply the first stage of my hermeneutic reading, which consists in analysing the structural relations between the symbols of the Sacred within the selected literary texts. Furthermore, I will draw upon Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy, since this will allow me to examine the correspondences between the symbols in the three writers’ selected works and the Sufi Islamic heritage.

Chapter VI presents an ontological understanding of the worlds projected by Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's texts. Having explained the structural relations between the symbols of the Sacred in the preceding chapters, I propose in this final chapter to read the concept of the Sacred in light of Ibn Arabi's notion of the *barzakh*. The emphasis in this chapter will be placed on the creative aspect of the "worlds" projected by the selected texts, a creativity displayed in their intermediate aspect. Finally, the Conclusion revisits the aims and objectives of this thesis, discusses the limitations of this research and proposes questions that demand further research. The Conclusion will also highlight two key observations. The first observation is that a hermeneutic analysis of the symbolic and ontological dimensions of the Sacred allows me to identify the creative interplay between the literary works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie, and the Sufi Islamic tradition. The second observation is that the study of the concept of the Sacred in the three writers' selected works is not aimed at defining what the Sacred *is*. On the contrary, the aim is to question philosophically how it is both expressed *in* the texts and experienced *beyond* the parameters of the texts.

Chapter I : Literature Review of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie

Introduction

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first three sections begin with a brief overview of each writer's biographical details, and then provide a literature review of the selected works by Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. I will therefore explore a selection of dominant approaches to their writings, with a particular focus on key concepts and theories that critics have employed. The final section summarises the key findings from the literature review and discusses the significance of undertaking a study of the concept of the Sacred in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's work.

In relation to Djébar's *Vaste est la prison* and *Loin de Médine*, I will examine the readings of Orlando, Goellner, Hiddleston, Calle-Gruber, Mortimer, Kelly, Hayes, Zimra and Woodhull. A recurrent main theme in these previous readings is Djébar's subversion of patriarchal and Colonial discourses, her feminist project, and the blending of autobiographical and historical genres. A further recurrent theme is the problem of female silences and how these silences are unearthed from male-dominated chronicles of history.

In the literature review of Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*, I will consider the readings of Erickson, Orlando, Hayes, Hess, Maazaoui and Hamil. As in the case of Djébar, the ways in which Ben Jelloun pays particular attention to the oppression of women in Moroccan society and possible forms of liberation from the oppression of patriarchal discourse is a recurrent theme. As this chapter will show, both Djébar and Ben Jelloun are seen as defying patriarchal norms and as recovering silenced female bodies and voices. Another dimension that is also emphasised in Ben Jelloun's writing is the author's transgression of gender lines, as

well as the contravention of sexual taboos, an aspect that is deemed to be dangerous in a religiously conservative society like Morocco.

In the literature review of Rushdie, I will analyse readings of *The Satanic Verses* by Erickson, Bhabha, Reif-Hülser, Dutheil de la Rochère, and Sanga. These readings focus on the ways in which Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* transgresses Islamic religious discourse. Additionally, the hybrid features of *The Satanic Verses* are seen as encapsulating a transgression of cultural binary thinking. In the readings of *Shalimar the Clown* by Stadtler, Siddiqi, Pessoa-Miquel and Choudhuri, I will show how these critics expanded their critical interest in postcolonial and postmodern theories by addressing political and contemporary issues such as terrorism and globalisation.

Before I engage in a literature review of the three authors' works, I will discuss briefly the main features of postcolonial, postmodern and feminist theories that previous critics have drawn from. It is not my purpose to examine the details of each theory but to present a more general picture of the dominant features, as this will help gain a better understanding of the theoretical framework that informs the readings in this chapter. Postcolonial Studies is an academic discipline that deals with the cultural, social, historical and political impact of colonisation, the relationship between coloniser and colonised and the strategies of resistance employed by the colonised. Since its emergence in the 1970s, there has been a vast debate about the definition of the term postcolonialism.⁴³ postcolonial critics have primarily drawn from postmodern schools of thought, and from Marxist as well from feminist theories and concepts. My understanding of postcolonialism in this chapter

⁴³ The debate is still ongoing, despite the fact that some critics have announced the death of the discipline. An example is Hamid Dabashi's study of the Arab Spring and the wave of revolutions that shook Arab countries like Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria. Dabashi writes about the demise of postcolonialism, arguing that it has been supplanted by an era of people-led revolutions. See Dabashi (2012).

is congruent with the definitions proposed by Loomba, and Childs and Williams.

According to Ania Loomba:⁴⁴

It is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. (2005: 16)

In a similar line of thought, Peter Childs and Patrick Williams' definition of postcolonialism focuses on three main aspects: temporal, cultural and conceptual. Hence, the temporal aspect consists in understanding postcolonialism as historically coming after Colonialism (Childs and Williams 1997: 1). The cultural element signifies the meaning of resistance to Colonial legacy (Childs and Williams 1997: 15). The conceptual element is predicated on questioning Eurocentric and Anglocentric definitions of the colonised "Other" (Childs and Williams 1997: 19-20).

In their landmark work on postcolonialism, entitled *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Griffiths argue that postcolonial literature refers to works produced by those who were colonised by European powers:

What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of their experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial (2002: 2).

It is in this sense of resistance that critics of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie as examined in this chapter refer to the postcolonial elements in the three authors' writings. As will be shown later in this chapter, a great emphasis has been placed on

⁴⁴ Loomba's book length study provides a comprehensive study of the key concepts that inform postcolonial studies. See Loomba (2005).

how the three authors and their texts resist dominant discourses such as colonial discourse.

A number of critics referred to in this chapter have also drawn from a postmodern theoretical angle; hence it is important at this stage to give a broad definition of postmodernism. Like postcolonialism, postmodernism spans a diverse range of philosophical, literary, cultural and artistic fields. John McGowan (1991: x) draws attention to the elusiveness of the term postmodernism, arguing that part of this elusiveness stems from the fact that it is a theory that spans historical, cultural, literary, and architectural fields of study. Regarding postmodernism, McGowan says:

We don't know whether it names the kind of theorizing rampant in the academy, the kind of architecture now cluttering our downtowns, and the kind of novels being written by Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Angela Carter, or whether it names the social, historical matrix within which and because of which these particular cultural phenomena flourish (1991: x).⁴⁵

McGowan notes that debates over the definitions of postmodernism are unabated and ongoing. According to McGowan (1991: 15) what mainly characterises the postmodern theoretical approach is that it involves a critique of modernism, that it is a critique of its “foundational principles” which are “reason,” “humanism,” “patriarchy” and “imperialism”. In a similar vein, Stephen Hicks (2004: 7-14) defines postmodernism as a movement that historically and philosophically departs from the modern tenets that are inherited from the Enlightenment era.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Frederic Jameson (1991: 3) considers postmodernism a “cultural dominant” that “allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features.” Jameson (1991: 3) situates the emergence and development of postmodernism in relation to capitalism, arguing that postmodern “aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production.” See Frederic Jameson (1991).

⁴⁶ For more on the definition of postmodernism, see McGowan (1991) and Hicks (2004).

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard (1984: xxiii)⁴⁷ presents postmodernism as a “condition” which “designates the state of our culture” and which corresponds to what he termed “the crisis of narratives.” In Lyotard’s view, postmodernism presents the possibility of little narratives which, contrary to grand narratives,⁴⁸ resist closure and binary thinking. For Lyotard (1984: xxiv), postmodernism displays “incredulity” towards grand narratives which are a result of the modernist project and which tend to be authoritarian forms of oppression. As Lyotard (1984: xxv) puts it, “Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities: it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.” In this sense, one of the defining features of postmodernism is that it culturally defies forms of oppression that underlie narratives such as scientific progress, humanism, or patriarchy.⁴⁹

In “Postmodernism and Literature,” Barry Lewis (1998: 122) outlines the main features of postmodernist fiction and underscores their connection to “transgressive fictional forms.” According to Lewis (1998: 123), these features comprise “temporal disorder; the erosion of the sense of time; a pervasive and pointless use of pastiche; a foregrounding of words as fragmenting material signs; the loose association of ideas; paranoia; and vicious circles.”⁵⁰ As will be addressed by critics in this chapter, Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts contain features germane to postmodern fiction, since the transgressive dimension in their literary

⁴⁷ Victor E. Taylor and Charles W. Winquist (2001: 165) state that Lyotard’s book had a seminal impact on the development of postmodern theory. See Taylor and Winquist (2001).

⁴⁸ For a detailed study of the concept of grand narratives, see Gary Browning (2000).

⁴⁹ In this line of thought, Stuart Sim (1998: vii) identifies postmodernism with a “rejection of many, if not most, of the cultural certainties on which life in the West has been structured,” stating that “It has called into question our commitment to cultural progress.” Furthermore, Sim (1998: vii) observes that postmodernism defies humanism, a legacy of the Enlightenment project, since it is perceived as an “ideology” that “has in its turn come to oppress humankind, and to force it into certain set of ways of thought and action.” See Sim (ed) (1998).

⁵⁰ For a detailed definition of postmodern fiction, see Barry Lewis (1998).

works consists in resisting all forms of authoritarian discourses. Additionally, critics in this chapter who draw from Postmodern theories have shown how the three authors' works defy "grand narratives" (Lyotard 1984: xxiv) such as patriarchy, religion, colonialism and nationalism.

In addition to postcolonial and postmodern theories, I refer in this chapter to critics who have been inspired by feminist approaches. Amongst the central issues that Feminism addresses are questions concerning women's equality to men, women's resistance to forms of subordination and strategies for liberation from patriarchal power. Maggie Humm argues that Feminism should be understood in its plural form as "Feminisms" in order to account for the diversity and wide scope that such a body of theory comprises. In Humm's view,

feminists are pursuing questions about the consequences for women and for men when gender oppressions intersect with other forms of oppression [...] Feminisms are the thought, practices, critical moments and writings in which feminists engage in their attempts to confront these consequences and to change them. The multiplicity of the term is needed to help us challenge the multi/duplicity of sexist assumptions and sexist constructions which surround us everywhere. (1992: 403)

Therefore, even though feminist theorists commonly address the issue of oppression, there are a variety of oppressive forms and there are varied ways of resisting them.

For example, bell hooks takes into account the categories of race and class in identifying forms of oppression that women need to struggle against. Hence, hooks⁵¹ defines Feminism as:

the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a ready-made identity or role one can step into. (1984: 26)

⁵¹ bell hooks is a 20th century African-American feminist and she insists on having her name spelt in lower-case letters. This, according to her, allows for a subversion of language and its grammatical limitations. Regarding this point, see Sheila Tobias (1997).

In hooks' view, Feminism is predicated on a continuous process of struggle against oppressive forms of sexism, and she draws attention to the importance of the categories of race and class in relation to any form of feminist struggle. Hence, according to hooks (1984: 18), race and class "in conjunction with sexism, determine the extent to which an individual will be discriminated against, exploited, or oppressed."

While hooks emphasises the relation between sexism, class and race to a feminist struggle, Hélène Cixous highlights the significance of recovering one's voice and body through writing. For Cixous, writing the self allows women to liberate themselves from oppression and to gain a sense of empowerment. In Cixous' words (1976: 880): "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her." Thus, writing the self enables women to reclaim their voices that have been silenced. Cixous in particular, and feminist theorists in general, underscore the seminal importance of writing the self, which enables women to find liberating venues that establish strategic defiance to male dominance. Writing, as Cixous puts it, is:

An act that will also be marked by woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her *suppression*. To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become at *will* the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process. (1976: 880; emphasis in original.)

As stated earlier, the purpose of the general picture presented, though by no means exhaustively, of postcolonial, postmodern, feminist theories is to establish the conceptual framework that has informed the readings explored in this chapter. Following this general description, the next three sections will focus on the lives of

the individual authors and on a review of their works, with particular emphasis on the selected corpus.

i. Literature Review of Djebbar

Djebbar was born Fatima-Zahra Imalayène in 1936, in Cherchell, a small town in Algeria. Djebbar's father was a French teacher in an all-boys colonial primary school which Djebbar attended as a little girl before going to a private Quranic school.⁵² Djebbar's mother was a descendent of a Berber tribe known as Ben Menacer. In this regard, *Vaste est la prison* also pays tribute to Djebbar's ancestral Berber language and culture. Until her death in 2015, Djebbar was a prolific writer, poet, essayist, historian, filmmaker, playwright, translator and university professor. Her works, which have been translated into more than 20 languages,⁵³ span a range of themes such as: gender and feminism, women's liberation, cultural identity, the quest for independence, multilingualism, colonial and postcolonial histories, memory and forgetting, and autobiographical writing. I will touch upon these themes in the literature review carried out in this section.

Djebbar was the first Algerian woman to be accepted at the prestigious Parisian higher education institution, the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1955. However, Djebbar's participation in political protests led by Algerian students in Paris

⁵² Owing to her father, Djebbar received a French education. This autobiographical detail is extensively explored in one of her most acclaimed novels *L'Amour, la fantasia* which opens with a depiction of the narrator holding her father's hand and walking to school. In her later autobiographical work, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, Djebbar writes again about her French schooling. Christa Jones (2010: 50) argues that Djebbar's childhood contact with the French language enabled her to "fashion a complex bicultural identity and worldview that empowered her to liberate herself from some of the constraints of a highly traditional patriarchal Muslim society." In a similar vein, Orlando (1999: 119) argues that Djebbar's father, by "exposing [his daughter] to a Western education," defied "village taboos." For more on Djebbar's French education, see Jones (2010) and Orlando (1997).

⁵³ Alison Rice notes the seminal role played by the translations of Djebbar's works in expanding her readership beyond the French-speaking audience and in making the author internationally celebrated. See Rice (2006).

resulted in her being expelled from the University. In 1956, Djébar completed her BA in History at the Sorbonne in Paris. Amongst other research interests, between 1958 and 1959, Djébar conducted research on mysticism in the Middle Ages.⁵⁴ Djébar taught in a number of universities including Rabat University in Morocco, University of Algiers in Algeria, University of California in the U.S.A, and Trinity College, Cambridge in the U.K. In 1997, Djébar became Distinguished Foundation Professor of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, U.S.A. In 1999, she completed her PhD in French Literature and Civilization at the University of Paul Valéry, Montpellier III. In 2001 she moved to New York where she held the position of Chair and Professor of French and Francophone Studies at New York University.

Djébar's early career as a novelist began with the publication of her first book *La Soif* (1957)⁵⁵ followed by *Les Impatients* (1958), *Les Enfants du nouveau monde* (1962) and *Les Alouettes naïves* (1967). Following a narrative silence that lasted for ten years, Djébar directed two films entitled "La Noubia des femmes du Mont Chenoua" (1978) and "La Zerda ou les chants de l'oubli" (1982).⁵⁶ Amongst Djébar's novels that have attracted a great deal of critical attention are *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985),⁵⁷ *L'Ombre Sultane* (1987), *Vaste est la prison* (1995) and *Nulle part*

⁵⁴ This partly explains why her novel *Vaste est la prison* makes direct references to the Sufi thinker Ibn Arabi.

⁵⁵ *La Soif* is a novel that revolves around the intimate relationships of an Algerian female character, Nadia. Although it was published during the Algerian War of Independence, the novel does not make a reference to the historical and political events in Algeria. Like Djébar's *Loin de Médine*, Djébar's early novels *La Soif* (1956) and *Les Impatients* (1958) have attracted negative responses, mainly from Algerian nationalists. Djébar was harshly criticised for writing in French and for overlooking the political maelstrom in which Algeria was engulfed. Zimra (2001: 84) notes that *La Soif* and *Les Impatients* "furent immédiatement conspués par ceux qui se disaient patriotes." In a similar vein, Mary B. Vogl (1998: 139) states that: "Although praised in France, Djébar's first two novels were condemned by nationalist critics in Algeria for being too preoccupied with problems of individual women of the upper middle class and for ignoring the political realities of the day." For more details on the responses to Djébar's early novels, see Zimra (2001) and Vogl (1998).

⁵⁶ For an overview on filmmaking in North Africa, see Rebecca Hillauer (2005).

⁵⁷ *L'Amour, la fantasia* revolves around the Colonial history of Algeria, the war of Independence, and postcolonial Algeria. The novel is based on a mixture of autobiographical writing and Djébar's rewriting of history.

dans la maison de mon père (2007).⁵⁸ These four novels are commonly known as the four volumes of the Algerian Quartet.⁵⁹ In this chapter I will consider the major themes and key concepts that critics have explored in relation to Djébar's Quartet, in particular to *Vaste est la prison*.

Witnessing the bloodshed and the rise of religious fundamentalism in 1990s Algeria, Djébar interrupted her Quartet project in order to publish *Loin de Médine* (1991). In 1995, *Le Blanc de L'Algérie* was published as Djébar's elegy to her friends and others who fell victims to the surge of Islamic violence in post-independent Algeria. In 1997, Djébar published *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* where she explored further the theme of memory – a theme largely addressed in her Algerian Quartet – in conjunction with the trauma of exile.⁶⁰

It was stated in the introduction to this thesis that the negative public reception of some of Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's works and the authors' own opposition to censorship constitute a common ground between the three writers. I noted for example that *Loin de Médine* met with acrimonious responses in Algeria due to the author's dealing with sensitive issues concerning the situation of women while exploring the early years of Islamic history. I will return to this point in more detail later in this chapter. For the time being, I will discuss the critical approaches to Djébar's *Vaste est la prison* with a particular focus on the feminist, postcolonial and postmodern aspects that have been explored in varying ways.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Mosher (2008) devotes the third chapter of her PhD to the study of Djébar's Quartet. Mosher explores the connections between Djébar's filmmaking experience and the visual imagery in the author's novels. See Mosher (2008).

⁵⁹ Djébar's Quartet signals a new turn in Djébar's writing career. This is due to the special attention that Djébar pays to her connection with her female ancestors. Although, as Sophie Timmerman writes (2005: 82), the Quartet novels are a result of a "sentiment d'exclusion du monde maternel que Djébar a ressenti du fait de son éducation à la française," it is owing to these novels that Djébar "se rapproche des femmes algériennes, dont elle est séparée par le français, langue du colonisateur." See Timmerman (2005).

⁶⁰ Jenny Murray's book-length study (2008) of Djébar's works includes a chapter on *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* entitled "Building Identities on the Ruins of History." (2008: 155-178).

In her article “Assia Djébar’s *Vaste est la prison*: Platform for a New Space of Agency and Feminine Enunciation in Algeria,” Orlando (1997: 84) explores the feminist agenda in Djébar’s novel and observes that the “controversial” aspect of Djébar’s writing is amongst the reasons why she was forced to live abroad. In addition, Orlando notes that:

Djébar’s popularity in the Western world counters her lack of support (both as a public intellectual and politically as an activist) in Algeria due to that country’s deeply-rooted anti-intellectual climate after independence. (1997: 86)

Vaste est la prison, in Orlando’s view, illustrates the author’s continuous effort to tackle issues pertaining to gender oppression. This effort entails negotiating an empowering position not only for women, but for all intellectuals alike. As Orlando (1997: 85) puts it, “As an author and an intellectual living in exile, Djébar must forge a new interactive space of reflection for herself and others who live on the ‘outside’.” Both the rewriting of history and the embedding of the author’s own experience of filmmaking are what allows Djébar, in Orlando’s view, to forge a new feminist space in *Vaste est la prison*.

Moreover, Orlando, in her book-length study entitled *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb* examines the works of Djébar in conjunction with those of Ben Jelloun and Leila Sebbar. Drawing from feminist, postcolonial and postmodern theories, Orlando argues that Djébar defies the patriarchal norms that are imposed on women in Algeria. Djébar’s defiance, in Orlando’s view (1999: 151), encapsulates “the sole means of protesting a prison that is so vast, its borders and its exits are almost indeterminable.” Djébar, Orlando writes:

[...] must live outside, as a dissident, on the liminal edges of a factionalized Algeria in order to contest the injustice that is imposed there. She insists that a dissident

voice is the only means through which an author, placed in an unstable and unjust world, will succeed in developing his or her own strategy of dialogue to effectuate a platform of agency. (1999: 151)

Djebar's subversion of the patriarchal norms and inscription of her female characters at the heart of a feminist agency constitute, in Orlando's view, a daring dimension in *Vaste est la prison*.

Furthermore, inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's postmodern theorising of nomadic thinking and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concept of hybridity, Orlando (1999: 8) shows also how Djebar and Francophone Maghrebien writers alike have inscribed "feminism itself beyond the patriarchal, political, judicial, and cultural structures of their homeland." Djebar's feminist project, in Orlando's view, consists in transgressing the gender lines prescribed by Algerian patriarchal society and in defying its forms of political and cultural restrictions. In a similar vein, later in this chapter, I will show how both Orlando and Erickson contend that Ben Jelloun's writing also refuses to abide by the patriarchal norms.

Amongst the feminist strategies that can be found in Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Vaste est la prison*, Orlando argues, are the recovery of the silenced voices of women and the negotiation of a feminist agency. Instead of "the violence of patriarchal and religious regimes," Orlando (1999: 7) makes the case that Djebar, from her exilic space, actively promotes the emancipation of women. Orlando's third chapter is devoted to the analysis of Djebar's two novels and focuses attention on how Djebar negotiates a feminist agency through her strategic rewriting of history. Orlando highlights Djebar's subversion of colonial and Orientalist representations of Algerian women, as does Anne Donadey (2001), who presents a detailed study of Djebar's subversive rewriting of the colonial representation of Algerian women. In the same way, later in this chapter I will show how previous critics of Rushdie have

paid particular attention to the way Rushdie subverts Western colonial discourse in his novels *The Satanic Verses* and *Shalimar the Clown*.

Djebar's recuperation of the silenced voices of Algerian women is carried out through the blending of autobiographical, historical and fictional narratives. According to Orlando, *Vaste est la prison* takes up the "rewriting of history" project already found in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, which allows Djebar to undermine French Orientalist depictions⁶¹ of Algerian women as submissive.⁶² Orlando (1999: 8) states that Djebar destabilises "the veiled and submissive image of Maghrebian women in the harem so meticulously cultivated by French Orientalist fantasies, to reinstate them as active fighters for their country and freedom."

In addition to the subversion of Orientalist representations of Algerian women, *Vaste est la prison* defies the oppressive rise of religious extremism in 1990s Algeria. Orlando (1999: 134) argues that intellectuals like Djebar have "been the brunt of so many vehement and violent attacks by Islamic fanatics." Nevertheless this "public hostility towards intellectuals" did not stop Djebar from forging a "space of agency" in *Vaste est la prison* (Orlando 1999: 134). Djebar depicts "the great risks women face when they step outside the boundaries of their designated roles to challenge structures of authorities" (Orlando 1999: 150). What Orlando's reading demonstrates is that *Vaste est la prison* continues Djebar's previous works where she proposes a feminist revision of colonial history and a subversion of Orientalist depictions of Algerian women. Nonetheless, Orlando emphasises the idea that *Vaste*

⁶¹ Orientalism is a term coined by the Palestinian-American scholar Said. Said (1997: 128) defines Orientalism as the sum of "ideological oppositions, images and fantasies about a currently important and politically urgent region of the world called the Orient." Orientalism is therefore anchored in a dichotomous understanding whereby the East is represented as the "Other" of the West. The Orient is thus a "European invention" which is perceived, Said writes (1987b: 1), as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes." See Said (1997b: 1-2) and (1995). For an in-depth study of Orientalist and Colonial representations of women, see Haideh Moghissi (2005).

⁶² Erickson (1998) provides a textual analysis of *L'Amour, la fantasia*, with a particular emphasis on the silenced voices and the space of writing. See Erickson (1998).

est la prison is a novel where Djébar expresses her fears about the rise of religious extremism in postcolonial Algeria.

As discussed earlier, Djébar's blending of autobiography and history constitutes an important component in Djébar's feminist project. In this regard, *Vaste est la prison* is replete with autobiographical elements which can be discerned in the personal memories of Djébar about her mother and her grandmother. Djébar also includes details relating to her own experience as an Algerian filmmaker.

The blending of genres in Djébar's *Vaste est la prison* in particular and in her writing in general is a focal point addressed by Mireille Calle-Gruber in *Assia Djébar, Nomade Entre Les Murs: Pour une Poétique transfrontalière*. According to Calle-Gruber, *Vaste est la prison* embodies an amalgam of fictional, cultural, historical and autobiographical elements that cut across genre lines. As Calle-Gruber puts it:

Car c'est bien de frontières qu'il est question, de seuils, de limites, mais aussi du passage – des passages – de la navette qui noue fil autobiographique et fil historial. (2005: 71; emphasis in original.)

Additionally, Calle-Gruber (2005: 74) notes how the narrative in *Vaste est la prison* is infused with myriad languages ranging from Berber to French to Arabic that are inscribed within “un enjeu de polarités”. In Calle-Gruber's view, Djébar crosses linguistic and cultural frontiers as well as the frontiers between genres. Hence, Calle-Gruber (2005: 68) argues that Djébar's writing creates “un autre monde” where “tout peut arriver: l'improbable, l'impossible, l'infini.” Like Orlando, Calle-Gruber (2005: 68) uses Deleuze and Guattari's concept of “nomad” in order to demonstrate that Djébar's writing is anchored in “mouvements” thus creating a literary space “poussant toujours un peu plus loin les limites.” Calle-Gruber speaks of Djébar's literary space being governed by a constant movement that creates a world without

limits. Likewise, in Chapter VI, I will explore the way Djébar's texts project "worlds" made up of a constellation of symbolic opposites. While Calle-Gruber relies on the concept of "nomad" to identify the type of world created by Djébar's writing, I will draw on the Sufi concept of the *barzakh* and will show that the intermediate "worlds" in *Vaste est la prison* and *Loin de Médine* are closely linked with the experience of the Sacred.

To return to the question of the blending of genres, critics and Djébar alike stressed the significance of writing the self as a powerful tool to defy patriarchal and religious discourses. From a feminist angle, the autobiographical aspect of Djébar's writing, coupled with her use of the French language, transgresses the oppressive patriarchal norms of a society that prohibits and condemns the personal disclosure of women.⁶³ Citing *L'Amour, la fantasia* and the collection of essays *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, Sage Goellner notes the risks Djébar takes not only by incorporating autobiographical elements, but also by using French as a means of expression. Goellner argues that:

Assia Djébar has often remarked upon the dangerous nature of autobiographical writing for Arab women, especially when written in "la langue adverse". Often perceived as a cultural and a linguistic betrayal, personal disclosure is generally prohibited in the Arabo-Muslim context, and to write of oneself as a woman in a colonial language is an even greater transgression. In Algeria in particular, writers who express themselves in French are met with cultural condemnation and even mortal danger. (2004: 1)

In a patriarchal society like Algeria where silence is imposed on women and where voices of intellectuals are denied, Djébar dares to write against all odds. In an interview with Marguerite Le Clézio (1985: 238), Djébar admits that "Ecrire dans

⁶³ Trudy Agar (2013) interprets the secret love in *Vaste est la prison* as a form of transgression. Taking Levinas' ethical philosophy as a point of departure, Agar argues that the "encounter" between Isma and the other is built on risky ground. Agar argues that illicit love is punishable in a conservative society like Algeria and that Djébar's autobiographical writing about such a delicate topic reflects the author's transgression of conventional socio-religious codes. See Agar (2013).

cette langue, mais écrire très près de soi, pour ne pas dire de soi même, avec un arrachement, cela devenait pour moi une entreprise dangereuse.”

Djebar discusses further the question of autobiography in *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*. Djebar lays bare the forces of repression that are comprised in the mechanisms of silence imposed on women in general and on female intellectuals in particular in postcolonial Algeria. Additionally, Djebar (1999: 65) points out that silence can also take the form of auto-censorship, or what she termed “les tabous intérieurs”. Given the tension between self-imposed silence and the desire to break that silence, Djebar’s writing exposes the dilemma of recuperating personal and collective voices. Djebar (1999: 65) insists that “écrire pour moi se joue dans un rapport obscur entre le ‘devoir dire’ et le ‘ne jamais pouvoir dire’.” Writing against all odds is a difficult process; however, it is the only means to assert female agency and participation in history. To echo Djebar’s words (1999: 65), writing is a way of discovering oneself and the others: “l’écriture comme aventure, comme recherche de soi et du monde.”

On the question of autobiography, Mildred Mortimer writes about the transgressive aspect of this type of writing for Djebar:⁶⁴

The novelist comes to autobiography fully aware that subjectivity in life and fiction are transgressions in Algerian culture. Unlike Western civilization which, Foucault reminds us in his *Histoire de la sexualité*, delights in the public airing of all private matters – desires, sins, suffering – Islamic culture is bound to the *non-dire*, or unspoken, in other words, to silence; it prohibits personal disclosure. If a Muslim woman is to be neither seen nor heard in public and divulges private matters, revealing in public the secret world neither men nor women should ever reveal, she is, in effect, involved in a double transgression. If the female writer dares to preserve for posterity the very secret not to be revealed in public, is she not committing a triple transgression? As a woman writer of the Arab world, a novelist

⁶⁴ Sherif Hetata notes that “writing the self” in Arabic-speaking countries is a tricky and intricate issue. As Hetata (2003: 124) puts it, the “self, the inner, secret self, is something a man (or a woman) in our region does not write about.” Hetata explains that patriarchal power has a stronghold on what can be said and revealed about the self. See Hetata (2003).

whose quest for self-definition encompasses self-revelation, Djébar is forced to come to grips with the thorny issue of the *non-dire*. (1997: 102)

In terms of religion, in Mortimer's view, Islam does not allow women to appear in public let alone to speak in public.⁶⁵ Women are relegated to the private sphere, due to the repressive nature of the religious conservatism and patriarchal power in Algerian society. Likewise, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, Ben Jelloun's novels *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*, are concerned with the marginalised status of women in Moroccan society.

The autobiographical dimension in Djébar's writing is also examined by Debra Kelly, who devotes a whole chapter in her book *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French* to the analysis of *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Vaste est la prison*.⁶⁶ Kelly draws from Deleuze and Guattari's postmodern theory in order to shed light on the political and poetic strategies employed by Djébar. In the same way that Goellner and Mortimer noted the dangers germane to Djébar's use of the French language and

⁶⁵ Another example that can be cited in this context is the "female gaze" and how it constitutes defiance to the enclosure of women in the private sphere. In Mortimer's view the female gaze is one of the feminist strategies that Djébar uses in order to counteract male domination. In this sense, Djébar appropriates the female gaze in order to displace the repressive power of patriarchy. "For Djébar," Mortimer writes (2001: 214), "the gaze is crucial because the prohibition against woman seeing and being seen is at the heart of Maghrebian patriarchy, an ideological system in which the master's eye alone exists; women challenge the patriarchal system by appropriating the gaze for themselves." Mortimer (2001: 221) states of Djébar that "as an Algerian writer and a feminist, she calls for the transformation of domestic space into a locus of positive relationships, a space no longer controlled by the male patriarchal gaze." In a similar vein, Jane Hiddleston (2006: 103) underscores the idea that the female gaze is "a symbol of resistance" because "the very gesture of controlling the camera signifies self-affirmation and rebellion. Significantly again, however, self-expression is a collective project, undertaken explicitly in the name of all the women who suffered repression in the harem." "Filmmaking," Hiddleston (2006: 103) goes on, "is here bound up with self-assertion but also with cooperation." The idea of openness towards others is reiterated in Djébar's words "Je m'essaie à vivre, c'est-à-dire à regarder, un œil grand ouvert vers le ciel, quelquefois vers les autres, l'autre œil tourné en moi" (VP: 313). Hence as Hiddleston (2006: 104) indicates, "Djébar's text is a force of connection, setting up links and narrating common experiences between singular women." A great emphasis is therefore placed on what Hiddleston (2006: 104) termed an "underlying individual agency as well as communality between women." To echo Djébar's words, the female gaze that traces the contours of self and others' liberation is not an end in itself but rather a beginning, for it is "nous enfin qui regardons, nous qui commençons" (VP: 175).

⁶⁶ Kelly (2005) provides a comparative study of four North African writers: Mouloud Feraoun, Albert Memmi, Abdelkébir Khatibi and Assia Djébar, with a particular focus on autobiography.

autobiographical writing, Kelly (2005: 252-253) observes that Djébar is aware of “the risk of writing about the self” yet she “continues to undertake the endeavour and to persevere with the act of writing despite, in defiance of, or perhaps because of, the ever-present risk inherent in such an act.” Through “the writing of the self,” Kelly (2005: 333) argues that Djébar achieves a better understanding of the knowledge of the self and others at a time when the history of Algeria is – again – threatened by erasure.

In a similar line of thought, Jarrod Hayes argues that Djébar’s feminist revision of history and autobiographical writing challenges the dominant discourses on gender. Using postmodern and feminist theories, Hayes closely examines the works of Djébar in two chapters in his book titled *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb*. What is revealing in Hayes’ argument is that Djébar’s “writing the self” is intermeshed with identity and politics. For Hayes (2000: 182), Djébar’s “feminist rewriting of history” equates to an unveiling of “women’s erasure from history” as well as a resistance to a unified definition of ‘Algerianness’ (Hayes 2000: 188). “Writing the self” and revising history from a feminist perspective becomes a transgressive political tool,⁶⁷ as Hayes puts it:

Unveiling, here, is related to secrets; the association of the veil and the closet is thus strengthened by this understanding of Djébar’s feminist writing as a form of unveiling. Narratives queer the Maghrebian Nation and make the Nation feminist through similar tactics: disclosure, uncovering, digging up, revelation, and unveiling both secrets and transgressions (2000: 190).

⁶⁷ Karina Eileraas offers a political reading of Djébar’s treatment of the theme of the self and other. Devoting the fourth chapter of her book to the study of *L’Amour, la fantasia*, Eileraas argues that Djébar challenges any fixed understanding of a binary relation between self and other. Part of Djébar’s “decolonising project,” Eileraas argues (2007: 132), lies in creating new ways of negotiating a feminist identity. Drawing from Nietzsche’s philosophy, Eileraas (2007: 131) compares *L’Amour, la fantasia* to an “epistemological journey” that enables Djébar to uncover the violence of representation and to envision novel ways of interpreting identity.

Djebar's autobiographical writing is therefore a site where the personal is unveiled and revealed, which is a transgressive act in itself as articulated by the literary critics of Djebar. For Hayes, Djebar's feminist writing captures a political stronghold as it reveals what should remain hidden and revives the voices that have been silenced. In this thesis I will also use the concept of unveiling, but unlike Hayes, I will shift attention from a feminist perspective to a Sufi perspective. In Chapters V and VI, I will explore the way the female narrator in *Loin de Médine* experiences unveiling like a Sufi seeker's experience of the Sacred.

Again focusing on the feminist dimension in Djebar's work, Jane Hiddleston establishes a parallel between Djebar's writing of the "self" and her maternal heritage. Hence, blending feminist and postcolonial theoretical insights with French philosophical thought, Hiddleston interprets the spirit of resistance that *Vaste est la prison* displays. In Hiddleston's view (2006: 98), Djebar pieces together the stories of women from past and present in order to establish a "feminine communion" and a "common women's language." Hiddleston (2016: 99) explains that the legend of the Berber Queen Tin Hinan in conjunction with the stories about the mother, Isma, and Djebar's autobiographical accounts of her filmmaking experience, all show "traces of feminine language" that are "treasured for their creative power." All these women in Djebar's text, as Hiddleston puts it (2006: 97), "challenge the oppressive structures with which they contend" and emblemise "resistance to containment." According to Hiddleston, *Vaste est la prison* is a "feminist" work that underscores a sense of "self" in relation with other women. Hiddleston remarks that unlike conceptions of Western Feminism that emphasise "individual agency," Djebar highlights the significance of a collective feminist voice.

The title of Hiddleston's book *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria* indicates the critic's interest in exploring Djebar's relationship with Algeria. This relationship, as Hiddleston puts it, reveals that "Djebar's journey, through both life and work" is built around tensions. Hiddleston (2006: 1) argues that Algeria constitutes a "symbol" that signifies both Djebar's belonging and exclusion. In Hiddleston's view, the study of Djebar's works shows that Algeria is "the object of quest, inciting the writer to invent an identity and a genealogy, but it also resists and eludes that quest." In this sense, Djebar tries to reconstruct a sense of belonging through the multiplicity of female Algerian voices that she uncovers. However, Djebar is faced with "the very difficulty of theorising post-colonial Algeria in terms of any single, straightforward framework" (Hiddleston 2006: 4). While Hiddleston interprets Algeria as a symbol of quest for Djebar,⁶⁸ I will focus my attention on textual symbols that correspond to the Sacred in Islam. Differently from Hiddleston, my reading of the journey in Djebar's texts will demonstrate that it is a symbol of the Sacred. In Chapters IV and V, I will present a hermeneutic analysis of the journey in conjunction with four symbols that correlate with the names of God, that is the "hidden", the "openings", "darkness" and "light".

⁶⁸ Rodriguez Drissi explores the theme of the journey in *Vaste est la prison* by demonstrating that the female characters in the novel are in a constant quest for change. Drissi interprets *Vaste est la prison* through the lens of Northrop Frye's concept of the quest novel. Kelly (2000) also examines the theme of the journey in her comparative study of *Vaste est la prison* and *L'Amour, la fantasia*. Kelly explains that Djebar's rewriting of history constitutes the author's quest for "the liberation of the self and of the wider community." Additionally, in her comprehensive postcolonial study of the theme of the journey in African novels, Mortimer devotes a chapter to examining Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Ombre sultane* and Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*. Mortimer (1990: 149) notes that those two novels in particular encapsulate "a temporal-spatial journey" whereby the narrator "turns to the past to understand herself better." Mortimer (1990: 12) shows that: "[J]ust as the outer journey leads the traveling hero or heroine to lucidity and self-understanding, the inner journey – which includes personal thoughts, past memories, the collective experience of the family or clan – helps the African female protagonist develop the inner strength necessary in a twofold struggle against the vestiges of colonialism and the present grip of traditional patriarchy." *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Ombre sultane*, in Mortimer's view, emblemise Djebar's feminist project which consists on the one hand in excavating women's voices that have been silenced by the colonial history, and on the other on tracing female liberation from spatial and patriarchal oppression. See Drissi (2005), Kelly (2000) and Mortimer (1990).

Djebar's defiance of patriarchal norms, her subversion of French Orientalist representations of women and her blending of autobiographical and historical elements all form part of her feminist project that critics discussed thus far have emphasised. Djebar's *Loin de Médine* is also a continuation of the author's feminist project which consists in unveiling voices that have been silenced by male Islamic historians. In light of the historical events that shook Algeria in the early 1990s, Djebar interrupted her Quartet project to write *Loin de Médine*. In her interview with Clarisse Zimra, Djebar explains the motivations behind the writing of *Loin de Médine*. Djebar remarks (1993: 123) that "*Médine* is, above all, a piece of committed literature with regards to actual events in contemporary Algeria." Djebar admits that her decision to temporarily interrupt the Quartet project sprang out of her being distraught at the rampant extremism in Algeria:

I was derailed by the street riots of October 1988 in Algiers: I saw blood flowing in the streets. For several years I had been an uncomfortable witness of the fundamentalist rise in public life – particularly among students. I told myself that the only kind of response of which I was capable, as a writer, was to go back to the written sources of our history. I wanted to study, in great detail, this specific period that the fundamentalists were in the process of claiming for themselves, deforming it in the process from the standpoint of facts as well as the standpoint of intent. *Médine* became this interruption in my own work, a piece written at one sitting, so to speak, in my eagerness to enter this particular debate. In short, *Médine* was conceived as a response to specific circumstances (1993: 122-123).

In the face of the violence wreaking havoc in Algeria, Djebar decides to take a journey back in history, seeking the voices of women and endeavouring to defy the male-centred historical accounts.

In "Postcolonial Thought and Culture in Francophone North Africa," Winifred Woodhull explains how Djebar's feminist agenda in *Loin de Médine* acts as an alternative voice to counter the rising of Islamic extremism in Algeria in late 1980s and early 1990s. For Woodhull (2003: 214-215), Djebar's *Loin de Médine* relies on its "feminist strategy," in order to advance "democratic values" and to

counter “the Islamists’ reductive, ahistoric and repressive views.” Woodhull (2003: 214) remarks that a number of intellectuals like Djébar reacted to the growing religious extremism in the Algeria of the 1990s, and observes that the discourse of “supposed religious and cultural purity” is echoed in the voice of those who “maintain that their interpretation of Islam is the eternal truth and that their understanding of Algerian culture as essentially Arab and Muslim constitutes the essence of Algeria.” Woodhull (2003: 215) associates Djébar’s rewriting of Islamic history in *Loin de Médine* with a feminist attempt to capture the “error, hypocrisy, and intolerance of fanatics who pretend to be obeying divine law in enforcing the subjection of women.” According to Woodhull (2003: 215), Djébar’s work digs into “the history of Islam and of women’s participation in early Islamic communities” in order to counteract the “Islamists’ claims to possess the only valid interpretation of the Koran and other sacred texts.”

Woodhull remarks that Djébar’s feminist subversion of patriarchal domination is not only found in her fiction, but is also observed in Djébar’s political engagement. In addition to her novels, Djébar’s engagement with the plight of Algerian women was affirmed in 1989 when she opposed the imposition of the Family Code in Algeria. According to Woodhull:

Three Algerian women’s organizations had met with independent feminist activists, including Assia Djébar and Egyptian feminist Nawal al-Saadawi, to discuss ways of challenging the family laws, for instance by showing that they were in conflict not only with the national constitution but with international conventions ratified by the Algerian government. The women also aimed to put pressure on the government to ratify the Copenhagen Convention on Women’s Rights and put a stop to the fundamentalists’ harassment and intimidation of feminists. (1993: 53)

Woodhull explains how the Family Code came to emphasize male power and to relegate women to the status of subservient to men:

The patriarchal texture of Algeria's political culture is evident in the persistence of traditional social practices dictated by Islamic law, practices that the state formally sanctioned in the family law of 1984, adopted from the Shari'a, the historical principles of Islamic law and ethics. (1993: 12)

Woodhull further adds:

Under this law, women remain legal minors, for example, until they marry, whereas men attain adult status at age eighteen whether they are married or not; a woman's, but not a man's decision to marry must be authorized by a guardian; the dowry system is maintained; married women must obey their husbands; and it is difficult and costly for women to initiate divorce, whereas men retain the rights of polygamy and repudiation of their wives. (1993: 12)

One of the major characteristics of the 1990s is, in Woodhull's view (1993: 14), "women's exclusion from the nation's political life." According to Woodhull (1993: 14) "women are indeed underrepresented in political institutions, silenced in public debates, and denounced as anarchists whenever they make themselves heard."

The range of theoretical approaches and key concepts utilised by the critics of Djébar testify to the plethora of issues that the Algerian author raises through her writings, in particular in her novels *Vaste est la prison* and *Loin de Médine*. Previous critics have drawn from several approaches, amongst which the feminist and postcolonial approaches are dominant. What undeniably comes to the fore is that Djébar defies the silences imposed on women, whether in *Vaste est la prison* where her autobiographical voice is enmeshed with fiction and history, or in *Loin de Médine* where myriad female voices are unearthed from the depths of the male-dominated chronicles of Islamic history.

In the ensuing section, I will turn to Ben Jelloun's writing where similar preoccupations and theoretical approaches to those of Djébar are also echoed by the critics of his novels.

ii. Literature Review of Ben Jelloun

Tahar Ben Jelloun was born in Fez, Morocco, in 1944. His family belonged to a modest social background. His father worked as a shopkeeper and a tailor. As a child, Ben Jelloun attended a Qur'anic school. At the age of seven he joined a Franco-Arab school, then went to the French high school Lycée Regnault in Tangier.⁶⁹ Ben Jelloun graduated in philosophy from the University of Rabat. As a student he joined the literary journal *Souffles* which was later banned by the Moroccan government.⁷⁰ In 1966, Ben Jelloun was arrested and imprisoned in the aftermath of his participation in student demonstrations. In 1971, Ben Jelloun sought exile in France in order to escape repression. He settled in Paris and completed his doctorate in social psychiatry.

Ben Jelloun is a novelist, essayist, poet, journalist, playwright and psychiatrist who currently lives in Paris. He has written over twenty books which have been translated into many languages. Ben Jelloun's writings tackle a plethora of questions such as racism and immigration, Maghrebian and French identity, oral storytelling, multilingualism, the female body and voice, sexual taboos, erotic desire, and colonial, political and religious oppression.

Ben Jelloun's first published novels were *Harrouda* (1973),⁷¹ *Moha le fou*, *Moha le sage* (1978)⁷² and *La Prière de l'absent* (1981).⁷³ Ben Jelloun attracted

⁶⁹ For more general information on Ben Jelloun and his life, see Siga Fatima Jagne and Pushpa Naidu Parekh (2012), Henry Louis Gates and Emmanuel Akyeampong (2012) and Lawrence D. Kritzman (2006).

⁷⁰ *Souffles* is a literary journal created by Abdellatif Laâbi in 1966. Laâbi was imprisoned for eight years due to the highly revolutionary and political tone of the journal. For more details on the influential role that the journal played in Ben Jelloun's writing career, see Soraya Mekerta (1998).

⁷¹ *Harrouda* was censored due to its explicit sexual nature. It is a novel that revolves around the figure of a prostitute, taking its inspiration from Moroccan folklore. The narrative is made up of a mixture of poetry, prose, autobiography, history and hallucinations, and is geographically situated between Fez and Tangiers. The sexual content of the story is related through the eyes of a little boy. Ben Abdallah examines the intersection between sexuality and the narrative structure in *Harrouda* and argues that

international attention and recognition with the publication of *L'Enfant de sable* (1985) and *La Nuit sacrée* (1987) which like his early novels place a great emphasis on the marginalised voices of Moroccan society and on religious and sexual taboos. In 1991 his novel *Les Yeux baissés* appeared, in which Ben Jelloun turned his attention to the issue of racism in France.⁷⁴ The question of racism is also strongly voiced by Ben Jelloun in his bestseller nonfictional works *Le Racisme expliqué à ma fille* (1998) and *L'Islam expliqué aux enfants* (2002).⁷⁵ More recent works by Ben Jelloun include *Par le feu* (2013) and *L'Ablation* (2014).⁷⁶

Examining the postcolonial aspects of Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable*, Erickson, in *Islam and the Postcolonial Narrative*, argues that the Moroccan author and his main characters alike inscribe their own counter-discourse from outside the limits imposed by Islamic and Eurocentric discourses. In this sense, Erickson's reading focuses on explaining how Ben Jelloun as a postcolonial writer defies two types of authoritarian discourses: the Colonial as well as the patriarchal.

According to Erickson (1998: 77), Ben Jelloun's ambiguous protagonist in *L'Enfant de sable* is composed of Ahmed as the emblem of authority and Zahra as the emblem of a submissive female position. Zahra, Erickson (1998: 80) writes,

sexual desire is juxtaposed to the wandering of the prostitute in the Moroccan cities. Such a wandering mirrors the narrative that refuses to abide by textual limitations. See Alaeddine Ben Abdallah (2008).

⁷² Moha is the central character in this novel. He is an enigmatic persona who embodies both insanity and wisdom. Like Harrouda, Moha is also drawn from Moroccan folklore, sides with marginalised voices and represents resistance in the face of all forms of oppression.

⁷³ This story revolves around three main characters Yamna, a prostitute, Sindibad, a beggar, and Bobby, a man who dreams of becoming a dog. Upon their discovery of an abandoned child in a cemetery, all three social outcasts decide to embark on a journey from Fez to the South of Morocco. In her psychoanalytic reading of *La Prière de l'absent*, Laila Ibnlfassi (2001: 152) argues that the journey of the protagonists "represents the metaphorical journey into the depths of [Ben Jelloun's] self." The death of the child in the novel, according to Ibnlfassi (2001: 154), marks the death of Ben Jelloun's "subjectivity." Laila Ibnlfassi (2001).

⁷⁴ The English translation *With Downcast Eyes* appeared in 1993. It tells the story of a Berber girl who emigrated with her family from Morocco to France. The novel depicts the effects of alienation and racism that the character grapples with. For a study of the representation of racism in Ben Jelloun's work, see Vogl (2003).

⁷⁵ *L'Islam expliqué aux enfants* was written in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers in New York.

⁷⁶ For a brief overview of Ben Jelloun's novels, see Simon Gikandi (2003) and Karen L. Taylor (2007).

represents the “voiceless” and “silent woman” in what he terms “traditional, Islamic society.” As Erickson (1998: 71) puts it: “The voiceless narrative of Zahra evokes the state of aphonia in which woman exists in traditional Arab society.” While *L’Enfant de sable* portrays, through Zahra, the subjugation of women in Moroccan society, it also defies patriarchal norms. Erickson demonstrates that Zahra is representative of a hidden narrative while Ahmed is emblematic of the authoritarian patriarchal discourse. Referring to Jacques Derrida’s concept of “voiceless narrative,” Erickson (1998: 70) argues that Zahra’s narrative reflects on how women’s voices and bodies are “veiled” in Moroccan society and are forced to remain “silent and hidden, inaccessible.” Hence, Erickson explains that Zahra refuses to abide by the rules of “traditional narrative of male domination in Islamic society.” In this sense, Ben Jelloun seeks to liberate his character from the authority of patriarchal discourse and succeeds in dismantling the traditional gender lines that differentiate men from women. By inscribing ambiguity within the character, who is neither Zahra nor Ahmed, Ben Jelloun subverts the gender norms upon which patriarchal discourse is predicated. Thus, Erickson (1998: 80) writes: “The voiceless person in the text speaks” and also defies “the male authoritarian structures” which find their root in “the sexual division and hierarchization laid down by Islamic law.” This position expressed by Erickson is very similar to Orlando’s reading of Djébar who also showed that the latter dismantles the gender lines prescribed by a male-dominated society.

After explaining the oppositional stance that Ben Jelloun’s narrative displays towards patriarchal discourse, Erickson goes on to clarify how the author opposes Colonial discourse. In this regard, Erickson associates the voiceless narrative of Zahra with the marginal position of Ben Jelloun as a postcolonial author. Erickson

observes that in the same way that Zahra, through her ambiguous status, negotiates an identity beyond the patriarchal norms, Ben Jelloun creates a postcolonial narrative that resists the conventional norms of Western Colonial discourse. In order for Ben Jelloun to resist his “otherness” and “to exist in the face of the power play of Western culture”, he creates a discontinuous narrative, and thus:

literally and literarily turns inside out the conventional Western narrative form and, by extension, the relation of power between the West and the so-called Third World. (Erickson 1998: 93)

In Erickson’s view, *L’Enfant de sable* does not follow the conventional linear narrative; instead, it presents to its readers a postcolonial narrative which is fragmented. Erickson (1998: 67-70) indicates that the multiplicity of narrators is on the one hand inspired by the tradition of storytelling, and on the other is a textual strategy that allows Ben Jelloun to contest the Western conception of a coherent narrative.

The comparison that Erickson draws between Zahra and the postcolonial status of Ben Jelloun is echoed in Orlando’s reading of both *La Nuit sacrée* and *L’Enfant de sable*. Focusing on the postcolonial aspects of Ben Jelloun’s writing, Orlando (1999: 75) writes that both Ben Jelloun and Zahra occupy a “peripheral space.” According to Orlando (1999: 75): “[Zahra’s] confusion, lack of status as a woman in a phallogentric society, vulnerability, and fear all allude to the author’s own confused, complicated, unstable universe.” In the same way that Erickson stresses Ben Jelloun’s defiance of the conventional linear Colonial narratives, Orlando notes that Ben Jelloun is:

At the crossroads of two cultures in his mediating space, where he subverts established norms (such as linear narrative structure), he inscribes a new method of

narration that mixes literary practices from both the West and the Maghreb on all levels. (1999: 76)

It is worth noting here that this subversive postcolonial aspect of Ben Jelloun's writing is also found in both Djébar's and Rushdie's writing. All three authors rely on a narrative that straddles linguistic, cultural and geographical boundaries, and in doing so create narratives that are subversive in their form as well as their content.

Orlando's reading of Ben Jelloun seems to expand Erickson's argument further, in that she puts less emphasis on what Erickson described as the "voicelessness" of Zahra, and highlights instead the empowering position that the Moroccan author proffers to his protagonist. Firstly, Orlando compares Ben Jelloun to Djébar, observing that both authors share a resistance to patriarchal authoritarian discourse. Secondly, Orlando contends that the ambiguous status of Ben Jelloun's character defies the gender norms of Moroccan society. Then, Orlando (1999: 75) goes on to show how Ben Jelloun, like Djébar, inscribes "a space of empowerment for himself and his feminine character." What Ben Jelloun achieves in Orlando's view is that he:

opens up a new politics of the body for oppressed women; at the same time he combats his own misgivings concerning his identity as an exiled Francophone Maghrebian author writing in France. (1999: 77)

Basing her approach on Deleuze and Guattari's "nomadic" theory⁷⁷ and Bhabha's postcolonial concept of hybridity, Orlando maintains that Ben Jelloun finds his own voice through his protagonist. While, in Orlando's view, Zahra seeks to negotiate her

⁷⁷ In her reading of Ben Jelloun, Lisa Lowe (1993: 57) notes how the storyline splits into myriad fragmented stories narrated by several voices: "there is no coherent, consistent narrator who presents a stable chronology of events, rather, the narrative of *L'Enfant de sable* is continually interrupted and problematized." Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "nomad," Lowe (1993: 46-47) demonstrates that the narrative structure in *L'Enfant de sable* parallels a postcolonial nomadic space where "one can travel to any point, through a variety of routes, by a variety of means." See Lowe (1993).

marginalised status as woman, Ben Jelloun endeavours to find a voice from a postcolonial peripheral position. In Chapter VI, I will note that Orlando's use of the "nomadic" concept indicates her reading of the intermediate aspect in Ben Jelloun's narratives as a space that mediates cultures and languages. I will propose a different way of reading this intermediate aspect by drawing on Ibn Arabi's concept of the *barzakh* and demonstrating that the journey of Zahra is ontologically situated between two opposite worlds, that of "darkness" and that of "light".

Like Orlando and Erickson, Hayes proposes a reading of Ben Jelloun's novels *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée* which is situated within a postcolonial and a postmodern theoretical framework. Nonetheless, Hayes raises a different set of questions concerning sexuality and politics. Hayes (2000: 166) argues that Ben Jelloun's writing displays a politics of resistance whereby the author boldly reveals sexual taboos and exposes the erotics of the body and its desire. Hayes writes (2000: 2) that the androgynous character Ahmed/Zahra is emblematic of a "resistance to sexual normativity." Using the concept of "queer nations," Hayes explains that sexual transgressions are political allegories of the Nation in Ben Jelloun's novels. For Hayes, Ben Jelloun "queers" the Nation by including marginalised sexualities:

I shall use [queer] here less as an adjective to describe sexual acts than as a verb to signify a critical practice in which non normative sexualities infiltrate dominant discourses to loosen their political stronghold. (2000: 7)

Hayes discusses how Ben Jelloun defies, or "queers", the national discourses that prevail in postcolonial countries like Morocco. Ben Jelloun's defiance comes in the form of unveiling "marginal sexualities," which according to Hayes (2000: 9-14), "question dominant narratives of the Nation." By "queering the nation" Hayes writes (1999: 14), Ben Jelloun rewrites the national discourse by inscribing what has been

excluded from the “official versions of national identity.” Hayes underlines the way Ben Jelloun reveals hidden sexual taboos and marginalised sexualities for this forms part of the postcolonial strategy of resisting dominant discourses. Chapter IV of my thesis explains the “hidden” in Ben Jelloun’s text from an angle that differs from Hayes’ postcolonial reading. I will propose to interpret the “hidden” as a symbol of the Sacred in conjunction with two other Sufi symbols, the journey and the “opening”.

Hayes’ reading of Ben Jelloun’s works draws from Judith Butler’s theorising of gender.⁷⁸ As such, Hayes emphasises the subversive aspect of Ben Jelloun’s writing which lies in dismantling the idea of naturally acquired gender and sex roles. For Hayes, Ben Jelloun’s androgynous character blurs the gender lines that Moroccan patriarchal society imposes on men and women alike. Linking the sexual to the political, Hayes (2000: 134) demonstrates that Ben Jelloun’s subversion of the “dominant models of gendered identity” goes hand in hand with the author’s subversion of “official models of nationality.” In the same way that sex and gendered norms are subverted by the androgynous character, Ben Jelloun as author reveals the cracks in the dominant discourse on national identity.

⁷⁸ According to Butler, the binary division between male and female identities is socially constructed, therefore the gender lines between men and women are imposed by the patriarchal heterosexual power in a given society. Butler speaks of the “performative” aspect of the male and female roles which reflects the socially constructed nature of gender and sex. Because gender and sex are not naturally acquired, Butler (1993: 107) argues that they are “produced as a reiteration of hegemonic norm.” Butler explains that by interpreting gender as “performative” rather than as an “essence” one can show that there is no such thing as a pre-existing identity. For example, Elena Loizidou explains how Butler’s theory on performativity and gender roles is inextricably linked to her interpretation of language as a performative act. The formation of gendered subjects is first and foremost formed through language. Loizidou (2007: 35) argues that Butler’s “concept of gender performativity is used to explain how subjects are formed in and by language.” Loizidou notes that: “the performative method that Butler develops enables us to see how our naming, whether as women, foreigners, idiots, etc., is produced. This explicates that we are products of both a past that precedes us and a cultural context in which we find ourselves. To be named a woman, for example, means that there is a historical understanding of who is a woman, but to become one, to re-appropriate that naming or to resist the historical way in which that naming is uttered, produces us as subjects of a contemporary culture” (2007: 41). See Butler (1990) and (1993). For a detailed study of Butler’s theory, see Loizidou (2007).

In her book-length study of Medieval and Modern French narratives, Erika Hess, like Hayes, draws on Butler's theory of gender, but instead of focusing attention on the intertwining between the political and the sexual, she underscores the link between the narrative construction and identity formation in Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable*. Hess (2004: 44) examines the parallel between the ambiguous identity of Ahmed/Zahra and narrative indeterminacy in order to show how Ahmed/Zahra represents "a transgression of binary categories." Hess, by drawing from Butler's theory, demonstrates how Ben Jelloun not only reveals the social construction of gender and sex but also subverts the binary thinking upon which that construction is predicated. In Hess's view (2004: 44), the ambiguous gender of Ahmed/Zahra blurs "the essentialism of the binary opposition man/woman" thus allowing Ben Jelloun to "explore the limits of the traditional sex-gender categories and boundaries." Narrative indeterminacy juxtaposed with the ambiguous identity of Ahmed/Zahra allows Ben Jelloun to subvert "the laws, definitions and norms of gender" in Moroccan society (Hess 2004: 153). For Hess (2004: 109), the multiplicity of narrators, the uncertainty about Ahmed/Zahra's identity, the different versions of truth all reflect resistance to "narrative closure". Gender and sex norms are predicated on a binary opposition and by portraying an ambiguous character like Ahmed/Zahra, Ben Jelloun seeks to destabilise socially imposed binarism. Hess (2004: 153) argues that *L'Enfant de sable* has a feminist agenda in the sense that "the multiple, fluid, blurred" identity of Ahmed/Zahra is a "representation of a new, open, heterogeneous reconceptualization of gender that would free women and men from the restrictions and limitations of traditional binary roles."

Ben Jelloun (1993: 41) himself underscores his interest in and treatment of the "feminine condition" which for him is indicative of wider issues pertaining to

sexual and gendered marginality. In Ben Jelloun's words (1993: 41): "I go towards woman because in our society, she is the victim of a not-so-nice situation. So I serve as her witness." Hence, Ben Jelloun's concern with the condition of women in Morocco provides a way of understanding the reality of those who are marginalised in society. In this regard, Abbas Maazaoui remarks how both *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée* are centred around the condition of women in Moroccan Muslim society. In Maazaoui's view, (1995: 75) Ben Jelloun's novels denounce the negative effects of patriarchal power on the female body: "Les deux romans de Ben Jelloun sont ainsi l'expression, à tous les niveaux, des méfaits de la misogynie et de la violence dans la société marocaine de culture arabo-musulmane." Maazaoui thus underscores the patriarchal power in Moroccan society, which in his view Ben Jelloun seeks to denounce.

In his reading of *La Nuit sacrée*, Mustapha Hamil, like Erickson, Orlando, Hayes, Maazaoui and Hess, maintains that Ben Jelloun opposes the dominant patriarchal discourse. Again, placing Ben Jelloun's work within a postcolonial and postmodern framework, Hamil (2001: 73-74) draws from Jacques Lacan's psychological concept of the Name-of-the-Father in order to explain how Zahra challenges "the dogmatic discourse on (female) sexuality in the Arabo-Islamic world." Hamil indicates that Ben Jelloun's quest for a narrative voice parallels Zahra's quest for her own voice in *La Nuit sacrée*. Hamil (2001: 63) clarifies how the Name-of-the-Father stands for "the figure of the law par excellence" and it is responsible in the "repression of desire" in one's unconscious.

Ben Jelloun's "writing-the-woman," as Hamil (2001: 64) writes, allows the author to transgress the established patriarchal order and to denounce the exclusion of women. Hence, Zahra's quest for liberation from the Name-of-the-Father both

reposes on gender politics and is emblematic of resistance in the postcolonial sense.

For Hamil:

Zahra's struggle for "emancipation" is the struggles of a(ny) woman whose identity has been usurped by any form of authority. Her struggle is also a symbolic representation of collective resistance, the struggle of a people fighting for its liberation from the yoke of political domination. (2001: 65)

Hamil's argument highlights the multi-layered aspect of Zahra's postcolonial resistance, which cuts across the domains of language, sexuality and politics. In this sense, Hamil's argument is very similar to Hayes' consideration of the relationship between the political and the sexual, and they both underscore the postcolonial strategy of resistance in Ben Jelloun's writing. Later in this chapter I will explore the readings of Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*, and I will explain how critics such as Catherine Pessoa-Miquel and Sucheta M. Choudhuri also highlight the postcolonial strategy of resistance in Rushdie's writing.

The postcolonial aspect of *La Nuit sacrée*, in Hamil's view, consists in Ben Jelloun's symbolic portrayal of Morocco's resistance to the Colonial power. Zahra's fragmented identity reflects in this sense the sundered identity of the Moroccan 'Other.' In Hamil's words:

Zahra is the figure of a body-nation literally possessed by an Other, she has become the emblem of colonized space. Her story as a woman raised as a man may symbolically stand for the experience of her country, in the sense that France, the coloniser, imposed upon the Moroccan subject a foreign language, a sundered notion of identity, and a double estrangement from both past and present (2001: 67).

By telling her story, Zahra remembers the violence of the past in the same way that the postcolonial subject relives the traumas bequeathed by the colonizer. This act of retelling the traumas of the past allows Zahra to experience a "resurgence of desire" which has been "repressed" (Hamil 2001: 73). Hamil (2001: 73) argues that the

return of the repressed signifies Zahra's "sexual emancipation" beyond the parameters of "patriarchal and social laws." Here, Hamil (2001: 74) insists on the collective emancipation that Zahra symbolises, recognising that Zahra's sexual freedom "may be read as a projection of repressed collective desire."

Zahra, according to Hamil (2001: 67), symbolises a fragmented "self" that cannot be recovered by an essentialist definition of identity. For Hamil, "in-betweenness" resides in the sundered identity of Ahmed/Zahra:

The unity within herself, the world, and history has been damaged beyond repair. The text implies that she has become two things at once, Ahmed/Zahra; that her two selves, male/female, occupy the same space; and that her origin is irreducibly composite and hence impure. (2001: 66)

In this sense, the fragmented identity of Zahra is a reflection of a fragmented view of the world. The narrative refuses to provide a coherent interpretation of the self and of the world. It is a negotiation between a Colonial past and a postcolonial present. In Hamil's view, Zahra stands for the "in-betweenness" that characterises identity negotiation. As such, a sense of an origin that can define the "self" is lost and renegotiated in the temporal and spatial boundaries between the coloniser and the colonised. In Chapter VI of this thesis, I will explore further this idea of "two selves"; however, I will propose a reading that shifts the interpretation from a postcolonial angle to a Sufi angle. I will show how the ambiguity that characterises Ben Jelloun's protagonist is ontologically similar to what I have termed an intermediate "world." I will be using Ibn Arabi's Sufi concept of the *barzakh* in order to gain a better understanding of this world.

Moreover, Hamil argues that *La Nuit sacrée* revolves around the journey of Zahra which symbolises both a search for her repressed desire and the author's own search for a voice that defies dominant discourses like the patriarchal and national

discourses. In Hamil's view (2001: 62), Zahra embarks on a "journey across prohibited territories, whether linguistic, cultural, and political or pertaining to the Name/Law-of-the-Father." By allowing the repressed female body to be overtly expressed, Ben Jelloun defies the patriarchal power that marginalises and ostracises women in the Maghrebian context. As Hamil puts it (2001: 65), Zahra's journey reflects "A symbolic representation of the story of women like her mother, who are excluded from the power system of language and crushed by figures of authority." For Hamil (2001: 65), Zahra's journey is a quest for liberation and defiance of patriarchal power through the liberation of her own sexual desire. Although I agree with much that Hamil says in his discussion of Ben Jelloun's novel, especially his emphasis on Zahra's journey, I propose a different reading in this thesis which explores the symbolic relation between Zahra's journey and the Sacred. I will do so by situating my reading within a Sufi Islamic angle. In Chapter V, I will demonstrate that the journey of Zahra is intersected with the symbols of "light" and "darkness" and will argue that such an intersection underscores the creative engagement between the text of Ben Jelloun and the Sacred.

To sum up, previous critics of Ben Jelloun's novels and in particular of *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*, have drawn largely from postcolonial, feminist and postmodern approaches. It has become clear that Ben Jelloun's writing displays an oppositional and subversive stance towards Colonial and patriarchal discourses. In this sense, the marginal status of Ben Jelloun's androgynous protagonist represents the postcolonial status of the author himself, who seeks to find a voice from the periphery. Critics have also borrowed concepts from feminist approaches, gender studies and psychoanalytic theory in order to demonstrate how Ben Jelloun subverts gender norms and highlights the relationship between the sexual and the political.

iii. Literature Review of Rushdie

Rushdie was born in Bombay, India, in 1947 and was raised by wealthy Muslim parents who are of Kashmiri descent. His father was a businessman who studied at the University of Cambridge and his mother was a teacher. As a child, Rushdie attended a private school in Bombay and then joined Rugby School, a well-known boarding school in Warwickshire. Rushdie is a novelist, screenwriter, essayist and a Distinguished Honorary Professor at Emory University. Since 2000, Rushdie has been living in New York. His works have been translated into thirty languages and they cover a wide range of themes including but not limited to: the Indian Diaspora, cultural identity and hybridity, magical realism, East-West civilizations, religion, secular beliefs, and racism.

Rushdie pursued his studies in history at King's College Cambridge. After completing his M.A. from Cambridge, Rushdie went to live with his parents, who had earlier migrated to Pakistan due to the turmoil caused by the partition between India and Pakistan. He worked in Pakistan for a short period of time in television, then moved back to England where he found a job as a copywriter. Rushdie started his writing career⁷⁹ with the publication of *Grimus* in 1975, which went unnoticed by the critics.⁸⁰ However, with the publication of *Midnight's Children* (1981), Rushdie's reputation gained international recognition.⁸¹ Rushdie's third novel *Shame* (1983)

⁷⁹ For a detailed overview of Rushdie's novels, see D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke (2010). For a postmodern reading of Rushdie's works, see Sabrina Hassumani (2002).

⁸⁰ *Grimus* marked Rushdie's literary debut as a writer. It revolves around the journey of Flapping Eagle, a young Indian who receives the gift of immortality after drinking a magic fluid. Flapping Eagle becomes a pariah and wanders for seven hundred and seventy-seven years and seven months trying to find his immortal sister Bird Dog. In the mysterious Calf Island, Flapping Eagle discovers people who are blessed with immortality. *Grimus* is inspired by the 12th century poem by Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of Birds*. For a study of *Grimus*, see Andrew Teverson (2007).

⁸¹ *Midnight's Children* is a story about a factory worker called Saleem Sinai. Saleem was born when India won independence from the British rule in 1947. Distressed about "cracks" that appear in his

won the Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger in 1984.⁸² In 1987, Rushdie published his fourth novel *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey*.⁸³ Between 1990 and 2001, Rushdie wrote four books, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990),⁸⁴ *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995),⁸⁵ *The Ground Beneath her Feet* (1999)⁸⁶ and *Fury* (2001).⁸⁷ His most recent works include *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010),⁸⁸ *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012)⁸⁹ and *Two Years, Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015).⁹⁰ Between 2004 and 2006, Rushdie served as President of the PEN American Centre. In 2008, Rushdie was elected a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

body, he starts to tell his life story in fear of his imminent death. Saleem discovers that he has the gift of telepathy which allows him to read the mind of the children who were born like him on the independence day of India. Saleem's story spans the period of time before and after independence. The novel also revolves around such places as India, Pakistan, Kashmir and Bangladesh. Rushdie's novel blends a magic-realist style with historical and autobiographical genres. For a detailed study of *Midnight's Children*, see Ten Kortenaar (2004) and Norbert Schurer (2004).

⁸² The story covers three generations and revolves around the lives of the Hyder and Harappa families. The novel's story is located in a town called Q where three sisters, Chunni, Munee and Bunny, pretend to give birth to Omar Shakil. Omar is brought up in isolation from the world. When Omar turns twelve he is allowed to attend school. In addition to Omar, the story also focuses on his wife Sufiya Zinobia, Raza and Balquis' daughter, who suffers from mental illness. For a study of *Shame*, see Teverson (2007).

⁸³ Rushdie wrote *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* following his visit to Nicaragua. This is a travel narrative that focuses on the Nicaraguan spirit of resistance to the U.S. power. For a study of *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey*, see Graham Huggan (2000).

⁸⁴ *Haroun and The Sea of Stories* is a children's story written at the time when Rushdie was in hiding following the *fatwa* issued against him. It revolves around Haroun Khalifa and his father Sharif Khalifa who is a renowned storyteller. When Sharif discovers the betrayal of his wife, he loses his talent of storytelling. Throughout the novel, Haroun tries to help his father recover his talent. See Madelena Gonzalez (2005).

⁸⁵ In addition to the Whitbread Prize, *The Moor's Last Sigh* won the European Aristeion Prize in 1996, in Copenhagen. The story is set in India and traces four generations of the family of the narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, also called Moor. Moor has disease that consists in the ageing of his body at twice the normal rate. For a detailed study of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, see Gonzalez (2005) and Samir Dayal (2007).

⁸⁶ *The Ground Beneath her Feet* is set in the U.S.A and revolves around the love of two men, Ormus and Umeed, for the same woman, Vina, who is a famous singer. The novel covers the historical period between the 1950s and 1990s which is marked by rock 'n' roll music. See Gonzalez (2005).

⁸⁷ *Fury* tells the story of Malik Solanka who escapes to New York from his limiting academic life. See Gonzalez (2005).

⁸⁸ This is a sequel to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. The protagonist this time is Luka, Haroun's brother, who also tries to help his father. Luka travels to the "Magic World" in order to steal the "Fire of Life". See Yael Maurer (2014).

⁸⁹ This is a personal account of Rushdie on when he was forced into hiding following the *fatwa* issued against him. See Robert Eaglestone (2013).

⁹⁰ *Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* recounts the story of a jinnia, Dunia, who has a love affair with the philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes). As a result of their affair, they give birth to children who have fantastical powers unbeknown to them. For a recent *Guardian* review, see <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/04/two-years-eight-months-and-twenty-eight-nights>.

It was noted earlier in this chapter that Erickson, in his reading of Ben Jelloun, shows how the latter presents a narrative that subverts Islamic and patriarchal narratives as well as Western Colonial discourse. Likewise, Erickson underscores the postcolonial and oppositional aspects of *The Satanic Verses*. Erickson explains that *The Satanic Verses* opposes the Western narrative construction of the migrant whose:

power of description is grounded in a narrative that defines, outlines, and fixes the non-Westerner, turns him into a demonic entity, grotesque and threatening, in need of incarceration in ghettos, detention centres, asylums and jails. (1998: 137)

In Erickson's view, Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses* is the embodiment *par excellence* of the migrant "Other" who is turned into a demonic creature due to the discursive Colonial narrative that fixes the image of the "Other" against a supremacist definition of the Self. According to Erickson (1998: 138), the Western narrative demonises the "Other" and "represents the postcolonial personage (the migrant) as a figure of alterity, a monster who disrupts the peaceful, law-abiding existence of the London bourgeoisie."

In the same way that Rushdie resists Western Colonial discourse, he opposes Islamic religious discourse which "rigorously selects and frames the details of the legend on which it bases the life of Muhammad and the jurisprudence (*fiqh*) legislating Islamic society" (Erickson 1998: 138). Erickson explains that *The Satanic Verses*' oppositional stance to Islamic religious discourse lies in incorporating the heretic story of the satanic verses. Since the story of the satanic verses has been excluded by those who hold the power of religious discourse, Erickson (1998:142) shows that Rushdie rewrites this controversial story, thus turning "the very reliability of the authorized divine discourse of revelation against itself" as well as throwing

“doubts on the reliability” of both the Prophet and the Archangel. As Erickson puts it:

From the standpoint of the narrative, not only do the heretical satanic verses provide the basis for the telling of the “full story” of the revelations received by Muhammad [...], but they serve as a privileged metaphor for the terms of Rushdie’s oppositional discourse and the poles between which it swings. The attempt by authorities to strike the satanic verses from the record reflects the operation of a magisterial discourse of exclusion that lies at the heart of Islam. (1998: 141-142)

As the quote above reveals, the inscription of the story of the satanic verses in Rushdie’s novel strategically opposes the official versions of Islamic discourse that deny the validity of different readings and interpretations of Islamic history. Rushdie, in this sense, inserts in his novel what has been construed as a heretical story, a story silenced and eroded by the power of the Islamic religious discourse. This bold step taken by Rushdie is akin to Djébar’s unearthing of the female voices that have been eclipsed from the official recordings of history by Muslim historians, and to Ben Jelloun’s unveiling of sexual taboos that a religious society like Morocco seeks to hide in the closet of silence.

While Erickson emphasizes the oppositional relation between Rushdie’s narrative and Western and Islamic discourses, Bhabha turns his attention to the empowering dimension of cultural hybridity in *The Satanic Verses*. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha analyses *The Satanic Verses* by situating the novel once again within a postcolonial and postmodern theoretical framework.⁹¹ For Bhabha (1990: 322), the crux of *The Satanic Verses*’ treatment of the migrant’s condition, is encapsulated in the character of Chamcha who represents the “borderline culture of hybridity.” The hybrid identity of Chamcha, in Bhabha’s words, represents the

⁹¹ Michael Hensen and Mike Petry establish a parallel between Rushdie’s work and Bhabha’s theory of hybridity. They discuss (2005: 353) the “fruitful in-betweenness” that can be found in Bhabha’s interpretation of hybridity and Rushdie’s cross-cultural fiction. See Hensen and Petry (2005).

“liminality of migrant experience” and “cultural difference *at the interstices*” (1994: 321; emphasis in original). In this regard, Chamcha is perceived as the emblem of the postcolonial condition in the sense that he acts as the meeting-point between cultures and identities. In Chapter VI, I will observe that Bhabha’s concept of hybridity represents the intermediate aspect of Rushdie’s writing. While Bhabha’s reading is framed by postcolonial and postmodern theories, I will propose a different reading of the intermediate character of Rushdie’s writing. Drawing from Ibn Arabi’s Sufi concept of the *barzakh*, I will examine the intermediate world projected by *The Satanic Verses* and I will show its connection to the experience of the Sacred.

In Bhabha’s view, the discussions concerning to the issue of blasphemy in relation to *The Satanic Verses* have mainly stressed the idea that Rushdie transgressed the Sacred. On the contrary, Bhabha proposes a different reading of blasphemy which is situated within postcolonial and postmodern angles. Bhabha (1994: 323) argues that “blasphemy is not merely a misinterpretation of the sacred by the secular; it is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation.” In this sense, Rushdie did not merely transgress lines that are prohibited by Islamic religion; in Bhabha’s view, he rather “translated” the Sacred into a different and hybrid cultural context. Bhabha (1994: 323) explains that “blasphemy as a transgressive act of cultural translation” can be found in Rushdie’s reinterpretation of the Sacred within the framework of spatial and temporal postcolonial condition. As Bhabha puts it:

It could be argued, I think, that far from simply misinterpreting the Koran, Rushdie’s sin lies in opening up a space of discursive contestation that places the authority of the Koran within a perspective of historical and cultural relativism. (1994: 323)

In this sense, Rushdie inscribes the sacred text of the Qur'an within a culturally relative and hybrid narrative, thus destabilising its monolithic grounds. Similarly, through the hybrid conceptualisation of identity, Rushdie destabilises Western Colonial discourse that fixes the image of the Other. As such, Bhabha (1994: 321-323) insists that blasphemy should rather be interpreted along the lines of "cross-genre, cross-cultural identities" and should be perceived as a movement "towards an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture's difference."

Moreover, Bhabha argues that Rushdie carves out an empowering discourse which is anchored in creating a hybrid identity. Chamcha, who crosses the frontiers of cultures, Bhabha (1994: 324) argues, reflects "an empowering condition of hybridity." What emerges, in Bhabha's view (1994: 324), is that in order for blasphemy to be empowering, it needs to liberate itself from and "survive" beyond the parameters of the binary division between "self" and "other." In Bhabha's words:

For the migrant's survival depends, as Rushdie puts it, on discovering how newness enters the world. The focus is on making the linkages through the unstable elements of literature and life. (1994: 324)

It is a blasphemy situated in and initiated by the hybrid of the postcolonial subject who is constantly in the process of discovering "newness." Bhabha further adds:

Cultural translation desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and in that very act, demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation *within* minority positions. (1994: 327; emphasis in original.)

By showing the conceptual interlocking between blasphemy, cultural translation and hybridity, Bhabha (1994: 321) sheds light on how Rushdie explores emancipatory avenues that allow those who inhabit the fringes of the British society to reclaim their "minority position."

The link that Bhabha establishes between *The Satanic Verses* and the postcolonial and postmodern readings of cultural hybridity is similarly echoed in readings of *The Satanic Verses* by Sanga, Reif-Hülser, and Dutheil de la Rochère. In her book-length critical study of Rushdie, Jaina Sanga situates her reading within a postcolonial framework, analysing such concepts as blasphemy, hybridity, translation and migration. Sanga interprets blasphemy as a transgression that has both religious and cultural aspects.⁹² With regard to religious blasphemy, Sanga undertakes a close textual analysis of *The Satanic Verses* and demonstrates that it transgresses sacred definitions of God, the Qur'an and the Prophet. Sanga closely examines the blasphemous character of *The Satanic Verses* which is directly linked to the transgression of the sacred. Beginning by pointing out the satirical tone that the narrative employs with respect to God (2001: 110), Sanga (2001: 111) then moves on to analysing how the Prophet is named Mahound, which is an "obviously derogatory reworking of Muhammad." Hence, Sanga contends that the *The Satanic Verses* destabilises "established beliefs" by mocking not only God but also the Prophet and the divine Quranic message. Referring to the story of the satanic verses, Sanga writes:

Rushdie is clearly rendering a satirical reworking of the whole saga to cast doubt upon the authenticity and fixity of the holy text and the tenets of orthodoxy that legitimize it. Rushdie is also mocking the Prophet here, something that Muslim fundamentalists have found extremely insulting despite the fact that the narrative is a fictional depiction of the story. (2001: 112)

⁹² While blasphemy is generally understood in oppositional terms to faith, Sara Suleri argues that Rushdie does not totally dismiss religion in *The Satanic Verses*. In Sara Suleri's view (1994: 222), blasphemy in Rushdie's text should be "re-read as a gesture of reconciliation toward the idea of belief rather than as the insult that it is commonly deemed to be." Furthermore, Suleri questions the Eurocentric premises of those who defend Rushdie in the name of a "secular voice speaking against the impingement of a monolithic fundamentalism." Thus, Suleri proposes to bypass the cultural schism between the West and Islam that informs much of the debates pertaining to the Rushdie Affair. See Suleri (1994).

In addition to the transgression of the sanctity of the Qur'an and the Prophet, Sanga (2001: 112-116) demonstrates how blasphemy is epitomised in the character of Salman, in the episode on Ayesha, in the brothel of the twelve prostitutes and in the rewriting of the Islamic history. Sanga (2001: 110) borrows Bhabha's concept of hybridity and translation in order to explain how *The Satanic Verses* is deemed to be blasphemous: "*The Satanic Verses* is considered blasphemous by certain fundamentalists because it translates what the Islamic religion considers sacred and pure into the space of the fictional." According to Sanga, cultural hybridity allows Rushdie to translate the content of the Sacred into the context of fiction.

Following her analysis of the religious dimension of blasphemy, Sanga goes on to demonstrate the cultural element of blasphemy, which I have discussed earlier in Bhabha's reading of Rushdie. As Sanga puts it:

The novel opens up an extremely problematic discursive space by writing about migration, translation, and hybridity, because these are precisely the issues that are the focus of contention and deliberation in the contemporary postcolonial world. In other words, Rushdie's writing migration, translation, and hybridity into the novel is a form of cultural heresy that not only explicates a postcolonial consciousness, but in so doing also names the sites of contestation that must be negotiated between colonial and postcolonial predicaments. (2001: 116)

In this sense, the blasphemous dimension in *The Satanic Verses* is coterminous with a postcolonial interpretation of migration and translation. Because *The Satanic Verses* undertakes a transgression of established cultural constructions of what constitutes the British "self" and the migrant "Other", it contributes to the postcolonial project of colonial contestation. To illustrate her argument, Sanga (2001: 117-118) takes the example of Chamcha "who is the emblematic figure of the postcolonial migrant" and who endeavours to "reimagine himself in the world." For Sanga, Chamcha is "faced with enduring all the humiliations of being an immigrant – the inherent racism that exists in Britain, as well as coming to terms with his own

altered self.” Sanga emphasises the idea that Chamcha re-enacts a postcolonial transgression of racially established definitions of the migrant. As such, Sanga’s argument inscribes blasphemy within a postcolonial revision of identity and resistance to colonial legacy:

Rushdie’s writing in *The Satanic Verses*, can, in a sense, be seen as an attempt to understand the traces or the “stains” left by imperialism, and imagine, or re-imagine, British society’s “entire sense of itself. (2001: 121)

Hence, Sanga’s reading recognises the significance of blasphemy in its religious dimension. Similarly, Sanga equally stresses the seminal importance of the cultural blasphemy which occupies a central position in Rushdie’s novel.

In *Borderlands: Negotiating Boundaries in Postcolonial Writing*, Monika Reif-Hülser (1991) considers the relationship between narrative construction, character representation and border-crossing in the opening chapter of *The Satanic Verses*. According to Reif-Hülser (1999: 275), reading Rushdie’s novel through Bhabha’s definition of the cultural concept of hybrid identity helps to identify the way “cultural translation” unsettles “the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy.” Unsettling colonial supremacist divisions between “self” and “other,” as Reif-Hülser (1999: 275) puts it, “implies dehierarchization and decolonization as well as rereading before an expanded horizon.”

For Reif-Hülser, Rushdie’s discontinuous narrative strategy reflects both the sundered identity of his characters and the in-between space that the postcolonial writer inhabits:

In a remarkable way, Rushdie evokes movement, motion, transition, shifting, by interconnecting or intercutting in quick succession objects of different modes, such as reclining seats, motion sickness receptacles, debris of the soul, untranslatable jokes. The narrative presentation of the flowing and floating-around of fragmented parts, bodies and ideas creates the literary space for *imaginary transgressions*. Out

of this space in-between emerge figurations, wonderlands, and borderland experiences. (Reif-Hülser 1999: 273; my emphasis.)

Discontinuity at the level of narrative in *The Satanic Verses* displays, in Reif-Hülser's view, the postcolonial condition of constant movement and translation between cultures. Hybridity in this regard is indicative of a transgression of the lines that separate the "self" from the "other." In addition to the analysis of the narrative in *The Satanic Verses*, Reif-Hülser illustrates this idea of hybridity by taking the example of the two protagonists, Chamcha and Gibreel. Reif-Hülser (1999: 274-275) observes that both characters "are translated men, manifesting and realizing themselves in process of transformation." In addition, Reif-Hülser (1999: 274-275) notes that they both enact a postcolonial "creation of contact zones, borderlands, and spaces in-between, where the relevant realms of meaning are simultaneously present and interact." The emphasis here is therefore placed on the way Rushdie creates characters and a narrative that are situated within a postcolonial understanding of cultural hybridity.

In another reading, by Martine Dutheil de la Rochère, the writing of Rushdie in general and *The Satanic Verses* in particular are placed with postcolonial and postmodern fields of study. In *Origin and Originality in Rushdie's Fiction*, she focuses attention on the intersection between the migrant's condition and Rushdie's representation of identity. Dutheil de la Rochère (1999: 82-83) demonstrates that Rushdie's representation of identity politics, cultural hybridity, language and translation, immigration and British history are emblematic of the author's postcolonial affiliations. Drawing from Bhabha's and Said's postcolonial theories and Derrida's postmodern conceptualising of the loss of origins, Dutheil de la Rochère argues that Rushdie inhabits a cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, cross-

geographic position that allows him to question monolithic definitions of identity. In this sense, Dutheil de la Rochère (1999: 81) remarks that *The Satanic Verses* “focuses on the ways migration reveals the precarious status and unstable nature of identity, embodies many possible and often contradictory answers to the migrant condition.” By depicting the myriad lives of fictional migrants in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie draws attention to the cultural position that migrant occupies in the postcolonial making of British culture, history and identity. As Dutheil de la Rochère notes:

Against the dominant ideology which ignores or represses the constitutive role of immigration in the making of the nation, Rushdie uncovers Britain’s multi-layered and cross-cultural heritage, and documents the agency of immigrants from the former colonies on British society, economy and culture. (1999: 86)

Like Erickson, who underscored *The Satanic Verses*’ oppositional resistance to Western Colonial discourse because it is a discourse that which demonises the “Other,” Dutheil de la Rochère affirms that:

Rushdie indicts the discriminatory practices of the powerful image makers in society (the government, the media), and shows how they can lead to the demonization of segments of society for reasons of racial, cultural, gender and class difference. (1999: 109-110)

Dutheil de la Rochère further adds:

Rushdie interrogates the meaning of dominant representations by displacing and reinscribing them away from their original official context. In so doing, he not only gives visibility to the repressed “other,” but also reveals the dangers inherent in the simplistic oppositional logic of self and other. (1999: 110)

Therefore, for Dutheil de la Rochère, Rushdie questions Western dominant discourse that defines identity in binary terms whereby the self is posited against the “Other.” Dutheil de la Rochère’s argument underscores the idea that *The Satanic Verses*

reinscribes the silenced Other within the dominant discourse in order to destabilise this binary understanding of identity.

The readings examined thus far of *The Satanic Verses* deal with a multitude of questions pertaining to identity, cultural hybridity and blasphemy. Due to the controversial nature of *The Satanic Verses*, the issue of blasphemy has attracted a great deal of critical attention. In this regard, the prevalent approaches to Rushdie's novel are situated in postcolonial and postmodern theories. Later readings of *Shalimar the Clown* have taken up similar themes that have been previously explored in Rushdie's work, but since the novel was published in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, some critics underscored contemporary political issues such as terrorism, the Kashmiri politico-religious strife, and the impact of global politics.

In her reading of *Shalimar the Clown*, Catherine Pessoa-Miquel provides a postcolonial interpretation of oppression. Pessoa-Miquel argues that Rushdie's novel displays a postcolonial resistance to oppression through the remembering of the dead. Pessoa-Miquel examines how the narrative describes in detail the several forms of oppression that are inflicted upon Kashmiris. Similarly, Pessoa-Miquel demonstrates how the novel depicts the impact of oppression on the personal lives of the fictional characters, and argues that amongst the powerful tools of resistance to oppression used in *Shalimar the Clown* is the remembering of the individual lives, which official narratives of history have erased. In Pessoa-Miquel's words:

Thus fiction, by inventing imaginary victims of atrocities, by raising them from the dead to give them back their identity, their specific story, helps to fight against the horror and anonymity of common graves. (2007: 154)

Pessoa-Miquel further adds:

one of the most powerful strategies of literature is that it turns statistics, numbers of anonymous, faceless victims, into individual people whose humanity, uniqueness and dignified suffering is illuminated. (2007: 154)

According to Pessoa-Miquel, *Shalimar the Clown* achieves this resistance by giving life to those who have been oppressed and subjected to violence at the hands of the Indian army and the Pakistani militants. It is worth noting here that this dimension in Rushdie's novel is very similar to Djebbar's preoccupation, in *Loin de Médine*, with excavating the voices of silenced women from male-dominated chronicles. In addition to remembering the dead, Pessoa-Miquel identifies narrative strategies such as satire, the interrogative form and repetition, which all expose different forms of oppression. Pessoa-Miquel concludes her argument by noting that *Shalimar the Clown* translates the power of literature to resist the power of oppression.

In a very similar line of thought, Sucheta Choudhuri analyses strategies of resistance in Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*. Unlike Pessoa-Miquel, Choudhuri does not focus on oppression but turns her attention to the way fictional narrative defies the linearity of history narratives. Thus, Choudhuri (2011: 16) explores the postcolonial as well as the postmodern rewriting of history in *Shalimar the Clown*, arguing that the novel "articulates a postmodernist skepticism about the univalence and unilinearity of history, it also functions as a postcolonial critique of the monolithic discourse of the nation and its imagined history." For Choudhuri (2011: 16), *Shalimar the Clown* denounces "the hegemonic politics of historiography" by excavating "'untold tales' and 'unwritten histories' that get obliterated in the process of constructing the grand narrative of the nation." Drawing from the theories of Walter Benjamin, Linda Hutcheon⁹³ and Ursula K. Heise, Choudhuri shows that the

⁹³ Choudhuri notes that the concept of history in relation to postmodern writing received significant attention in Linda Hutcheon's reading of *Midnight's Children*. For more details on this topic, see Linda Hutcheon (1988).

narrative structure of *Shalimar the Clown* displays postmodern elements which consist in resisting closure. Furthermore, Choudhuri maintains (2011: 2) that in *Shalimar the Clown*: “the temporality of resentment that defies closure negates not only the structure of revenge narratives but the linearity of historiography, since history is reimagined as constructed and multivalent.” In her textual analysis, Choudhuri (2011: 5-6) demonstrates that *Shalimar the Clown* defies “the linearity of time,” merges public history and personal stories and interrogates the concept of history. Additionally, Choudhuri explains that *Shalimar the Clown* is akin to postmodern narratives that “not only recuperate multiple, counter-hegemonic histories, but also consider history as a textual artifact. In other words, they expose how history gets constructed through co-opting ‘concrete’ and ‘local’ narratives” (2011: 7). Choudhuri’s emphasis on the postmodern aspect of narrative construction and resistance to closure reveals the way *Shalimar the Clown* questions the linearity germane to official discourses of narratives. This questioning also brings to the fore the significance of fiction writing as a form of recovering silenced stories.

Roxana Marinescu explores the concept of violence in her comparative reading of *Shalimar the Clown*, *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*. Marinescu (2007: 93) argues that Boonyi in *Shalimar the Clown* symbolically represents the “country” whose body has been subjected to violation. The two main aggressors, India and America, in Marinescu’s view (2007: 93) are responsible for the “rape of the Mother country.” Basing her argument on Michel Foucault’s theorising of power and discipline, Marinescu discusses the ramifications of colonial violence in its postcolonial form. Marinescu’s (2007: 90) reading of *Shalimar the Clown* explores the way violence constitutes a “quest for national identity.” Marinescu (2007: 96) explains that Boonyi symbolically represents the “body of the mother country” which

undergoes colonial violence both at the hand of the Indian army and the American global power. In Marinescu's view the Indian nationalist army subjects the "difference" of the Kashmiri "body" to a "colonial dissolution," thus creating "a sense of continuity." In a similar way, the American power symbolised by Max Ophuls' sexual "penetration" of Boonyi's body entails another form of colonial "torture" that see the "body" of the other as "the site where the desire to dominate is articulated" (Marinescu 2007: 99).

In his reading of *Shalimar the Clown*, Florian Stadler argues that Rushdie sheds light on important issues such as terrorism⁹⁴ and globalization. Stadler observes that Rushdie began to explore these issues in his earlier novels *The Ground Beneath her Feet* (1999) and *Fury* (2001) and that he developed them further in *Shalimar the Clown*. Situating his reading within a postcolonial framework, Stadler explains that Rushdie establishes a connection between the globalised form of terrorism and the widespread forms of terrorism that are found in the Kashmir. Bearing in mind the time of *Shalimar the Clown*'s publication, Stadler notes how the questions of terrorism and globalization have become pressing issues since the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre. Stadler notes:

the question of why Rushdie chose to tackle terror overtly in one of his novels may be attributed not only to the events of 11 of September 2001 but also to his engagement with Kashmir in his fiction and non-fiction and the different dimension brought into the India-Pakistan conflict with both countries' acquisition of the atomic bomb, the rise of Hindu and Islamic fundamentalism, and its influence on mainstream politics of both countries. (2009: 1994)

According to Stadler, Rushdie invites the reader to question simplistic definitions of the term "terrorism."⁹⁵ In addition to the concept of terrorism that Rushdie explores

⁹⁴ For a detailed discussion of terrorism and globalisation in *Shalimar the Clown*, see Vijeta Gautam (2014).

⁹⁵ Stadler makes a reference to the works of the contemporary political analyst Bruce Hoffman that

in a global contemporary context, he also sheds light on the impact of terrorism on the Kashmiri region. As Stadtler puts it:

In *Shalimar the Clown*, Rushdie dramatises the problematic relationship between India and its minorities and its peripheral territories. While he debates the wider political dimension of terrorism, he is more concerned with the effects of terrorism and the state's counter-terrorist measures on the individual characters. The argument Rushdie presents is less about India as a nation-state than about Kashmir and how India, Pakistan and terrorism, be it state-led or by militant groups, have destroyed Kashmir's principles and ethos. (194-195)

Hence, *Shalimar the Clown*, as seen by Stadtler, portrays the violence perpetrated by the Indian army and the Pakistani militants in the Kashmiri region.⁹⁶ Therefore, the individual lives of the main characters Boonyi, Max, Shalimar and India/Kashmira are all affected by the spread of regional as well as global terrorism, thus showing how Rushdie explores the effects of public politics on private lives.

Offering another political reading of *Shalimar the Clown*, Yumna Siddiqi, like Stadtler, stresses Rushdie's voiced concerns with the intermeshing between the personal lives of his characters and globalized political affairs. While Stadtler based his argument on the definition of the concept of terrorism, Siddiqi focuses her reading on the concept of cosmopolitanism while focusing attention on the postmodern features of the novel. In Siddiqi's view, *Shalimar the Clown* not only functions as a postmodern allegory of globalised violence but also promotes a cosmopolitan vision. Siddiqi (2007: 300) shows that violence in Rushdie's text is allegorised through the "breakdown of language" and "the limits of the representational possibilities of language." In addition to the linguistic element, Siddiqi examines how the characters in the novel are emblematic of allegorised

deal particularly with the concept of terrorism. See for example Hoffman (2006) and Hoffman (1993).
⁹⁶ According to Saurabh K. Singh (2012), *Shalimar the Clown* conveys the outrage of Rushdie vis-à-vis the partition war and his criticism directed at the fundamentalist state of Pakistan and the "nationalism" of India.

violence. In terms of the cosmopolitan vision in the novel, Siddiqi explains that Rushdie draws on the concept of *kashmiriyat* which translates the spirit of a community that, despite religious differences, can live together harmoniously by sharing a common ethos. Siddiqi (2007: 306) states that “Rushdie looks beyond the nation, for the fashioning of efficacious political and cultural identities.” Siddiqi (2007: 307) also notes: “A globally projected spirit of *kashmiriyat* serves in Rushdie’s novel as a placeholder for community in this disarticulated postmodern urban terrain.”

On the whole, the previous readings of Rushdie’s novels *The Satanic Verses* have drawn attention to the recurrent themes of blasphemy, cultural hybridity and resistance to dominant discourses such as religious and Colonial discourses. In these readings, the theoretical framework is primarily situated within postcolonial and postmodern angles. Some critics of *Shalimar the Clown* have also underscored the postmodern and postcolonial elements in Rushdie’s writing, while others have placed their critical attention within contemporary political fields of study that centre around such issues as terrorism and globalization.

iv. Towards a Study of the Sacred in Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s Writing.

The literature review of previous critical studies constitutes the first step in helping to understand the prevalent theoretical orientations and key concepts employed in relation to Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s works in general, and in relation to the selected corpus in particular. This first step is fundamental to reaching the aims and objectives that have been underlined in the introduction to this thesis. It is therefore important at this stage to reflect on these previous readings of the three

authors' works so that I can outline the contribution of this thesis to the current state of knowledge. The first observation is that the prevalent theories on which previous critics have drawn are primarily situated within postcolonial, postmodern and feminist perspectives. This leads me to my second observation. These readings largely focus attention on the way the three authors and their works oppose and resist dominant discourses, whether these are religious, patriarchal, sexual, or Colonial discourses. Such resistance recalls the question of the three authors' own opposition to censorship. As clarified in the introduction to this thesis, all three authors have openly criticised various forms of oppression that impinge on the right of intellectuals to speak. My third observation is that even though it is clear that all three authors are concerned with – and draw from – religious discourses, the creative interplay between the Islamic heritage and the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie has been largely overlooked.

To date, there is no detailed analysis of the concept of the Sacred in the study of these individuals and more especially in a comparative study that encompasses the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. Although some later critics have highlighted the relevance of studying the influence of Islamic heritage on the three authors' works, there is, then, no comprehensive study of the concept of the Sacred. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the contribution of this thesis consists in exploring the symbolic as well as the ontological interplay between the literary and the Sacred in the three authors' works.

Before delineating further the significance and relevance of a study of the Sacred in the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie, I will give a brief overview of the few major works that have recognised the seminal importance of the religious dimension in the three authors' works. The examples that I refer to are Rice's and

Wehrs' readings of Djébar, Gontard's reading of Ben Jelloun, Bourget's reading of Djébar and Ben Jelloun and finally Ben Youssef Zayzafoon's reading of Djébar and Rushdie.

Although Alison Rice's reading of *Loin de Médine* demonstrates that Djébar's rewriting of Islamic history forms part of Djébar's feminist project, her position differs from those of the previous critics analysed thus far, in the sense that she highlights the strong connection between the novel and Djébar's religious heritage. Rice (2006: 90) starts her argument by noting that the "question of religion" has received little attention in the critical works on Djébar. I agree with this observation and I think it is also applicable to the critical studies concerning Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. I will return again to this point in the conclusion to this chapter.

According to Rice (2006: 124) Djébar's *Loin de Médine* undertakes a journey back in history in search of the origins of her Islamic heritage. Rice (2006: 98) then stresses the idea that Djébar's "unique method of re-reading and re-writing" the chronicles in *Loin de Médine* is similar to a musical composition in the sense that the author listens to female silences, and looks for the "voices that have been erased from the official soundtrack." The return to the past that Djébar undertakes in *Loin de Médine*, according to Rice (2006: 99), displays the Algerian author's pursuit of a religious heritage that brings back to life the voices of women who have been silenced. What enables Djébar to carry out this journey, in Rice's view, is the French language: "Restoring the lost stories of these forgotten women is only possible in the language of movement, travel, of open (and subversive) space." Hence, Djébar's rewriting of the past in the French language demonstrates the way the Algerian author seeks a liberating space where she can travel freely in history while projecting her own autobiographical self. Djébar's use of the first person narrative in *Loin de*

Médine, as Rice argues (2006: 128), reflects the way the Algerian author is “inserting herself in the work in an effort to translate tradition and preserve religion from the injustices of time.”

Furthermore, Rice shows how Djébar’s *Loin de Médine* is a narrative posited in-between the present and the past. According to Rice, Djébar’s quest lies, on the one hand, in the author’s listening to the silences in the accounts she has read by male Muslim historians and, on the other, in voicing the forgotten oral memory of women during the early years of Islamic history. As such, Rice compares the narrative of *Loin de Médine* to a “musical combination”,

[which] Djébar restores to writing, bridging the seemingly insurmountable gap between the written and the remembered [...] Reinterpreting the past means finding the harmony among these different strands that make up tradition (2006: 103).

What Djébar’s narrative shares with music, in Rice’s view, is the fusion between the silences found in the male written chronicles and the voices of female oral stories. Rice’s reading, although still inscribed in a feminist framework, brings to the fore a dimension that has been overlooked by previous critics, which is the influence of the Islamic religious heritage on Djébar’s writing. I follow the steps of this position in this thesis since I think that this dimension highlights another creative aspect in Djébar’s writing. Additionally, I will expand further on Rice’s interest in Djébar’s journey, by exploring its Sufi dimension and by interpreting it as a symbol of the Sacred in Djébar’s texts.

Donald Wehrs is another critic who reads *Loin de Médine* quite differently from previous interpretations. Like Rice, Wehrs acknowledges the significant interplay between the literary work of Djébar and the Islamic religious heritage. Unlike Rice, Wehrs departs from the prevalent feminist approaches to Djébar’s work

and proposes to use concepts that are drawn from the Islamic religious heritage. In the sixth chapter of his book-length study entitled *Islam, Ethics, Revolt: Politics and Piety in Francophone West African and Maghreb Narrative*, Wehrs (2008) analyses Djébar's *Loin de Médine* in conjunction with her novel *L'Amour, la fantasia*. Wehrs agrees that there is a great deal of evidence showing that Djébar's writing is consonant with Western feminist writing, but he contends that the author engages with Islam and more specifically taps into the Islamic intellectual legacy of *ijtihad*.⁹⁷ According to Wehrs (2008: 186), previous critics of Djébar have not paid much attention to the "conjunction of Islam with feminism" in her writing. As Wehrs (2008: 186) puts it: "Djébar retrieves in *Loin de Médine* an Islam incommensurate with later patriarchal rewritings, an Islam kept alive over the centuries by women's oral discourse." What Wehrs (2008: 185) shows in his textual analysis of *Loin de Médine* is that Djébar's feminist strategies of "resistance to gendered forms of imposition and oppression" are anchored within the Islamic intellectual tradition of *ijtihad* which encourage free-thinking and intellectual endeavour. By tapping into this tradition, Wehrs (2008: 186) argues, "Djébar affirms Islam against both Western reductions of it to 'fanaticism' and Muslim alternatives of conventionalist or fundamentalist interpretation." My reading of Djébar in this thesis follows the path laid by Wehrs and agrees with the fact that Djébar creatively engages with the Islamic heritage. However, while Wehrs based his interpretation on the legacy of *ijtihad*, I will draw from a Sufi conceptual framework as this will allow me to explore further the creative encounter between Djébar's writing and the Sacred.

One further example that can be cited here is Carine Bourget's (2002) comparative study of Maghrebian authors, including Djébar and Ben Jelloun, entitled

⁹⁷ In Chapter V of this thesis I will present a detailed definition of the meaning of *ijtihad* which from an Islamic judicial perspective means an intellectual endeavour.

Coran et Tradition Islamique dans la Littérature Maghrébine. Bourget begins her first chapter by examining the Western stereotypes of Muslim women. She then argues that Djébar's *Loin de Médine* questions such stereotypical views not only of women but also of Islam:

Djébar conteste l'image de la femme musulmane (voilée et cloîtrée dans un rôle de femme au foyer), et par extension, la conception de l'Islam en tant qu'entité monolithique et immuable, toutes deux diffusées aussi bien par les mouvements islamistes que par les médias occidentaux. (2002: 72)

According to Bourget (2002: 75), Djébar returns to the early years of Islam in order to defy strategically the official versions of history that deny women a place in public and influential political roles. Fatima and Aïcha are amongst the central figures in *Loin de Médine*, in Bourget's view, who are representative of resistance to oppressive religious power while they both occupy a special place in the Prophet's life, Fatima as his daughter and Aïcha as his wife. As Bourget (2002: 76) puts it: "Il faut noter la liberté avec laquelle Aïcha s'exprime, et le fait que son opinion est respectée par le Prophète." Furthermore, Bourget (2002: 79) indicates that the rewriting of history in *Loin de Médine* shows the Prophet as "champion de la cause des femmes." Like Wehrs' assertion of the significance of *ijtihad* in understanding Djébar's novel, Bourget (2003: 81) argues that *Loin de Médine* is anchored in the Islamic heritage and that Djébar refers to *ijtihad* in order to highlight women's right to intellectual endeavour.

The second chapter of Bourget's book is devoted to Ben Jelloun's novels *L'Enfant de sable*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *Les Yeux baissés*. At the start, Bourget asserts Ben Jelloun's interest in the Sufi dimension of Islam and his opposition to all forms of fundamentalist interpretations of Islam. Bourget follows up this assertion by analysing the Sufi intertextual references in Ben Jelloun's three novels cited above.

In relation to *L'Enfant de sable*, Bourget (2002: 102) shows how the word “secret” is inspired from the Sufi tradition. Moreover, Bourget traces the meaning of the word “battène,” or the “hidden” in English, to the Qur’anic names of God and to its mystical connection to Sufism. With regards *La Nuit sacrée*, Bourget notes that there are myriad references to Sufi poets. In addition, Bourget (2002: 112) observes that Zahra’s quest and her profane love for the Consul parallel the journey of “les soufis dans leur effort d’union avec Dieu.” As far as *Les Yeux baissés* is concerned, Bourget (2002: 118) shows that the novel borrows its central symbol of “downcast eyes” from the Qur’an. Bourget’s emphasis on the Sufi references in Ben Jelloun’s novels provides a reading that differs from the previous theoretical angles that I have reviewed in this chapter. Taking into account Bourget’s interpretation, I will expand further this interest in the Sufi heritage and endeavour to show how all three authors selected in this thesis engage with that heritage from symbolic and ontological perspectives, with of course a particular focus on the concept of the Sacred.

In a similar vein, Marc Gontard’s reading of *L'Enfant de sable* detects the relevance of a Sufi interpretation of the secret that underlies the narrative. Placing his interpretation within a postmodern theoretical frame, Gontard argues that Ben Jelloun is in search of a singular identity and of a negotiation of a sense of “self”. In Gontard’s words (1993: 8), the “quête” of Ben Jelloun is centred around “la revendication identitaire.” By constructing his narrative in a postmodern fashion, Ben Jelloun, in Gontard’s view (1993: 8), depicts the opaque aspect of the “Self”: “un Moi étrange, ambivalent, pluriel, et bien souvent indéchiffrable.”⁹⁸ Gontard indicates that the multiplicity of voices in *L'Enfant de sable* testifies to the postmodern narrative strategies of meta-narrative and self-referentiality. In this

⁹⁸ Gontard (1993) argues that Ben Jelloun, like other Moroccan writers such as Khatibi and Laâbi, battle with the loss of a sense of the “Self.”

sense, Gontard explains that the plurality of storytellers reflects the illusory character of fiction and subverts the traditional linear form of narration. As Gontard puts it:

En effet, la multiplication des voix narratives et leur antagonisme souligne le caractère illusoire de la fiction, mettant ainsi en évidence le piège de la vraisemblance qui reste l'élément fondamental du réalisme. (1993: 17)

Gontard further adds that since the narrative is constructed as an enigma, there is no end to the cycle of narration. This cyclical and labyrinthine aspect highlights the postmodern character of the novel.

Examining the labyrinthine aspect of the narrative in *L'Enfant de sable*, Gontard contends that there is a mystical sense to the secret that cannot be resolved in Ben Jelloun's text. According to Gontard (1993: 20), "le livre du secret" in *L'Enfant de sable* is employed by Ben Jelloun in order to "représenter la fiction comme énigme et d'aboutir par là même à la mise en œuvre d'une véritable mystique du récit." In passing, Gontard notes that the "mystique du Secret" in *L'Enfant de sable* echoes the works of the 12th century Sufi poets Attar and Nizami. Gontard (1993: 27-28) concludes his reading of *L'Enfant de sable* by noting that it is possible to read Ben Jelloun's text from a Sufi religious standpoint. Gontard's concluding remark is pertinent to my reading of the three authors in this thesis since I expand further this point by presenting a detailed study of Sufi religious symbols that are intersected with the Sacred.

A final example that will I refer to here is Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon's comparative reading of Djebbar and Rushdie in her book *The Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History and Ideology*. In the closing chapter of her book, Ben Youssef Zayzafoon addresses the relevance of the Islamic heritage to both Djebbar and Rushdie, exploring the way both authors deploy the symbol of the "house of the Prophet." Ben Youssef Zayzafoon (2005: 137) argues that while the

“house of the Prophet” acts a symbol of “self-empowerment in Djébar’s feminist novel *Loin de Médine*,” it signifies “Islam’s sexual oppression of women in Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*.” Drawing from Foucault’s concept of archaeology, Ben Youssef Zayzafoon (2005: 140) indicates that Djébar, like other Muslim feminist writers, seeks to excavate “a spiritual Islam/a feminist revolution, which has been strangled in its cradle by Orthodox Islam.” In Ben Youssef Zayzafoon’s view (2005: 152), Djébar reclaims her right to *ijtihad* “by sitting under the shade of the Sacred as the *râwaiya* (transmitter) or *mujtahida* (religious scholar).” As far as Rushdie is concerned, Ben Youssef Zayzafoon (2005: 158) observes that his “desacralization of the House of the Prophet” coupled with “his postmodern rejection of all monologic discourses” are embodied in the way “Rushdie undermines the religious authority of this Muslim symbolic by turning it into a brothel.” In this regard, Rushdie’s transgressive stance towards this sacred symbol, as Ben Youssef Zayzafoon (2005: 158) puts it, serves to “denounce women’s seclusion” and to “undermine the institution of polygamy.” Hence, the difference between Djébar’s and Rushdie’s novels lies at the level of their contrasting deployment of the symbol of the “house of the Prophet.” While Rushdie opposes a “gender transgressive” perspective to “a monologic and male centred Islam,” Ben Youssef Zayzafoon (2005: 159) notes that Djébar “is creating a symphony of transgressive female voices inside the house of the Islam.” The problem that Ben Youssef Zayzafoon (2005: 160) raises in relation to Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* is that he “leaves no room for the agency of the Muslim women in his self-Orientalist construction of the House of the Prophet.” Contrary to Rushdie, Ben Youssef Zayzafoon (2005: 160) concludes, “Djébar reinvents this powerful symbolic from the exclusive standpoint of Muslim women.” This thesis shares Ben Youssef Zayzafoon’s interest in the concept of the

Sacred and aims to expand this thinking further by exploring the interplay between this concept and the literary works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie.

In the readings above, it is clear that some critics have signalled a new direction in studying the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie, a direction that takes into account and acknowledges the relevance and influence of Islamic religious heritage to their writing. This thesis therefore follows on the steps of this new direction proposed by the critics above. However, what I will primarily focus on is a particular dimension of Islamic heritage which is the Sufi conceptual framework of Ibn Arabi. I therefore propose to pay particular attention to the concept of the Sacred and to show how a selection of works by Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie creatively engage with its symbolic and ontological features.

It could be argued that a study of the Sacred should be confined to theology. However, recent research places interdisciplinary emphasis on the connection between literature and religion. This thesis probes further the relation between what constitutes the literary and religious dimensions in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's texts, with a particular emphasis on the concept of the Sacred.

In her introduction to the collection of essays entitled *Literature and Theology: New Interdisciplinary Spaces*, Heather Walton (2011: 2) discusses the way both literature and religious studies have become "terms that carry meanings which extend beyond their academically defined boundaries." Additionally, Walton (2011: 2) argues that "the terrain of 'literature and theology' is a liminal meeting space where new possibilities can take place." In the same collection of essays, David Jasper explores further the relationship between literature and religious studies. He begins by explaining how the secularising tendencies in critical theories which culminated with the rise of cultural theories in the 1980s have overlooked the role of

religion in cultural circles. Jasper stresses the significance of an interdisciplinary outlook on religion and literature, arguing that it is not a way of:

trying to find theology or religion still lurking in disguise in literary texts or works of art. It is rather, for us today, exploring ways in which a work of literature – a poem or a novel – in its own right, not necessarily so much by what it says as by how it says it or how it plays its games, can illuminate the way in which we think. (2011: 9)

This interdisciplinary orientation brings the two terrains of literature and religion into dialogue, and this is an underlying motivation behind this thesis. The study of the Sacred in conjunction with the literary works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie in this thesis brings to the fore the idea that literature can “illuminate the way in which we think” (Jasper 2011: 9) about matters pertaining to religion, and more essentially about the creative act of literature.

In an earlier collection of essays, edited by Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, entitled *Mapping the Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures*, the concept of the Sacred is dealt with from a postcolonial perspective. In this regard, a particular emphasis is placed on the “religious practices of colonized people” (Scott and Simpson-Housley 2001: 188). In his introduction to the volume, Scott addresses the critical need for re-evaluating the relevance of such religious concepts as the Sacred within the postcolonial field of study. The emphasis in this volume is placed on the study of the geographical and spatial aspects of the Sacred in postcolonial literatures. Scott (2001: xxvii-xxviii) intimates that “possible new directions in the interdisciplinary study” of the Sacred space will not only expand the postcolonial field but will also “offer concrete opportunities for us to discover in ourselves and in our neighbours that simultaneous presence of the seen and the unseen.”

In the same collection, Griffiths (2001: 460) indicates that “there is a clear need to address” what he calls “the many issues raised at the intersections of postcolonialism, geography and the sacred.”⁹⁹ Moreover, Griffiths (2001: 459-461) argues that an interdisciplinary scrutiny of the Sacred and geography in postcolonial literatures harbours the potential to “enable a broader and more tolerant vision” in tandem with anticipating “possibilities for transforming human understanding.”

The arguments of Scott and Griffiths are therefore very similar to the views expressed by Walton and Jasper in the sense that there is a new urgency for literary studies to enter into dialogue with a study of religion, and in particular with the Sacred. This thesis, by studying the concept of the Sacred, brings the literary and the religious into contact. This encounter provides a challenging intellectual platform for thinking about, or rather rethinking, the concept of the Sacred. By exploring the symbolic and ontological interaction between the literary texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie and the concept of the Sacred, this thesis will eventually show that there are no ready-made answers to what defines the Sacred. In the conclusion to this thesis, I will stress the idea that the selected texts of the three authors are impregnated with symbolic expressions of the Sacred whose meanings are inexhaustible. Additionally, there are myriad worlds of the Sacred whose intermediate character incites the reader to embrace a more flexible understanding of the Sacred.

⁹⁹ In the second edition of *Post-Colonial Studies* (2007), Griffiths, Ashcroft and Tiffin, introduce concepts such as the Sacred, globalisation, transnationalism and environments as key words that postcolonial studies need to incorporate. In relation to the Sacred, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point to the importance of studying the impact of religion on the relationship between the coloniser and the colonized. See Griffiths, Ashcroft and Tiffin (2007).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the main theoretical trends and influential approaches to Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected works and has shown that the critical framework of most of the readings is situated within postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist theories. Critical readings of Djébar's *Vaste est la prison* and *Loin de Médine* have demonstrated that Djébar inscribes an autobiographical voice that subverts the norms of patriarchal discourse. Additionally, the voice of Djébar is seen as interconnected with the silenced female voices that male historians have sought to eclipse from the official records of both Colonial and Islamic history.

Through the review of critical responses to Ben Jelloun's writing and in particular in relation to *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*, this section has also shown that the diverse issues raised by critics cover a range of questions such as the subversion of patriarchal discourse, the marginal status of the postcolonial author, the transgression of gender norms, the resistance to Colonial as well as national discourses, and the intersection between gender, sex and politics.

In relation to Rushdie's works, previous critics have explored the cultural aspects that define the hybrid and blasphemous dimensions in *The Satanic Verses* of Rushdie's novel. Once again critics have relied on postcolonial and postmodern fields of study. With regard to *Shalimar the Clown*, some readings have stressed its postcolonial and postmodern aspects, while some others have mainly discussed the novel in the light of contemporary pressing issues such as terrorism and cosmopolitanism.

As already mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, the controversies sparked over *The Satanic Verses*, *Loin de Médine*, and *L'Enfant de sable* embody the uneasy position that literature occupies when it deals with matters pertaining to

religion. In the course of this chapter's literature review, it has become clear that Djébar's writing questions the foundations of patriarchal discourse, that Ben Jelloun's writing exposes the silences over sexual taboos and that Rushdie's writing destabilises the monotheist grounds of Islamic religious discourse.

This chapter also involved a reflection on what is already known about the three authors' selected corpus and on outlining the contribution of this thesis. Amongst the main observations made is that a study of the Sacred in the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie has not attracted much critical attention. Hence, I surveyed some of the works that have taken into account the relevance of studying the Islamic heritage in general and the Sacred in particular. I then situated the significance of the study of the Sacred within Walton's and Jasper's discussion on the interplay between the religious and the literary, and Scott's and Griffiths' re-evaluation of the concept of the Sacred in postcolonial studies. By proposing to analyse the symbolic expressions of the Sacred and the ontological experience of the Sacred, the remainder of this thesis aims to explore the creative encounter between the selected corpus of Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's literary texts and the Sufi Islamic heritage. The next chapter will outline the contours of the hermeneutic methodology that I am adopting throughout this thesis.

Chapter II: Methodology

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided a literature review of Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected works. I explored a selection of prevalent approaches to the three writers' works, with a particular focus on postcolonial, postmodern and feminist theoretical angles. I also discussed this thesis's contribution to knowledge by underscoring the significance of a detailed study of the concept of the Sacred. Before I begin the analysis of the Sacred in the three authors' works, I will delineate in this chapter the hermeneutic methodology that underpins this thesis. Drawing on the theory of Ricœur,¹⁰⁰ the hermeneutic model provides a way of reading, and thereby revealing, how the three authors' texts engage with Sufi religious symbols. This chapter begins by examining how Ricœur reads the Sacred in his book *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967). I will then define the two stages of the hermeneutic reading that I have applied in this thesis. This chapter will focus attention on the key concepts of explanation, symbol, world and understanding. The examination of these hermeneutic concepts is a necessary step that will help clarify the methodological approach adopted throughout. Chapters IV and V propose a hermeneutic explanation of the symbols of the Sacred with the aim of showing how they are used creatively by the three writers. The symbols of the journey, the "hidden" the "openings" the "darkness" and "light" will be explored in the selected texts following a hermeneutic model of interpretation. The choice of these symbols, as stated in the introduction to this thesis, is motivated by their close relation to the sacred names of God in Islam,

¹⁰⁰ Ricœur was a French philosopher who was born in Valence, France, in 1913 and died in 2005 in Châtenay-Malabry, France. Amongst the awards that he received are the prestigious Humanities Hegel Prize, in 1985, and the Kyoto Prize for Arts and Philosophy, in 2000. He taught at the Universities of Strasbourg, Sorbonne and Chicago. For more details on Ricœur's life, see Charles E. Reagan (1996).

that is The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light, and to the Prophet's journey in Islamic tradition. I will clarify this point in the next chapter when I explore the Sufi philosophical and conceptual framework that informs this thesis. Chapter VI will examine the ontological¹⁰¹ dimension of the symbols of the Sacred and the way they project what I call "intermediate worlds" in the selected corpus of the three authors. In this regard, particular emphasis will be placed on the concept of the *barzakh* which is an ontological concept that refers to an intermediate reality where the Sufi seeker encounters opposite worlds, as will be discussed in detail in both Chapters III and Chapter VI.

i. The Sacred: A Judeo-Christian Perspective

Originally, hermeneutics refers to the application of textual interpretation or exegesis to religious scriptures. This is what is often known as traditional hermeneutics. Ricœur's hermeneutics finds its inspiration both in Biblical exegesis¹⁰² and modern hermeneutics whose main proponents are the 19th century philosophers Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1934)¹⁰³ and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911).¹⁰⁴ The

¹⁰¹ The meaning of ontology as taken up by Ricœur and as understood in this thesis is the philosophical field of study which deals with human existence. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) defines ontology as a "doctrine of being" which focuses on "the posing of questions, explications, concepts, and categories which have arisen from looking at being" (1999: 2). See Martin Heidegger (1999). For further readings on Heidegger, see Jacques Taminiaux (1991), Patrick L. Bourgeois and Frank Schalow (1990), Pierre Bourdieu (1991) and Derrida (2013).

¹⁰² For a study of Ricœur's biblical hermeneutics, see Jeanne Evans (1995).

¹⁰³ Schleiermacher's hermeneutic method focuses on two dimensions of a given text: the structural and the psychological. For Schleiermacher, the aim of a hermeneutic explanation of the structure of a given text is to reach a better understanding of the intention of the author. In Schleiermacher's view (Schmidt 2006: 14), hermeneutics demands from the interpreter "a talent for understanding both the language and individuality of the author." According to Schleiermacher, hermeneutic explanation relies on a textual analysis of the structure of a given text followed by a psychological understanding of the author's intentionality: "the goal of hermeneutics is to reconstruct the creative process of the author and even to understand him better than he understood himself" (Schmidt: 2006: 14). Hence, the goal of hermeneutic interpretation in Schleiermacher's view is to understand "the unconscious in the author's creative process" (Schmidt 2006: 13). Although Ricœur recognises the value of the concept of explanation as understood by Schleiermacher, he departs from the latter's definition of understanding. Hence, Ricœur insists that the definition of hermeneutics needs to be untied from a

contribution of Ricœur lies in expanding the field of hermeneutics beyond the religious field of exegesis.¹⁰⁵

Hermeneutics, in Ricœur's theory,¹⁰⁶ is mainly characterised by its philosophical nature; however, it is strikingly interdisciplinary as it extends to religious, literary, psychological and historical fields.¹⁰⁷ Symbols, metaphors, narrative and myth are a constellation of keywords that informs Ricœur's thought.

The main reason for choosing Ricœur's hermeneutics is that it allows me to interpret the symbols of the Sacred, to explain them within the structures of the texts and then to reach an ontological understanding of what these symbols project.¹⁰⁸ This reading is predicated on two stages. The first stage involves the explanation of the symbols of the journey, the "openings" and the "hidden" in *Vaste est la prison*, *L'Enfant de sable*, and *The Satanic Verses*; and the symbols of the journey, "darkness" and "light" in *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *Shalimar the Clown*.

psychological understanding of authorial intention. Ricœur (1995: 43) argues that hermeneutics is not synonymous with a "search for another person and psychological intentions which hide behind the text." For more on Ricœur's reading of Schleiermacher, see Ricœur (1991b) and Ricœur (1974).

¹⁰⁴ Dilthey, like Schleiermacher, stresses the significance of the concept of understanding. However, Dilthey does not correlate the aim of hermeneutics to an understanding of the intention of the author. For Dilthey, hermeneutic interpretation aims to reach an understanding of human experience: "On the basis of lived experience and self-understanding and their constant interaction, there emerges the understanding of other persons and their manifestations of life" (Schmidt 2006: 38). Applying hermeneutics to the domain of human sciences, Dilthey links hermeneutic understanding to all forms of human expression and experience. In this sense, understanding others for Dilthey depends on recreating their lived experience. See Lawrence Kennedy Schmidt (2006). For more on Ricœur's reading of Dilthey, see Ricœur (1991b).

¹⁰⁵ Kearney (2004: 20) notes that hermeneutics "first arose within the framework of biblical exegesis," dealing mainly with "the fact that texts could have several different layers of signification – for example historical or spiritual – which a logic of univocal meanings could not adequately account for." See Kearney (2004).

¹⁰⁶ For a detailed study of Ricœur's key philosophical concepts, see Mary Gerhart (1979) and Mario J. Valdés (1995).

¹⁰⁷ For a study of religious symbols, see Ricœur (1967) and Ricœur (2003). For a study of psychology and the unconscious, see Ricœur (1970). For a study of politics, see Ricœur (1986). For a study of narrative and history, see Ricœur (2012) and Ricœur (2004).

¹⁰⁸ An illustrative example that can be cited here is Ricœur's landmark work *Figuring the Sacred* (1995) in which the French philosopher provides a hermeneutic study of the Sacred. Focusing his attention on the religious symbols and narratives from the Bible, Ricœur emphasises the creative role of interpretation in connection with the concept of the Sacred. See Ricœur (1995).

The second stage is predicated on understanding the worlds of the Sacred that are projected by the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie.

As discussed, the hermeneutic model that I borrow from Ricœur will focus in particular on the interpretation of the symbols of the Sacred. An illustrative example that can be cited here is *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967) which is amongst Ricœur's seminal works.¹⁰⁹ Undertaking a hermeneutic analysis of the religious experience in a Judeo-Christian context, Ricœur explores the confession of evil and the experience of sin since "evil is supremely the crucial experience of the sacred." Ricœur's argument is predicated on the idea that the religious experience "is never immediate" but rather mediated through symbols. In *The Symbolism of Evil*, the primary focus on the interpretation of symbols stems from Ricœur's view (1967: 353) that "hermeneutics brings to light the dimension of the symbol, as a primordial sign of the sacred."

The Symbolism of Evil encapsulates a hermeneutic reading since it begins by examining the language of symbols and myths which leads to an understanding of an experience that goes beyond the parameters of the religious linguistic expressions. Ricœur clarifies that his approach to symbols differs from the phenomenological approach. Referring to Eliade's work, Ricœur explains that phenomenology describes what symbols are and understands them within a system of relationships, thus stressing the idea that hermeneutics seeks to comprehend the referential nature of the symbols. By referential, Ricœur links symbols to a world that a given text projects. The hermeneutic model as exemplified in *The Symbolism of Evil* is key to this thesis because my own hermeneutic reading of the selected novels starts first

¹⁰⁹ In Mark I. Wallace's (1995: 4) introduction to Ricœur's *Figuring the Sacred*, he explains that the contribution of *The Symbolism of Evil* lies in bringing "religious studies to the threshold of a new methodology as a hermeneutical, rather than a strictly philosophical or dogmatic, discipline." See Wallace (1995).

with the symbols of the Sacred within the interior structure of the texts then goes beyond the structure of the texts in order to explore the worlds of the Sacred.

Ricœur's hermeneutic reading explores the mythical and symbolic aspects of the experience of evil. As far as the mythical dimension is concerned, he (1967: 4) probes the origin and end of evil which can be found in the Judeo-Christian "myth of the fall." Myth is defined in terms of its "symbolic function" that yields the "power of discovering and revealing the bond between man and what he considers sacred" (Ricœur 1967: 4). Contrary to a modern understanding of myth as "a false explanation by means of images and fables," Ricœur rather highlights the myth's "explanatory significance and its contribution to understanding" (1967: 4).

As far as the symbolic dimension is concerned, Ricœur analyses the semantic aspect of the confession of evil. He indicates that the symbols of the experience of evil that can be found in the language of confession are interrelated to the myth of fall, indicating that the "semantic understanding that we can acquire from the vocabulary of fault is an exercise preparatory to the hermeneutics of myths" (1967: 9). When explaining the language of confession, Ricœur (1967: 151) pays particular attention to the meanings of defilement, sin and guilt which form a "whole chain of symbols" that are interrelated, thus demonstrating that defilement is symbolised by stain, sin by deviation and guilt by accusation (1967: 18).

Following his hermeneutic analysis of both the mythical and symbolic dimensions of the experience of evil, Ricœur asks the following question: "Is it possible [...] to come back to pure reflection and to enrich it with all that we have gained from the symbolic knowledge of evil?" (1967: 347). What transpires from Ricœur's reading of the experience of evil is that his hermeneutic methodology allows for an interpretation of the linguistic aspect of evil which in turn allows for a

philosophical reflection on the “relation of radical evil to the very being of man, to the primordial destination of man” (Ricœur 1967: 156). In a sense, the symbols of evil that Ricœur explores semantically lead to a philosophical understanding of an experience that goes beyond the parameters of the linguistic dimension of symbols.

Ricœur thus underscores the interrelation between an interpretation of the language of symbols and reflective understanding. In order for a philosophical understanding of evil to take place, an interpretation of symbols is a necessary “road” that needs to be taken. Ricœur writes:

a creative interpretation of meaning, faithful to the impulsion, to the gift of meaning from the symbol, and faithful to the philosopher’s oath to seek understanding. This is the road, requiring patience and rigor on our part, which is indicated by the aphorism inscribed at the head of this conclusion; ‘The symbol gives rise to thought.’ (1967: 348)

A hermeneutic reading in Ricœur’s view rests on this twin relationship between an explanation of the symbols of evil and an ontological understanding of the experience of evil. As Ricœur (1967: 349) puts it: “what the symbol gives rise to is thinking.” Hence, thinking is here situated within an ontological understanding of being. According to Ricœur (1967: 356), “it is as an index of the situation of man at the heart of the being in which he moves, exists, and wills, that the symbol speaks to us,” further adding:

All the symbols of guilt – deviation, wandering, captivity, – all the myths – chaos, blinding, mixture, fall, – speak of the situation of the being of man in the being of the world. The task, then, is, starting from the symbols, to elaborate existential concepts. (1967: 356)

Ricœur’s hermeneutic reading of the expressions and experience of evil reveals that the language of symbols cannot be dissociated from philosophical reflection and vice versa, a philosophical reflection on evil necessitates a detour through the language of its symbols. In this thesis, my reading of the Sacred adopts Ricœur’s hermeneutic approach in the sense that I start by explaining the symbols of the Sacred in a

selection of texts by Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. I then reflect on the ontological dimension of these symbols and establish their relation with the intermediate worlds that are projected by the selected texts. While Ricœur's method is placed within a Judeo-Christian perspective, I situate my reading of the Sacred within the Sufi Islamic heritage, as will be developed in Chapter III.

ii. Stage I: A Hermeneutic Explanation of Symbols

The first stage of the hermeneutic reading of the selected texts in this thesis is proposed in Chapters IV and V and consists of an explanation of the symbols of the Sacred. Here hermeneutic explanation rests on applying a structuralist analysis as propounded by Ferdinand de Saussure.¹¹⁰ As Ricœur (1991a: 121-122) puts it, "to explain is to bring about the structure, that is, the internal relations of dependence that constitute the statics of the text."¹¹¹ Therefore, the texts of the three authors are considered as autonomous structures where the meanings can be extracted from within. This first stage is where:

We can as readers, remain in the suspense of the text, treating it as a worldless and authorless object; in this case, we explain the text in terms of its internal relations, its structure. (Ricœur 1991a: 113)

The hermeneutic explanation undertaken in Chapters IV and V relies on an initial "bracketing" of any references beyond the texts and on a textual analysis of their inner structures. The texts in this sense are cut free from any authorial intention.

¹¹⁰ For a study of the connection between Saussure's structuralism and hermeneutics, see Jasper (1992).

¹¹¹ Ricœur refers to any given text as "discourse" since a text speaks of something and it is not self-sufficient. Although "fixation by writing is constitutive of the text," Ricœur (1971: 44-45) writes, "what comes to writing is discourse as intention-to-say and that writing is a direct inscription of this intent." Ricœur's emphasis on the characteristic of speech has significant implications for the act of interpretation. A written text is therefore not a fixed entity but is rather open to interpretation because like speech it always has something to say. Hence it is always in a state of change since it can project different meanings to different readers. Amongst Ricœur's seminal works on the connection between writing and speech are Ricœur (1976) and Ricœur (1991).

Hence, I follow here the steps of “the structuralist critics [whose] interpretative task involves a close analytic reading without drawing on information or material outside the work” (Jasper 1992: 87).

Chapter IV of this thesis explains the symbols of the Sacred by revealing the structural relations between the journey, “openings” and “the hidden”. Similarly, Chapter V of this thesis examines the symbols of the Sacred by focusing on the structural links between the journey, “darkness” and “light”. What I would like to emphasise at this stage is that the main focus of the hermeneutic analysis in this thesis is placed on the “intention” of the texts and that the process of interpretation emulates the “path of thought opened up” by the texts (Ricoeur 1991: 61).

At this point, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of explanation and how it is applied in this thesis. As stated earlier, Ricoeur’s theorising of hermeneutic explanation derives its meaning from Saussure’s structuralist theory.¹¹² In this context, the study of language is a study of a system of signs and of its underlying structures. What is therefore meant by hermeneutic explanation in the ensuing chapters is an analysis of the internal structures of the texts. For Saussure (1960: 16) “[l]anguage is a system of signs that express ideas.” Hence, Saussure’s (1960: 20) definition of language “presupposes the exclusion of everything that is outside [language’s] organism or system.” In this line of thought, the hermeneutic explanation of the symbols of the Sacred proposed in Chapters IV and V excludes any external elements to the texts and focuses on the internal structures of the texts and how the symbols intersect with the Sacred. Here lies the major difference with

¹¹² Ferdinand de Saussure was a Swiss linguist who was born in Geneva in 1857 and died in Vufflens-le-Château, Switzerland, in 1913. He is renowned for his *Cours de linguistique générale* which is a compilation of the lectures he delivered in Paris between 1907 and 1911. These lectures were published following Saussure’s death. To cite but a few, Roland Barthes, Jonathan Culler, A. J. Greimas, Gérard Genette and Roman Jakobson figure amongst influential 20th century theorists who have been inspired by Saussure’s structuralist approach. For a detailed definition of structuralism, key concepts and a selection of useful readings, see Jonathan Culler (1976), Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker (2005) and Terence Hawkes (2003).

previous critical approaches to Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's texts, which have, for example, semantically focused on external elements such as the cultural, historical, political or gender aspects of their writing.

The way I will apply the first stage of explanation is by considering the inner structural relations between the Sacred and the symbols of the journey, the "hidden", the "openings", "darkness" and "light". In Saussure's view:

language stands as the supreme example of a self-contained 'relational' structure whose constituent parts have no significance unless and until they are integrated within its bounds. (Hawkes 2003: 14)

Therefore, Saussure's (1960: 114) theory regards the study of language as "a system of inter-dependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others." As such, Saussure's emphasis is placed on the relations between signs rather on other external elements to language.

The term that Saussure uses to describe the relational aspect of signs is "synchronic". Saussure (1960: 102) observes that a "linguistic entity exists only through the associating of the signifier with the signified." The relation between the signifier and signified is what makes it "synchronic". With regards to the selected corpus, the first stage of structural analysis will concentrate on identifying the "synchronic" relations between the signifiers which will all form a meaningful "whole" that connects to the signified, the Sacred. In this sense, the symbols of the journey, the "hidden", the "openings", "darkness" and "light" if taken separately might not have a meaning that correlates with the Sacred. I will explore these "synchronic" relations in the selected texts by showing how the meaning of the journey is interconnected with a journey through "openings" and a journey towards the "hidden" in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, I will demonstrate that the journey is on

the one hand a journey through “darkness” and, on the other hand, a journey towards “light”. The meanings of all five signifiers i.e.: the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings,” “darkness” and “light” are all interdependent with the meaning of the signified, the Sacred.

In Chapters IV and V, the hermeneutic explanation underscores the structural relations between the journey, “the hidden,” the “openings”, “darkness” and “light” while revealing how within the interior structure of the texts these symbols are linked to the Sacred. This brings the discussion to the relation between hermeneutics and symbolic language. How, then, does Ricœur define the symbol?

Ricœur’s hermeneutic explanation, in *The Symbolism of Evil*, is encapsulated in his analysis of three categories of the “symbol” which are: the cosmic, the oneiric and the poetic. The cosmic symbols are the ones found in nature which are linked with the meaning of the Sacred.¹¹³ Ricœur (1967: 10-11) cites the examples of natural elements such as the sun and the moon. The oneiric aspect of the symbols is related to the “psychic function” which is found in the domain of dreams.¹¹⁴ The third dimension of a symbol is the poetic one. It is related to the language of imagination and poetic expressions.¹¹⁵ Ricœur (1967: 14) argues that the cosmic, oneiric, and poetic dimensions all make up the “unifying principle” of what a symbol is and its “structure”.

¹¹³ Kearney further explains Ricœur’s definition of cosmic symbolism. Kearney (2004: 43) states that: [...] cosmic symbols refer to a human’s primary act of reading the sacred on the world. Here the human imagination interprets aspects of the world – the heavens, the sun, the moon, the waters – as signs of some ultimate meaning. Kearney argues that although this category of the cosmic symbol is found in narrative “things”, the sacred symbolism of these very “things” is mediated through language. See Kearney (2004).

¹¹⁴ Kearney (2004: 53) points out here that Ricœur’s interpretation of the dream symbols is inspired by Freud’s and Jung’s psychoanalysis of the unconscious. Kearney cites Ricœur’s book *Freud and Philosophy* in which Ricœur examines further the symbolic dimension of the dream by showing “how behind direct meanings there are indirect ones.” See Kearney (2004) and Ricœur (1970).

¹¹⁵ Kearney (2004: 51-53) explains that Ricœur’s interpretation of the metaphoric language is focused on its semantic innovations and how metaphors establish connections between the verbal and visual aspect of a poetic image. See Kearney (2004).

In addition to the categories of the language of symbols, Ricœur's definition of the symbol in *The Symbolism of Evil* stresses two key components: the sign¹¹⁶ and double-intentionality. According to Ricœur (1967: 14) "symbols are signs" and they are therefore "expressions that communicate a meaning." The symbols explored in this thesis follow Ricœur's understanding of the symbol as an element of language in the sense that they are communicated through such words as the journey, "the hidden", the "openings", "darkness" and "light".

Ricœur's definition of the symbol is in line with Saussure's structuralist interpretation of signs. For Saussure (1960: 66-67), the "linguistic sign" is "two-sided" for it is made up of a "signifier" and a "signified." A symbol is a sign because it is made up of a relationship between a signifier and a signified. What distinguishes the symbol from other linguistic signs in Ricœur's (1967: 15) view is that it is characterised by its "double-intentionality." The symbol has a "literal and manifest sense" which, according to Ricœur (1967: 15), "points beyond itself." The double-intentionality of the symbol implies that the meaning of the symbol – its signified – is not of a linguistic nature. Ricœur explains how:

Symbolic signs are opaque: the first, literal, patent meaning analogically intends a *second meaning* which is not given otherwise than in the first place. This opaqueness is the symbol's very profundity, an inexhaustible depth. (1971: 290; emphasis in original.)

The double-intentionality of the symbol suggests that its meaning refers to a "reality", a world beyond its textual boundaries. What Ricœur interprets as a hermeneutic explanation of the symbol is coterminous with a structural reading which focuses on symbols as signs within a linguistic system. However, what Ricœur

¹¹⁶ The concept of sign is amongst the key terms employed by Saussure in his structuralist theory of language as well as a key concept employed in semiotics. For a definition of structuralism and semiotics, see Graham Allen (2003).

interprets as a hermeneutic understanding of the symbol refers to the world that the symbol projects beyond its linguistic parameters. Applying this method to this thesis consists therefore in identifying and explaining how the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light” are signifiers that relate to the Sacred as a signified. This first stage is not an end in itself; on the contrary, the hermeneutic analysis of this thesis is only complete when the second stage of understanding the Sacred is elucidated in Chapter VI of this thesis.

In addition to the double-intentionality of the “symbol,” what also characterises the symbolic language is that it defies fixity and therefore demands a dynamic interpretation of meanings. Each new reading of a symbol has the potential of exploring new meanings, and this constitutes the “depth” of a given symbol (Ricoeur 1971: 290). The double-intentionality that characterises the symbol allows different interpretations to take place without necessarily ascribing one fixed meaning to the symbol being analysed. In the case of this thesis’s selected corpus, the hermeneutic analysis begins with the literal meanings of the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light” within the inner structure of the texts. Then by establishing the “synchronic” relations between these signifiers and the Sacred, the analysis highlights the “opaque” dimension of these symbols. In this sense, I will explore from a Sufi perspective, the symbolic dimensions of these signifiers whose indirect meanings are closely related to the Sacred. As such, the movement of Chapters IV, V and VI follows the movement from the structural explanation of the symbols of the Sacred in the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie to the ontological understanding of the worlds projected by the symbols of the Sacred.

What needs to be recalled later in this thesis is that the hermeneutic interpretation of the “symbols” of the Sacred emphasises the plurality of meanings that are yielded by these “symbols.” The hermeneutic reading in this thesis endeavours to reveal but cannot exhaust these meanings. By no means does this hermeneutic reading of the “symbols” of the Sacred in Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts annihilate what Ricœur (1971: 78) calls the “very enigma of symbolism.” The hermeneutic reading proposed in this thesis pays particular attention to the enigmatic thrust of the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light” by exploring the variegated meanings that they divulge without necessarily ascribing a single meaning. Hence, this reading defies fixity owing to the dynamic interpretation that a symbol demands from the interpreter.

iii. Stage II: A Hermeneutic Understanding of Worlds

In the previous section, I noted that the hermeneutic reading of Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s selected texts in this thesis rests on two stages. The first stage is the structural explanation of the symbols of the Sacred and the second stage consists in understanding the worlds of the Sacred. Hence the hermeneutic interpretation of the selected texts is predicated on a movement from a structural explanation of the symbols of the sacred to an “ontological understanding” of the worlds of the Sacred. Hermeneutics in this sense, writes Ricœur (1971: 66), is at “the hinge between linguistics and non-linguistics, between language and lived experience.”

In Ricœur’s view, the movement of interpretation from the structure of a given text to “something” beyond the text is made possible by the referential function

of the symbolic expressions. While in a purely structuralist sense, a symbol is a sign that can be studied within the confines of a system of other signs, a hermeneutic reading takes a step further and crosses the boundaries of the textual parameters. It is for this reason that I have chosen Ricœur's methodology because it will allow me to explore how the Sufi symbols of the Sacred in the texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie refer to "something" beyond the texts. This will be shown in Chapter VI, where I will examine the worlds projected by the texts and will compare them to Ibn Arabi's ontological concept of the *barzakh*. I will argue that the symbols of the Sacred project worlds of the Sacred. These worlds are not pre-established nor defined in the texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. On the contrary, they are mediated through the language of symbols and are open to a continuous process of interpretation, thus inviting the reader to "understand" the possible realities that, to borrow Ricœur's phrase (1995: 43), "unfolded in front of the text[s]."

So what is the relationship between the language of symbols and the concept of world from a Ricœurian perspective? We have seen that the definition of the symbol in terms of double-intentionality reflects the idea that symbolic expressions refer to a non-linguistic dimension that goes beyond the parameters of the structural boundaries of a given text. Indeed, Ricœur (1971: 66) argues that "symbolism occurs because what is symbolisable is found initially in a non-linguistic reality." Ricœur refers to the non-linguistic reality that symbols project as the world of a text. According to Ricœur:

The term 'world' then has the meaning that we all understand when we say of new-born child that he has come into the world. For me, the world is the ensemble of references opened up by every kind of text, descriptive or poetic, that I have read, understood, and loved. (1976: 37)

The first instance of double-intentionality is “explained” when such words as the journey, the “openings”, the “hidden”, “darkness” and “light” in the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie are interpreted as symbols of the Sacred. The second instance of double-intentionality is “understood” when these very symbols refer to the worlds of the Sacred. Chapter VI will further explore this ontological dimension of the worlds of the Sacred.

The hermeneutic interpretation of the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie underscores the mediating function of the language of symbols. The texts do not describe the Sacred, but rather speak about the Sacred through the language of symbols. At the same time, the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie symbolically refer to the experiences of the Sacred through the projection of worlds. Ricœur (1976: 37) contends that literary texts “speak about the world. But not in a descriptive way.” In this light, a world projected by a given text is mediated through the language of symbolism. Here the language of symbols clearly plays an important role because in a text resides, as Ricœur writes:

a power of reference to aspects of our being in the world that cannot be said in a direct descriptive way, but only alluded to, thanks to the referential values of metaphoric and, in general, symbolic expressions. (1976: 37)¹¹⁷

In this regard, Ricœur (1976: 87-88) explains that “To understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference: from what it says, to what it talks about.” Ricœur (1976: 87) further adds that: “Understanding has less than ever to do with the author and his situation. It seeks to grasp the world-propositions opened up by the references of the text.” Hence, the whole movement of this thesis rotates around grasping the structural relations between the symbols, making sense of them, then

¹¹⁷ Ricœur differentiates between metaphors and symbols. For Ricœur, while metaphors are governed by linguistic references, symbols have a linguistic and a non-linguistic dimension. For more on Ricœur’s reading of metaphorical language and hermeneutics, see Ricœur (1978).

seeking to “understand” how the symbolic expressions of the Sacred refer to the intermediate worlds of Sacred experience.

Chapter VI in this thesis revolves around understanding the world of the Sacred. It will explore the intermediate aspect of the worlds of the Sacred and will analyse the extra-linguistic dimension of the symbols of the journey, “the hidden,” “openings”, “darkness” and “light”. What is meant by an ontological understanding of the worlds of the Sacred is not synonymous with a description of pre-established worlds that already exist in the texts and that the act of reading seeks to reveal. On the contrary, hermeneutic understanding as used in this thesis is coterminous with identifying the ontological movement whereby the selected texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie project possible worlds. In Ricœur’s words:

The sense of a text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed [...] The text speaks of a possible world and of a possible way of orienting oneself within it. The dimensions of this world are properly opened up by and disclosed by the text. (1976: 87-88)

The intermediate worlds of the Sacred that are examined in Chapter VI are understood as projected by the very symbols of the Sacred that the texts present to the reader. These intermediate worlds, which I will compare to Ibn Arabi’s concept of the *barzakh*, unfold themselves when the act of interpretation is set in motion.

Hermeneutic understanding, as used in the context of this thesis, focuses on the ontological dimension of the worlds. Here the meaning of ontological is tied with the meaning of the possible in the Heideggerian sense.¹¹⁸ I will briefly make a slight detour via Heidegger’s thought in order to clarify further this point. For Heidegger (1985: 216-217), hermeneutic understanding is ontological because it is

¹¹⁸ Ricœur’s concept of understanding is indebted to Heidegger’s philosophy. For an in-depth study of the similarities and differences between Ricœur and Heidegger, see Patrick L. Bourgeois and Frank Schalow (1990).

equivalent to an interpretation of “possibilities” which “are not yet present-at-hand.” The concept of ontology in the Heideggerian sense is equivalent to the study of being; hence, he stresses the significance of an existential understanding of what it means to be or to exist. Being, for Heidegger, is predicated on possibilities. These possibilities have a “projective character” and projection in this sense “has nothing to do with comporting oneself towards a plan that has been thought out” (Heidegger 1985: 217). Hermeneutic understanding, in Heidegger’s view (1985: 217), is therefore directed at “what can be” rather than at something that was already there. Heidegger (1985: 216) contrasts the meaning of ontological understanding with ontic understanding which signifies what is “actual.” In Heidegger’s words (1985: 215), “[w]hen we are talking ontically we sometimes use the expression ‘understanding something.’” Contrary to this “ontic” meaning, ontological understanding follows the possibility movement of “what can be” (Heidegger 1985: 216). The key idea here is that Heidegger places emphasis on the connection between understanding and the possible.

To return to Ricœur, his hermeneutic definition of understanding very much follows in the steps of Heidegger. Ricœur stresses the idea that ontological understanding equates with a departure from defining what a world is to disclosing its possibility (Vanhoozer 1990: 7). As Ricœur (1991b: 26) puts it: “To speak of a world of the text is to stress the feature belonging to every literary work of opening before it a horizon of possible experience.” A world of a text is therefore a possible world and a world ontologically projected by a given text. According to Ricœur:¹¹⁹

The text speaks of a possible world and of a possible way of orienting oneself within it. The dimensions of this world are properly opened by and disclosed by the

¹¹⁹ For a detailed and in-depth study of Ricœur’s concept of the possible, see Kevin Vanhoozer (1990).

text [...] It goes beyond the mere function of pointing out and showing what already exists. (1976: 88)

Understanding is therefore ontological as it seeks to disclose the world that a given text projects. It is not an “actual” world but a possible one.

Stressing this relation between understanding and possibility is significant in this thesis as it brings to the fore the philosophical stance that I will develop in Chapter VI. The study of the concept of the Sacred in the three writers’ selected works is not aimed at defining what the Sacred *is*. On the contrary, the aim is to question philosophically how it is expressed in the texts and experienced beyond the parameters of the texts. Chapter VI in particular will demonstrate that there are worlds that are projected as possible intermediate worlds by the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. The very act of hermeneutic interpretation will disclose how these worlds are projected and will highlight their ontological possibility. If, as Heidegger puts it (1999: 2-4), “the term ‘ontological’ refers to the posing of questions, explications, concepts, and categories which have arisen from looking at beings as be-ing” and if “[q]uestions grow out of a confrontation with ‘subject matter’,” then this thesis also seeks to ask questions about the concept of the Sacred and to underline how it is experienced rather than answering the question of what it is.

It has become clear how the hermeneutic methodology takes a philosophical turn in Chapter VI of this thesis. Instead of providing a definition of what the Sacred is, the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie invite the reader to interpret the “possible worlds” of the Sacred. These worlds are not pre-established but are rather mediated through the interpretation of the symbolic expressions. Interpreting the worlds of the Sacred and exploring their possibility testifies to the way the texts of

Djebar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie open up horizons of interpretation which do not necessarily impose one single meaning or assign a limited meaning to the concept of the Sacred. I will return again to this seminal point in the Conclusion to this thesis.

Before concluding this chapter, it is necessary to stress the interdependence between the two hermeneutic stages outlined thus far. The proposed ontological understanding of the concept of the Sacred first and foremost arises from the structural study of the symbols of the Sacred that will be carried out in Chapters IV and V. The hermeneutic reading adopted in this thesis follows in the steps of Ricœur in the sense that the second stage of ontological understanding is achieved owing to the first stage of structural interpretation. Hence, thinking ontologically about the Sacred in this thesis stems from the symbolic vocabulary found in the selected texts. To return to an initial idea expressed earlier in this chapter, the “symbol gives” and, as Ricœur (1968: 348) writes, “what it gives is occasion for thought.” Both stages are therefore seminal and interdependent in making the process of the hermeneutic interpretation of the Sacred possible.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the hermeneutic approach that this thesis will apply. I defined the key concepts of explanation, symbol understanding and world as these will inform the two stages of my hermeneutic reading of the selected texts. The explanation of the symbols of the Sacred involves the structural analysis of the symbolic expressions of the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light”. The symbol of the journey has been chosen because, as this thesis will demonstrate, it is closely interlinked with Sufism and the Prophet Muhammad’s Sacred journey. The other four other expression that I will be exploring in this thesis

– the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light” – have been selected on the grounds that they symbolically relate to the Sacred names of God: The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light. I will clarify further the meanings of these symbols and their relation to the Sacred in the next chapter.

The understanding of the symbols of the Sacred, which will be carried out in Chapter VI, rests on exploring the ontological aspect of worlds that the texts project. The focus in Chapter VI will be on interpreting the experience of the Sacred, which I have termed in this thesis the intermediate worlds. To clarify this point I will adapt Ibn Arabi’s Sufi concept of the *barzakh*. The next chapter will explore the philosophy of Ibn Arabi and will define the key concepts that will be used in this thesis.

Chapter III: The Philosophical and Conceptual Context

Introduction

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the study of the symbols of the Sacred is placed within the philosophical and conceptual context of Ibn Arabi's Sufi thought. The point of departure for choosing Sufism in general, and Ibn Arabi in particular, is the direct references to Sufis and Sufism in the selected texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie, as clarified in my choice of corpus. Placing these works within a Sufi Islamic perspective contributes to exploring new lines of inquiry that expand on the predominant theoretical approaches to their works, a point which I have addressed in Chapter I. Such new lines have often been overlooked due to the lack of attention paid to the significance of the Islamic heritage in the writings of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie which, while it is often referred to, has not been analysed in detail.

As outlined in my introduction, the choice of Ibn Arabi amongst other Sufis is made for three main reasons. The first is that he has an influential legacy which is known to both Muslim and Western audiences. This will be clarified later in this chapter. The second is that the language of his Sufi philosophy is impregnated with symbolic vocabulary that has its roots in the Sacred. The symbolic input of Ibn Arabi will prove to be a useful conceptual platform for my later hermeneutic interpretation of the symbols of the Sacred and of the experience of the *barzakh* in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected texts. The third main reason is the particular attention that Ibn Arabi pays to the names of God in his philosophy. This offers the conceptual tools that help me in analysing the connection between the three names of God in the Sufi Islamic tradition, that is The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light,¹²⁰

¹²⁰ In Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall's English translation, the Names of God in Arabic: "Zahir" and "Batin," are translated as "Outward" and "Inward." William Chittick translated the Names as The Manifest and The Non-Manifest. I have consciously opted for translating the names "Zahir" and

and the symbols that I have chosen to study in this thesis, which are the journey, the “openings”, the “hidden”, “darkness” and “light”, again as discussed in the introduction.

This chapter begins by defining the meaning and sources of the Sacred in Islam, followed by a definition of the meaning of Sufism and an overview of Ibn Arabi’s life, his influential Sufi works and his theory on the names of God. The rest of the chapter will expound on the conceptual and philosophical framework that I adopt in this thesis. I will therefore define the key Sufi symbols that are closely examined in the selected corpus as this allows for an understanding of the connection between the symbols that the three authors creatively use, and the Sacred. In the final section of this chapter, I will clarify the meaning of the *barzakh* in relation to the experience of the Sacred. I will argue that this concept is key in identifying what I have termed the intermediate worlds that the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie project. Hence, I will demonstrate how the symbolic expressions of journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, the “darkness” and the “light” are ontologically interrelated with the experience of the Sacred in the three authors’ works.

i. The Sacred in Islam

The notion of the Sacred is a religious category which forms an aspect of all religions and a comprehensive analysis of the Sacred is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹²¹

Since this thesis considers how the three authors incorporate symbols of the Sacred

“Batin” as The Manifest and The Hidden because it is more relevant to the symbolic associations that I establish between the symbols of the “hidden” and of the “openings” and the Sacred in the selected corpus.

¹²¹ For Jews the Torah forms a sacred source of knowledge as it contains the teachings of the Prophet Moses. For Christians, the Bible is formed of sacred scriptures consisting both of Old Testament and New Testament. Jesus is considered sacred by Christians because he is regarded as the Son of God. See Stephen M. Wylen (2005) and Darrel W. Johnson (2011). For a comparative study of the Sacred in world religions, see Nasr (1989).

from a Sufi perspective, my focus will be particularly on the Sacred in Islam. Before examining the Sufi perspective of Ibn Arabi and the key theoretical concepts used in this thesis, I will first define the meaning of the Sacred and its sources in Islam. This will shed light on the connection between the Sufi symbols employed in this thesis and their relation to the Sacred.

The Sacred, which translates as *Al-Quddous* in Arabic, is primarily a reference to God and to the sources that emanate from Him; that is the Qur'an, the Prophet and the *Shari'a*. My understanding of the Sacred in this thesis is in line with Nasr's definition (2010: 203; emphasis in original.): "God is *the* Sacred, and then there are things in this world that are sacred because of their relation to the Sacred." The Sacred from an Islamic perspective is therefore a transcendental entity whose reality belongs to a world of a totally different order from the physical world that humans inhabit. In Nasr's words (2010: 204), the Sacred in Islam is a concept: "which pertains to the very Reality of God, the Eternal, the Immutable, and the manifestations and theophanies of this Divine Reality in certain beings and entities in this world." *Al-Quddous*, the Sacred, is one of the ninety-nine names attributed to God or *Allah*. As I will show later in this chapter, the names of God occupy a significant place in Ibn Arabi's conceptual framework because they form the basis of his Sufi symbolism. The symbols that I am analysing in this thesis are closely linked to the names of God: the Hidden, the Manifest and The Light. All these names stem first and foremost from the name *Al-Quddous*. For now what I therefore emphasise that the meaning of the Sacred is synonymous with a spiritual reality that transcends the material world.

As outlined above, there are three main sources of the Sacred in Islam, and these are the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad and the *Shari'a*. The Qur'an is the

source of Divine revelation and is referred to by Muslims as the “Sacred Book.”

Muslims tend to refer to themselves as the “People of the Book.” As Nasr puts it:

The Quran for the Muslim is the revelation of God and the book in which His message to man is contained. It is the Word of God revealed to the Prophet through the archangel Gabriel. The Prophet was therefore the instrument chosen by God for the revelation of His word, of His Book of which both the spirit and the letter, the content and the form, are Divine. (1971: 42)

The word Qur’an derives from the root verb *iqra* which can be translated as “read” or “recite.” The Qur’an comprises 114 *sura* in total. A *sura* is a chapter and in each chapter there are *ayat*, verses in English. Since the Qur’an is understood as the Divine recitation of God’s words, its content, as well as the Prophet who transmitted it, are considered to be sacred by Muslims.

The night when the Qur’an was first revealed to the prophet is known as *Lailatu-al Qadr* which translates as the Sacred Night, the Night of Power or the Night of Destiny. A whole *sura* in the Qur’an is devoted to this Sacred Night and it reads as following:

We revealed the Qur’an during the Night of Power. What do you know of the Night of Power? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. During this night, the angel Gabriel and other angels descend with the permission of Allah with all decrees. This night is peace and goodness until the rising of dawn. (97: 1-5)

The Sacred Night refers to the first revelation, although it is commonly known amongst Muslims that the Qur’an was revealed gradually over a period of twenty-seven years. Imtiaz Ahmad (2000: 107) notes that *Qadr* has two meanings. On the one hand it means that the night when the Qur’an was revealed is “a night of value and power” (Ahmad 2000: 107). On the other, *Qadr* refers to “destiny” in the sense that on that night the Divine “decisions” are “handed over to the angels for execution

during this night” (Ahmad 2000: 107).¹²² The symbolic meaning of this Sacred Night will be explored in Chapter V in relation to Ben Jelloun’s *La Nuit sacrée*. Both the title of the novel itself and the title of the second chapter in *La Nuit sacrée* are a direct reference to the Sacred Night.

In addition to the Qur’an, the Prophet Muhammad is another source of the Sacred for Muslims. The Prophet is always referred to as the Prophet with a capital letter by Muslims, which testifies to the way he is highly revered, and whenever his name is mentioned the phrase *sallala allahou alayhi wa sallam* (Peace be Upon Him) is uttered by Muslims. In *Islam: the Fear and the Hope*, Habib Boularès states that:

In the place of honour stands the Qur’an. Then comes the tradition, the *Sunna*, of the Prophet composed of his sayings, the *Hadith*, and his acts, the *Sira*. Following, there is the tradition of his companions and immediate successors known for their wisdom and piety. Their acts, their judgments, their writings constitute the original consensus, the *ijma’*. To this consensus another *ijma’* is added, that of the great scholars of juridical science. (1990: 50)

The Prophet Muhammad is a Sacred figure in Islam and his tradition or *hadith*¹²³ – which encompasses his sayings and deeds – is another Sacred source of reverence for Muslims. In this sense, Nasr (1971: 79) observes that the *hadith*¹²⁴ constitutes “the

¹²² For a detailed definition of the Sacred Night, see Ahmad (2000).

¹²³ Generally the word *hadith* refers both to the Prophet’s sayings and actions. Some scholars like Nasr (1971: 78-79), for example, distinguish between the *hadith* and *sunna*. Some people use the *hadith* to refer only to the Prophet’s sayings and use the word *sunna* to speak only about the Prophet’s deeds. Some others perceive both concepts as interlocking and do not therefore understand them in separate terms. Muslim scholars, from various Islamic schools of thought, have debated what would constitute the *hadith* and the *sunna*, but a full treatment of such debate, interesting as it might be, is not pertinent to the discussion of the Sacred in this thesis. It suffices to say that Muhammad Idris al-Shafi’i, an influential founder of the *sunni* school of thought, has emphasized the idea that both *hadith* and *sunna* correspondingly designate the Prophet’s tradition. See Nasr (1971) and Daniel Brown (1996).

¹²⁴ In Muslim societies, Muslim scholars are the ones who master theological knowledge and are therefore entitled to interpret the Prophet’s tradition. The interpretations are reached through an *ijm’a*, a consensus amongst the scholars known as ‘*ulama*. Hence, what is at stake when one speaks of the prophetic tradition is what Brown (1996: 133) calls the “interpretive authority.” Brown (1966: 133) explains that the ‘*ulama* are not only the “guardians of hadith,” but also the “guardians of the whole tradition.” The central position occupied by the Muslim scholars and the role they play in relation to the interpretation of the sacred text and tradition cannot therefore be ignored. “By virtue of their expertise in the sciences of hadith and their knowledge of classical scholarship,” Brown (1966: 133) writes, “the ‘*ulama* are the mediators of the prophetic legacy. Through *hadith* they speak with the voice of the prophet.” For more details on the role of the ‘*ulama*, see Brown (1996).

most precious source of guidance which Islamic society possesses, and along with the Quran [it is] the fountain head of all Islamic life and thought.” In *Loin de Médine*, Djebbar relies on the sacred source of the Prophet’s *hadith*. In fact, the narrative in *Loin de Médine* mirrors the oral transmission of the *hadith*.¹²⁵ Similarly, the writing of *The Satanic Verses* draws from the *hadith* collections, more particularly in relation to what is known as the “satanic incident.”

In addition to the sanctity of the Qur’an and the prophetic tradition, the *Shari’a*, which comprises the sum of Islamic laws that govern Muslim societies, imparts a sense of the Sacred to the everyday life of Muslims. The *Shari’a* is impregnated with a sense of the Sacred because it is founded on Qur’anic injunctions. Nasr (1971) refers to the *Shari’a* as:

[the Divine Law] according to which God wants a Muslim to live. It is therefore the guide of human action and encompasses every facet of human life. By living according to the *Shari’ah* man places his whole existence in God’s ‘hand’. The *Shari’ah* by considering every aspect of human action thus sanctifies the whole life and gives a religious significance to what may appear as the most mundane of activities. (1971: 94)

In the light of Nasr’s definition, the *Shari’a* is not only an integral part of the Muslim’s outlook on the world but it also permeates the daily activities such as the professional and the social aspects of a Muslim’s life. In this line of thought, Akram (2009: 285) explains that “Muslim law does not classify life into two unconnected halves, one sacred and the other profane; the sacred law influences all walks of life.”

John Esposito (1992) provides another useful definition of the *Shari’a*:

¹²⁵ The Prophetic tradition has been orally transmitted. The *isnad* is often known as the chain of transmitters, which according to Leila Ahmed (1992: 46), “are based (as the biographical literature is) in memorized accounts first related by Muhammad’s contemporaries and transmitted by a carefully authenticated chain of individuals of recognized probity.” In a similar vein, Nasr (1971: 78) notes that the Prophetic sayings “were memorized by those who heard them and were in turn transmitted to those who followed during succeeding generations,” then they were “eventually collected as the spread of Islam.” Nasr (1971: 79) further adds that there emerged six major Sunni collections of the *hadith*, most important of which is the Bukhari collection. For a detailed study of the Prophetic tradition, see Nasr (1971). See also Ahmed (1992).

Islamic law provided the blueprint of the good society, the Islamic ideal. The Sharia or path of God was therefore a set of divinely revealed general principles, directives, and values from which human beings developed detailed rules and regulations which were in turn to be applied by judges (*qadis*) in Sharia courts. (1992: 35)

Esposito (1992: 35) describes the *Shari'a* as “comprehensive, including regulations which governed ritual and worship and defined the social norms of the community.”¹²⁶ Although my main focus in this thesis is on the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad as sources of the Sacred, the place that the *Shari'a* occupies in defining the Sacred in Islam must also be taken into account. Having now defined the Sacred and clarified its sources in Islam in general, I will introduce in the next section Ibn Arabi's Sufi perspective that will be drawn upon throughout this thesis.

ii. The Sacred in Ibn Arabi's Sufi Philosophy

• Sufism

As stated earlier, the philosophy of Ibn Arabi is defined as Sufi. Sufism has many meanings and interpretations and there exist various Sufi schools of thought that are geographically and historically different.¹²⁷ Sufism¹²⁸ is *tasawwuf* in Arabic and its etymological root stems both from *suf* which means wool and from the noun *safa* which means pure. The 11th century Persian Sufi Abd al-Qādir Al-Jīlāni explains that the:

[...] name *sufi* is an expression derived from the Arabic word *sāf*, 'pure.' The reason that the Sufis are called by this name is their inner world is purified and enlightened with the light of wisdom, unity and oneness. (1992: 40)

¹²⁶ It is important to note that there are different Islamic law schools which, to echo Esposito's words (1992: 35), were “united in purpose and based upon the same revealed sources;” however, “their conclusions often bore the mark of differing geographic contexts and customs as well as intellectual orientations.” Importantly, Esposito (1992: 36) points to the “dynamism, flexibility, and diversity” of the Islamic law mainly because of the nature of “human interpretation or judgment.”

¹²⁷ For a detailed study on the history of Sufism and the various Sufi schools, see Schimmel (1975).

¹²⁸ For a detailed definition of Sufism, see Burckhardt (2008), Martin Lings (1999) and Alexander Knysh (2004).

In *Sufism: The Mystical Side of Islam. Some Developmental Aspects*, Winston E.

Waugh (2005) also provides the following definition:

The term (Sufism) is a very wide one, and it surely conjures up different expressions and so variegated a behaviour pattern that, in its entirety, it defies all human effort to confine it to any one conventional description. Even the Sufis themselves are numerous in the way that they attest to their beliefs. Some describe their movement as a way of life; others describe it as a 'state' of the soul; and yet others talk about it as a relationship to God. (2005: 8)

In a similar line of thought, Shah (1999:16) notes that the term Sufism is quite elusive, stating that "the Sufis, cannot be defined by any single set of words or ideas.

By a picture, moving and made up of different dimensions, perhaps."

Sufism can best be described as the spiritual aspect of Islam and this is different from the legalistic side of Islam, which I have defined earlier as the *Shari'a*. In Nasr's words (2010: 276): "Sufism is the inner, esoteric, and mystical dimension of Islam." Therefore, the meaning of Sufism cannot be dissociated from what constitutes the Sacred in Islamic religion. Nasr draws attention to the importance of understanding Sufism in light of the Sacred foundations of Islam:

Sufism itself cannot be appreciated in its true light and taken seriously until it is realized that the *Tariqah*, or the esoteric dimension of Islam, has its roots in the Qur'an, and like all aspects of Islamic orthodoxy is based on the twin sources of the Qur'an and Hadith. (1971: 130)¹²⁹

In addition, Nasr (1971: 132-133) indicates that Sufis follow "a spiritual path" and their "practice" is based both on the life of the Prophet and on the Qur'an. Nasr (1971: 132-133) further adds that Sufis "walk upon the Path in quest of the spiritual

¹²⁹ Orthodoxy is a complex term. Generally speaking, it means "intellectual assent to prescribed religious doctrines" (Swatos 1998: 346). Moreover, Orthodoxy "in a religious tradition implies at a minimum the presence of specialists with the authority to determine the correctness of beliefs and safeguard doctrine from contaminating influences and interpretations" (Swatos 1998: 346). For a detailed definition of Orthodoxy and how it is understood in different religions, see William H. Swatos (1998).

experience,” yearning to gain “that illuminative knowledge (*al-ʿirfan*) which is the ultimate goal of the Way.”

Although Sufis abide by the Islamic laws, their approach to Islam is fundamentally spiritual rather than legalistic. In this sense, Titus Burckhardt notes that:

Taṣawwuf, which is the esoteric or inward (*bāṭin*) aspect of Islam, is to be distinguished from exoteric or ‘external’ (*ẓāhir*) Islam just as direct contemplation of spiritual or divine realities is distinguishable from the fulfilling of the laws which translate them in the individual order in connection with the conditions of a particular phase of humanity. (2008: 3)

Sufis therefore place a great emphasis on a spiritual attainment of a union with the Sacred. While a follower of Islamic law knows the Sacred through the legal route, the Sufi seeker aims to attain the knowledge of the Sacred through undertaking an inner journey. God in this regard becomes the desired Beloved. In Sufism:

[the] Knowledge of God always engenders love, while love presupposes knowledge of the object of love even though that knowledge may be only indirect and reflected. The object of spiritual love is Divine Beauty, which is an aspect of Infinity, and through this object desire becomes lucid or clear. (Burckhardt 2008: 23)

Sufis, in this sense, seek to acquire union in love. Such a union as emblematised in spiritual love is not merely an emotional state but rather an attainment of a knowledge of the Sacred. I will return to this point later in this chapter when I explain the symbolic significance of the heart and the Beloved in relation to the Sacred.

The Sufi method of approaching the Sacred therefore departs from the limitations of a legalistic approach. In this sense, Geoffroy argues that:

Sufism distinguishes itself once again by its *supra-rational* – not *irrational* – character, whereas theology and law rely on discursive reason and dialectical thought. Sufis do not reject the other disciplines of Islam, but they use them as a springboard, explaining that the word *ʿaql*, which means ‘reason’ or mind, also means ‘shackle’. Because the spiritual world does not obey the laws of duality, it is indeed by the union of opposites that the Sufi realizes the divine Oneness. (2010: 7; emphasis in original)

Chapter VI of this thesis develops further this idea of a meeting of opposites that characterises the spiritual world. To be more specific, I will use Ibn Arabi's concept of the *barzakh* which allows me to explore in more detail how the worlds projected by the texts of the three authors correspond to the intermediate spiritual worlds that a Sufi seeker encounters.

In her definition of Sufism, Schimmel (1975: 3) emphasises its spiritual nature, stressing the idea that Sufis seek the Sacred through an attainment of an inner illumination. According to Schimmel, Sufism is predicated on "a spiritual experience that depends upon neither sensual nor rational methods," observing that the meaning of Sufism is synonymous with what Sufis termed "the wisdom of the heart" (1975: 4). Sufis, in this sense, symbolically refer to the expression of the heart as the site of the spiritual experience. The heart of the Sufi seeker is what enables the latter to experience a sacred illumination. As Schimmel puts it:

Once the seeker has set forth upon the way to this Last Reality, he will be led by an inner light. This light becomes stronger as he frees himself from the attachments of this world or – as the Sufis would say – polishes the mirror of his heart. (1975: 4)

The "Last Reality" is a reference here to the Sacred reality of God that the Sufi wayfarer seeks to attain. Such a spiritual attainment takes place within the heart of the seeker and which receives an inner light, the light of the Sacred. This will be explored further in my reading of Djébar's *Vaste est la prison* in Chapter IV. Having clarified the meaning of Sufism and the difference between its spiritual dimension and the legalistic aspect of *Shari'a*, I will provide in the ensuing section an overview of Ibn Arabi's life, his major works and his theorising of the names of God.

- **Ibn Arabi**

Ibn Arabi was a leading medieval Sufi scholar, known as *Al-Shaykh Al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master). Ibn Arabi's full name is Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn al-'Arabi

at-Tâ'î al Hâtimî.¹³⁰ He was born in Andalusia in 1165. Ibn Arabi's training as a Sufi began at the age of nineteen. He then embarked on a life journey of constant travelling until he settled in Damascus where he died in 1240.¹³¹ His works abound with his spiritual journeys and visionary encounters which were accompanied by his extensive physical travelling across Morocco, Tunisia, Mecca, Medina, Turkey, Egypt and Syria.

As an influential Sufi master, the breadth of his legacy crosses cultural, geographical as well as historical boundaries.¹³² Ibn Arabi's works such as *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyah*¹³³ (*Meccan Openings*), *Fusus Al-Hikam*¹³⁴ (*The Bezels of Wisdom*) and *Kitab Al-Isra*¹³⁵ (*The Night Journey*)¹³⁶ became more known to Western audience in the 20th century owing to the translations and scholarly works produced by The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society and The Beshara School.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ In many of his writings, Ibn Arabi refers to himself as the "the Seal of Muhammadan sanctity" or "the Seal of Saints" meaning that no one else after him will fully inherit the sacred knowledge that the Prophet Muhammad embodies. For more details, see Chittick (2005a). For a definition of the concept of "the Seal of Muhammadan sanctity," see Matti Moosa (1988).

¹³¹ For more detailed biographical studies of Ibn Arabi, see Isobel Jeffrey-Street (2012), Stephen Hirtenstein (1999) and Claude Addas (1993).

¹³² Amongst the well-known and most popular works that have been translated and disseminated in the West are: *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries and the Rising of the Divine Lights*, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, *Journey to the Lord of Power: A Sufi Manual on Retreat by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi*, and *Kernel of the Kernel*. See bibliography for more details.

¹³³ It was originally written between 1230 and 1237.

¹³⁴ It was originally written in 1230.

¹³⁵ To the best of my knowledge there does not seem to be an exact date of the composition of *Kitab Al-Isra*. According to Michel Chodkiewicz (1993), *Kitab Al-Isra* was written in 594 AH, which is 1197 AD. However, the official website of The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society notes that *Kitab Al-Isra* was written after 1198, but no specific date is provided. See Chodkiewicz (1993).

¹³⁶ Ibn Arabi is said to be the author of 700 works, some of which were copied, verified and disseminated when Ibn Arabi was still alive. Hirtenstein notes that Sadruddīn al-Qūnawī, one of Ibn Arabi's disciples, kept a number of Ibn Arabi's original manuscripts in his private library in Konya, Turkey. For more details, see Hirtenstein (1999).

¹³⁷ Jeffrey-Street (2012) provides a comprehensive study of The Beshara School and The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society. The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society was founded in 1977. It is an international society and its headquarters is based in Oxford. The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society's official website has all publications, newsletters and information on conferences pertaining to Ibn Arabi. See <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org>.

While Ibn Arabi's reputation was well established in Andalusia and Turkey,¹³⁸ in most of the Arabic countries he was considered a controversial figure.

According to Idries Shah:

Although Ibn El-Arabi is loved by all Sufis, has an immense personal following among people of all kinds, and lived an exemplary life, he was undoubtedly a threat to formal society. (1999: 143)

The opposition that Ibn Arabi met reflects a long history of tension between Sufis and Islamic Orthodox scholars who are known as *ulama*.¹³⁹ In this regard, Abdallah Saeed and Hassan Saeed consider the unwelcoming attitude of Islamic Orthodox scholars towards Sufis throughout history:¹⁴⁰

By wholeheartedly accommodating diversity, Sufis were doing what others were not. Others were keen to differentiate themselves from the rest in order to demonstrate their superiority in the authenticity and truth of what they professed. The accommodation of the Sufis, coupled with their appropriation of elements from other religious traditions, as well as their influence and views on religion, ensured that they remained the target of non-Sufi scholars. At times this meant persecution and even the execution of some leading Sufis by the political authorities. (2004: 27)

Even after his death, Ibn Arabi continued to stir opposition to the point where his tomb in Syria remained hidden for 300 years.¹⁴¹ The harshest and most influential criticism that was directed at Ibn Arabi's works took place in the 14th century. On this matter, Stephen Hirtenstein notes that the:

¹³⁸ When Ibn Arabi travelled to Turkey, more particularly Konya and Anatolia, he inspired a number of avid disciples, amongst them Sadr al-Din al-Qūnawī. Al-Qūnawī's works helped spread the Sufi thought of Ibn Arabi, especially after the latter's death. For more, see Hirtenstein (1999).

¹³⁹ *Ulama* is the plural for the word *Alem* which refers in Arabic to a religious scholar. According to Abdallah Saeed and Hassan Saeed (2004: 29): "The 'official' *ulama* retained a watchful eye on behalf of the state to monitor what people believed, and thus became the guardians of 'orthodoxy'."

¹⁴⁰ There is a breadth of scholarly works that have been produced on the complex history of Sufism and the conflictual relationship with Orthodox followers of Islam. I can only cite relevant studies such as: Jonathan Porter Berkey (2003), B. G. Martin (1976), Winston E. Waugh (2005) Ayman Shihadeh (2007) and Mark Sedgwick (2000).

¹⁴¹ In the 16th century, according to Sharify-Funk and Dickson (2014: 132), the Ottoman elite decided to build a mosque next to Ibn Arabi's cemetery. Additionally, a *fatwa* was released by the Ottomans which decreed that the works of Ibn Arabi were officially allowed to be studied. These two important events have fostered "a renewed public recognition of Ibn al-'Arabi." See Meena Sharify-Funk and William Dickson (2014).

[...] virulent attacks reached a peak in the work of a fourteenth-century Damascene writer, Ibn Taymiyya: his mission was to root out all heresy in the form of Shi'ism, the Sufi orders and the cult of saints, whereby people visited tombs and prayed for intercession. He called the supporters of Ibn 'Arabī the 'unificationists' (*ittihādiyyūn*), and wrote polemical works attacking his followers. (1999: 240)

Hirtenstein further adds that in 14th century Egypt, the works of Ibn Arabi were deemed heretical. And even more recently, in the late 20th century, the Egyptian government has prohibited the works of Ibn Arabi.¹⁴² While it is true that many Sufis like Ibn have been persecuted or deemed heretic, it would be reductive to think of Sufism, its principles, and its movements as simply a group of people opposing Islamic orthodoxy. In this respect Yannis Toussulis (2010: 37) argues that “Sufism offered an approach that sometimes melded with – and sometimes clashed with – Islamic legalism and literalism. This sometimes compatible and sometimes ambivalent relationship continues to this day.”

- **The Names of God**

Ibn Arabi's Sufi thought is guided by and revolves around the names of God.¹⁴³ The Sufi philosopher's view on the names of God is relevant to my analysis of the texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie since it will allow me to establish the relation between the symbols in the three authors' texts and the Sacred. As clarified in the introduction to this thesis, the four symbols that I will be exploring: the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light” are closely interlinked with the names of God: The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light.

It is therefore essential to clarify at this stage the centrality of the language of symbols in Ibn Arabi's Sufi works, particularly in relation to the names of God. Nasr notes that:

¹⁴² For more details on the reception of Ibn Arabi, see Hirtenstein (1999).

¹⁴³ For a comprehensive study of the significance of the Names of God in Ibn Arabi's philosophy, see Chittick (1989) and (1998).

Sufi metaphysics has used several symbolic languages to express the truths with which it is concerned, including symbols connected to light, to the features of the human face, and to love, but most of all it has relied on the revelation by God in the Quran of His Names and Qualities. (2007: 36)

The names of God form a sort of an intermediary between the Sacred and the Sufi spiritual seeker for it is through the names of God that Sufis gain access to the Sacred realm. Nasr (2007: 36) writes: “it is through the Names of God – the sacred Names revealed by God in the Quran concerning Himself – that men and women are able to return to God and to realize who they really are.”

The names of God that Ibn Arabi symbolically draws from find their source in the Qur'an. Tracing the source of these names to the Qur'an helps clarify the sacred dimension of the symbolic associations that I will explore in Chapters IV and V. At the heart of the Qur'an are the recurrent references to the names of God which are also known as the most beautiful names. Their number, as previously mentioned, amounts to ninety-nine. Morris explains how:

These manifold names, reflecting their centrality in the Qur'an, became a central topic and inspiration in all subsequent traditions of Islamic theology and spirituality. Indeed, the very goal of human existence is portrayed in the Qur'an, in repeated accounts of Adam's creation and his inspired 'knowledge of the Names,' as the gradual discovery and manifestation of the full range of attributes expressed in the divine names. (2007: 90)

For example, in *sura Al-Hashr (Exile)* there is a reference to the Most Beautiful names of God:

He is Allah, than whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb, Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him). He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in heavens and the earth glorifieth Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. (59: 23-24)

Due to the specific focus of this thesis on the three names of God, The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light, it is relevant to cite some of the verses that

refer to these names and that have inspired Ibn Arabi's symbolic philosophy. In *sura Al-Hadid (Iron)*, God is referred to as "He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and He is the Knower of all things" (57: 3). In *sura An-Noor, (The Light)*, God is defined as The Manifest: "On that Day God will pay them their just due, and they will know that God, He is the Manifest Truth" (24: 25) and as The Light: "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (24: 35).

Ibn Arabi makes direct mention to the names of God, The Hidden and The Manifest, in his works. In Ibn Arabi's words (2000: 30): "How can I know You when You are the inwardly Hidden who is not known? How can I not know You when You are the outwardly Manifest who make Yourself known to me in everything?" For Ibn Arabi, God is The Hidden, yet the spiritual seeker searches for His manifest signs. God is both The Hidden and The Manifest for He discloses Himself to the hearts of those who seek His Sacred realm.

Before exploring Ibn Arabi's understanding of the names of God and their connection to the Sacred, I will clarify the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) since it provides the theoretical and philosophical framework upon which the names of God are predicated. In purely legalistic and orthodox terms, God is transcendent. Therefore a knowledge of the Sacred is limited to the confines of Islamic laws and the Prophetic tradition. From Ibn Arabi's Sufi point of view, God manifests Himself to the heart of the seeker, thus there is not a separation between the Sacred being and His creatures. Hence the meaning of the expression, unity of being, which designates such a closeness between the Sacred and those who seek the knowledge of the Sacred's being.

Etymologically, *wujūd* is both synonymous with existence and finding (Aladdin 2012: 5). Furthermore, the meaning of *wujūd* is linked by Sufis to the

feeling of ecstasy which translates as *wajd*. For Ibn Arabi, the spiritual feeling of ecstasy that enables the Sufi seeker to attain the Sacred is at the same time a finding of God which consists in attaining the unity of being. As such, “the awareness of the Real in ecstasy”, according to Ibn Arabi (Aladdin 2012: 15), is what allows the seeker to “possess the finding of the Real in it.” What makes the link between *wujūd* as finding and existence and *wajd* as ecstasy possible are the names of God for these are the site where the unity of being is achieved. Such a unity of being is experienced by the spiritual seeker in different forms owing to the diversity of the names of God. In Ibn Arabi’s (Aladdin 2012: 16) words: “The finding of the Real in ecstasy is diverse among the finders because of the property of the divine names.”

The meaning of *wujūd*, although it translates in English as being, its existential meaning is interpreted by Ibn Arabi in relation to finding. The Sacred exists as being because He is found and known: “At the end of the Path only God is present, is found. Thus, *wahdat al-wujūd* is not simply unity of being, but also the unity of existentialization and the perception of this act” (Schimmel 1975: 267). The concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*, in Ibn Arabi’s philosophy, paradoxically negates the transcendence of God while affirming it. *Wahdat al-wujūd* is about finding God who discloses or manifests Himself to those who seek His knowledge. *Wahdat al-wujūd* also affirms the idea that the very essence of God’s being cannot be known nor attained. As Schimmel put it:

In Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought a transcendence across categories [...] is maintained. God is above all qualities [...] and He manifests Himself only by means of the names, not by His essence. On the plane of essence, He is inconceivable (transcending concepts) and nonexperiential. (1975: 257)

In this regard, God is both known and unknown, both hidden and manifest. God is known through His names but this does not mean that His essence can be reached.

God's essence is hidden, yet it is disclosed through spiritual "openings" as will be explored further in the ensuing section.

According to Marietta Stepaniants (1994: 16), Ibn Arabi's theorising of *wahdat al-wujūd* can be understood in relation to "three levels: the Absolute, the Divine names (archetypes), and the phenomenal world." The Absolute is the essence of God, the phenomenal world is the "created world" and the names constitute the "intermediate" between the two (Stepaniants 1994: 17-18). In Ibn Arabi's words:

[the Absolute] is that which possesses existence by itself, i.e, that which is existent per se in its very essence. The existence of this thing cannot come from non-Being; on the contrary, it is the absolute Being having no other source than itself. (Izutsu 1984: 27)

It is through His names that the Absolute Sacred is manifested in the phenomenal world. The Sacred, while His essence is transcendental, He reveals Himself through His names. As Stepaniants puts it:

The Divine Names are the revelation of God in the nonmanifest world of mystery (*'ālam al-ghayb*) while the phenomenal world is a manifestation of the Divine Being in the world of testimony (*'ālam al-shahāda*), of objective perception. The Real Absolute Being is God; the world is the manifestation of His Essence. The term *wahdat al-wujūd* indicates both the transcendence and immanence of the Absolute Being as regards the phenomenal world. (1994: 19)

Hence, Ibn Arabi departs from the purely legalistic interpretation of the Sacred which puts primacy on the transcendence of God. *Wahdat al-wujūd* conveys the Sufi thrust of Ibn Arabi's philosophy since he stresses the spiritual aspect of the knowledge of the Sacred.¹⁴⁴ God manifests Himself through His names, despite His hidden transcendence.

¹⁴⁴ Chittick (1998: xvi) observes that Ibn Arabi's Sufi thought, in particular his interpretation of the knowledge of God has attracted negative reactions: "One traditional criticism of Ibn al-'Arabī has to do with his meddling in affairs that are not accessible to human knowledge. A good body of Islamic learning focuses on the present, the practical [...] for establishing individual and social equilibrium vis-a-vis God [...] This sort of knowledge is codified primarily in the Shariah." In a similar vein, Bakri Aladdin (2012: 3) notes that amongst the harshest attacks on Ibn Arabi's *wahdat al-wujūd* were launched by the 14th century Muslim scholar Ibn Taymiyyah. Ibn Taymiyyah's condemns Ibn Arabi on pantheistic grounds that form the "basis of a materialistic" association between God and the created world (Aladdin 2012: 3). See Aladdin (2012).

Chittick (1989: 34) argues that in Ibn Arabi's philosophy the attributes or names of God "provide the only means to gain knowledge of God and the cosmos." God is One in Islam, but within this unity lies the multiplicity of attributes or names. Chittick (1989: 35) explains that such "plurality in the Divinity," in Ibn Arabi's Sufi thought refers to "relationships, attributions, ascriptions, or corrections (*nisab, idafat*) that are envisaged between God and the cosmos." In Ibn Arabi's words:

When [God] sent His messengers, one of the things He sent with them because of those relationships were the names by which He is named for the sake of His creatures. These names allow us to understand that they denote (*dalāla*) both His Essence and an intelligible quality (*amr ma'qūl*) which has no entity in existence. But the property of the effect (*athar*) and reality manifest within the cosmos belongs to the quality. Examples of these intelligible qualities include creation, provision, gain, loss, bringing into existence, specification, strengthening, domination, severity, gentleness, descent, attraction, love, hate, nearness, distance, reverence, and contempt. (Chittick 1989: 35)

For Ibn Arabi, the multiplicity of the names of God point to the multiplicity of attributes that belong to God. However, this should not be confused with the multiplicity of God Himself. As Ibn Arabi puts it:

The divine names allow us to understand many realities of obvious diversity (*ikhtilāf*). The names are attributed only, to God, for He is the object named by them, but He does not become multiple (*takaththur*) through them. If they were ontological qualities (*umūr wujūdiyya*) subsisting within Him, they would make Him multiple. (Chittick 1989: 35-36)

The multiplicity of the names of God also indicate the multiple manifestations of the Sacred. In this regard, Ibn Arabi (Chittick 2005a: 29) stresses "the endless divine self-disclosures that fill the universe, the infinite faces of God that gaze upon the creatures."

The names of God, in Ibn Arabi's view, are attributes that enable the seeker to achieve knowledge of the Sacred. This knowledge is not a knowledge of the essence of God. For Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1998: xviii), God's essence cannot be defined nor known for it "is inaccessible and unknowable to us in itself." It is rather

a knowledge of the relations that are made possible through the names. Chittick (1998: xviii) takes the example of the Name Mercy which although cannot be known in essential terms it indicates the attributes of both mercy and wrath which are attributes of God and hence designate “the reality called ‘God’ that to some degree is accessible to our understanding.”

Thus, Ibn Arabi stresses the relational aspect of the names of God rather than their essentialist nature. As Chittick (1998: 39) puts it: “the names themselves have no independent existence, since they are simply words that designate relations.” Ibn Arabi’s interpretation of *wahdat al-wujūd* and his non-essentialist theorising of the names of God is key to my understanding of the Sacred in this thesis. Indeed, one of the findings of this thesis consists in determining the symbolic and ontological underpinnings of the Sacred. My later analysis of the symbolic expressions and ontological experiences of the Sacred in Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts underscores the relational aspect of the Sacred rather than its essentialist nature. Hence, what my reading of the symbolic connections between the Sacred in the three authors’ texts and the names of God – The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light – aims to achieve is an understanding the concept of the Sacred through its symbolic and ontological relations instead of defining it in essentialist terms.

iii. Symbols of the Sacred in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi Philosophy

In this thesis, I examine the textual symbolism of the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, “light” and “darkness” in Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s selected works and determine how they are intrinsically connected with the Sacred. Chapter IV analyses the Sacred aspect of the journey, the “hidden” and the “openings” in *Vaste est la prison*, *L’Enfant de sable* and *The Satanic Verses*. Chapter V presents a

hermeneutic explanation of the journey in *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *Shalimar the Clown* in relation to the symbols of “darkness” and “light”. Before embarking on a hermeneutic explanation of the selected corpus, it is essential to examine how in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi works, the symbols of the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, the “light” and “darkness” all relate to the Sacred. This step will lay the ground for understanding the sacred aspect of the symbols with which Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie engage.

- **The Journey: A Symbol of the Sacred**

In this section, I define the etymological meaning of the journey in the Qur’an and provide a brief overview of the Sacred journey of the Prophet Muhammad. I then elucidate the meaning of the journey in Sufism. Finally, I will explain how this symbol permeates the Sufi works of Ibn Arabi. Presenting this conceptual context to the meaning of the journey will help clarify the symbolic connections that will be established in Chapters IV, V and VI between the many journeys, the Sacred and the Sufi Islamic tradition in the three authors’ corpus.

Before I explore the connection between the journey and the Sacred, it is firstly important at this stage to discuss how previous critics of Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts have interpreted the meaning of the journey within a postcolonial context. The journey in the three authors’ selected works has attracted a great deal of attention and has largely been explored from cultural, spatial and political angles, while my own reading will engage with a different aspect of the journey and will be situated within the Sufi philosophical context of Ibn Arabi as explored above.

In relation to Djébar's writing, Hiddleston argues that there is a link between the exilic position of Djébar, her narrative journeys and her search for Algeria. Hiddleston notes that Djébar's expatriation is central to an understanding of the Algerian author's preoccupation with subjectivity and with her homeland Algeria. She indicates that "Djébar's journey, through life and work" is reflected in the entirety of her oeuvre (2006: 13). Such a statement reveals the author's grappling with the question of identity and subjectivity. In Hiddleston's view (2006: 1), Djébar's journey "out of Algeria" is displayed through the "movement" of her writing thus testifying to the author's resistance to "enclosure within a secure set of border or a defined locus of identification." Djébar's quest entails, as Hiddleston puts it, the latter's "discovery of Algeria's singular plurality, and ultimately to an ongoing preoccupation with its loss" (2006: 4-5). Novels such as *Vaste est la prison* and *Loin de Médine* thus represent Djébar's "quest" for a lost homeland (Hiddleston 2006: 1). In Hiddleston's view, "Djébar's journey" reflects the author's resistance to a fixed understanding of subjectivity which can be read as "a movement through a series of different understandings of subjectivity, while noting that this movement is not a steady and unidirectional unfolding" (2006: 11). In this sense, Djébar's journey back in history in *Loin de Médine* "draws attention to the power and agency of Islamic women in the past while suggesting that their contingent experiences escape our knowledge in the present" (Hiddleston 2006: 8). Similarly, *Vaste est la prison* which revolves around the lives of women, who are in constant movement, highlights the significance of their "unique and singular experiences of evasion and flight" which testify to their "resistance to containment" (Hiddleston 2006: 97). Taking the example of the motif of the fugitive in *Vaste est la prison*, Hiddleston argues that the:

women of Djébar's narrative share not a fixed position but the experience of evasion, as they question the notion of a secure home in favour of personal reinvention. Feminine identity is not rooted in a specific place but is endlessly mobile and subject to renewal. Characters derive a sense of self not from habitation and belonging but precisely from their ability to break away from home and roots. (2006: 100)

What transpires from Hiddleston's argument is that the geographical displacement of Djébar as an author is interrelated with her quest for a lost homeland and with the inscription of the subjectivity of her female characters and historical figures within the movement of constant journeying.

In a similar line of thought, Orlando (1999: 6) also describes Djébar's journey out of Algeria, noting that the Algerian author "preferred exile to the violence of patriarchal and religious fanatical regimes." The exilic position of Djébar has enabled her, in Orlando's view (1999: 8), to seek new ways of formulating her identity, an identity that "for centuries [has] been hindered both by colonial, Orientalizing notions of exoticism and by restrictive Muslim laws that have left women with little voice." The journey of Djébar out of Algeria and of her wandering female characters is an empowering expression and experience that results in establishing a feminist agency. As Orlando (1999: 13) puts it, "Djébar writes to create a new space of active agency for herself and all the women of Algeria who have been effaced from history through patriarchal discourse, fundamentalist traditionalism and French colonialism."

In relation to Ben Jelloun, Orlando (1999: 76) argues that *L'Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée* encapsulate the "nomadic journey" of the Moroccan author and of his central character Ahmed/Zahra. While Ben Jelloun straddles two languages and two cultures, his character Ahmed/Zahra is in constant quest of his/her identity. In Orlando's view (1999: 76), the journey of the author creates "a space of positive

agency” which is culturally and linguistically posited between “literary practices from both the West and the Maghreb.” Orlando describes the nomadic space in Ben Jelloun’s texts as:

That place [which] is an – Other space that is constructed from exile, difference, and subversion. Within it, Ben Jelloun draws a map he uses to navigate and travel beyond the limits of stereotyped identity in order to reach a place of imperceptibility – the open, smooth, plane of all possibilities. (1999: 76)

Both novels *L’Enfant de sable* and *La nuit sacrée*, according to Orlando (1999: 78), represent Ahmed/Zahra’s “search for her identity,” “sexuality”, and “femininity”, a search anchored “in the in-between of exile.” In this sense, Orlando argues that Ben Jelloun’s novels explore “the painful struggle of one woman” and her “quest to establish her own subjectivity” (1999: 78).

Likewise, in an earlier reading Lowe situates her reading of Ahmed/Zahra’s journey in *L’Enfant de sable* within a postcolonial theoretical framework. Lowe (1993: 45) remarks that the “central protagonist’s ‘journey’ – his/her literal and figurative shuttling between places” is an allegory of “the contradictory formations of the postcolonial subject between cultures.” Exploring the narrative strategies and characterisation in *L’Enfant de sable*, Lowe (1993: 43) argues that the text of Ben Jelloun is emblematic of what she termed “literary nomadics.” She interprets the “nomadic movements” in Ben Jelloun’s text as “strategies for imagining resistance to the logics of cultural imperialism” and “cultural domination” (1993: 45). In this regard, Ahmed/Zahra’s “undetermined wandering from identity to identity” emblematises a nomadic “strategy for resisting the fixed formations of either fixed masculine or feminine subjectivities, and allegorically, the overdetermined opposition of colonial rule and nativist reaction” (Lowe 1993: 57).

In Lowe's view, the journey of Ahmed/Zahra is reflected in the narrative itself, demonstrating that the narrative structure in *L'Enfant de sable* parallels a postcolonial "nomadic" space where "one can travel to any point, through a variety of routes, by a variety of means" (1993: 46-47). Moreover, Lowe indicates that the storyline which splits into fragmented stories narrated by several voices mirrors a "nomadic wandering": "there is no coherent, consistent narrator who presents a stable chronology of events, rather, the narrative of *L'Enfant de sable* is continually interrupted and problematized" (1993: 57).

In the same way that Hiddleston, Orlando and Lowe explored the postcolonial aspect of the journey in Djébar's and Ben Jelloun's writing, Reif-Hüsler and Rushdie himself examine the journey from a similar theoretical angle. In addition to the connection between the journey and the question of identity that Hiddleston, Orlando and Lowe have highlighted, Reif-Hüsler and Rushdie underscored the question of transgression. Reif-Hüsler (1999: 274) describes Gibreel and Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses* as "travellers between cultures" who experience a transformation following their fall from the plane. In Reif-Hüsler's view (1999: 273), the postcolonial "borderland experiences" of both Gibreel and Chamcha correspond to "imaginary transgressions." Here the journey of the two protagonists of *The Satanic Verses* is read as a crossing of temporal and spatial borders. On the one hand, temporal crossing refers to "imaginative constructions" of history and to the subversion of its "fictive continuity" (Reif-Hüsler 277-278). On the other hand, spatial crossing of borders is correlated with a cultural understanding of identity in the sense that movement of "transition and translation" is intersected with a subjectivity which is "in a remarkable state of flux" (Reif-Hüsler 1999: 279).

In *Step Across This Line*, Rushdie establishes a link between the journey and transgression, explaining that his “literary project” revolves around “a journey [which] involves a form of shifting and self-translation” (2002: 98). Rushdie (2002: 97) compares his literary endeavour to a “crossing of borders, of language, geography, and culture; the examination of the permeable frontier between the world of things and deeds and the world of imagination.” For Rushdie, writing corresponds to a journey where the artist faces boundaries and endeavours to transgress them. In his own words:

In all quests the voyager is confronted by terrifying guardians of territory [...] But the voyager must refuse the other’s definition of the boundary, must transgress against the limits of what fear prescribes. He steps across that line. (2002: 76)

Writing is thus a journey across boundaries predicated on “the idea of overcoming, of breaking down the boundaries that hold us in and surpassing the limits of our own natures” (Rushdie 2002: 77). Furthermore, Rushdie (2002: 82) links his status as migrant with the “creative” search for new forms of writing, with the crossing of boundaries that consist in being “severed from [one’s] roots”, and with the experience of “alienation”.

The readings examined thus far clearly indicate the connection between the journey in the three authors’ writing and the question of identity. Such a connection is examined from several angles such as the cultural, political, spatial and temporal ones within the broader context of postcolonial theory. My reading of the journey establishes its meaning as a symbol of the Sacred. Thus, I provide a different interpretation of the journey which explores its anchoring in the Sufi Islamic tradition. I therefore draw from Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy which allows me to gain a better understanding of the Sufi meaning of the journey in Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts.

Etymologically the meaning of the journey in the Qur'an is intersected with four key expressions which are *sayr*, *safar*, *suluk* and *siyâha*. According to Morris (1996: 43) *sayr* which translates as "going" or "moving" is amongst "the most common terms for 'travelling' or 'journeying' in the Qur'an." Similarly, *safar* which means "journeying directly toward a goal" is another expression in the Qur'an that Ibn Arabi and Sufis have equated with "the spiritual journey" (Morris 1996: 45). Furthermore, *suluk* which is synonymous with "travelling a road" is frequently used in the Qur'an and it often refers to "God's active, and ultimately guiding role in the directions and destinies of human beings" (Morris 1996: 46). Finally, *siyâha* which translates as "wandering" and is less frequently used in the Qur'an is, as Morris (1996: 46) puts it, suggestive of the "spiritual" dimension of the journey that has inspired Ibn Arabi and Sufis alike.¹⁴⁵

Sufis in general, and Ibn Arabi in particular, have been inspired by the Prophet's Sacred journey¹⁴⁶ which is also known as the night journey.¹⁴⁷ For Sufis, the Prophet's ascent symbolises a spiritual journey towards God, the Sacred. The Prophet's journey is formed of two parts: the *Isra* and the *Mi'raj*. The *Isra* is when the Prophet journeyed from the *Masjid al Haram* in Mecca to *Masjid al-Aqsa* in Jerusalem. The *Mi'raj* is when the Prophet ascended to the heavens.¹⁴⁸ As expressed in *sura Al-Isra*:

Glory be to Him Who transported His servant by night from Masjid al-Haram to Masjid al-Aqsa, the environs of which We had blessed, so that We might show him some of Our signs. Surely He is All-Hearing, All Seeing. (17: 1)

¹⁴⁵ For a detailed analysis of the Quranic expressions related to the journey, see Morris (1996).

¹⁴⁶ In his treatise *Shajarat al-Kawn (The Cosmic Tree)*, Ibn Arabi provides his own description of the Prophet's Night Journey. See John Renard (1996).

¹⁴⁷ Numerous commentaries have been written about the Prophet's Night Journey. See for example Christiane J. Gruber and Frederick Stephen Colby (2010) and Brooke Olson Vuckovic (2005).

¹⁴⁸ For a detailed definition of the meanings of *Isra* and *Mi'raj*, see Ahmad (2000).

The Angel Gabriel is said to have accompanied the Prophet in both his *Isra* and *Mi'raj*.¹⁴⁹ In Chapter V of this thesis, I will stress the significance of the symbolic aspect of “night” in the three authors’ texts, since this temporal dimension has a close link to the nocturnal journey that the Prophet undertook.

The word Sufism which translates in Arabic as *tasawwuf* or *tariqa* literally denotes the meaning of the way or the path. Michel Chodkiewicz (1996: 71) clarifies that *tariqa* for Sufis is coterminous with “a road to perfection” and that the *salik* is the one “who sets out on the road.” A Sufi in this sense is someone who follows a sacred path and embarks on a spiritual journey. In his book, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam*, Eric Geoffroy (2010: 8) also explains how the Sufi “aspirant follows an inward journey that must lead him to climb the ladder of the universal hierarchy of Being.” A Sufi is therefore a spiritual seeker who embarks on a journey towards finding God; however, this journey is characterised by its inward nature as has previously been explained.

In a similar line of thought, Knysh explains that Sufis define the *tariqa* in terms of three stages. The first stage is the “complete and unconditional surrender of the seeker (*murīd*) to the will of God” (Knysh 2000: 301). The second stage is when “the wayfaer (*sālik*) is ready to embark on the path to God (*tarīqa*) per se” (Knysh 2000: 301). And the third stage is marked by the seeker’s access to “the ultimate Reality, or God (*haqīqa*)” (Knysh 2000: 301).

The journey is therefore a defining feature of Sufism. Qalandar Abdur-Rahman Siddiqi (1980: 7) indicates that “Sufism is seen and described by Sufis as a

¹⁴⁹ In the *hadith*, it is related that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet Muhammad and carried him on a *buraq* (an animal from paradise) to perform his journey. Nasr (1971:133) gives a summary of the nocturnal journey: “On a certain night, while in Mecca, the Prophet was taken to Jerusalem and there ascended through the heavens [...] to the Divine Presence itself. Accompanied by the Archangel Gabriel, who was his guide, the Prophet journeyed through all the worlds until he reached a limit when the Archangel refused to pass any further saying that if he were to proceed his wings would ‘burn’, implying that the final stage of the journey was beyond even the highest degree of manifestation.”

journey, or a series of journeys.” In this sense, Siddiqi (1980: 7) emphasises the movement of “finding, losing – and finding – the way” that characterises Sufism. The movement of the journey is marked by the search that the seeker embarks on and which consists in a continuous passage from finding God to losing oneself in God.

In relation to Ibn Arabi, amongst his works that have an explicit link to the Prophet’s night journey are *Kitab Al-Isra (The Night Journey)*, *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyah (Meccan Openings)* and *Kitāb al-Isfār (The Secrets of Voyaging)*. In these works, the reference to the journey of the Prophet symbolises a Sufi spiritual quest for the Sacred. For Ibn Arabi, the voyage towards the Sacred is a continuous process that entails a passage through several spiritual openings:

In reality we never cease voyaging from the moment we and our roots are originated, ad infinitum. Whenever a waystation appears to you, and you say that is the goal, another road opens up before you. You supply yourself with provisions for the road and take off. Whatever waystation you come upon, you may say: ‘This is my goal.’ But when you reach it, it is not long before you set out once more travelling. (2015: 43)

For Ibn Arabi, the spiritual voyage towards the Sacred differs from one seeker to another since “no two people ever follow the same path,” since “there are indeed as many paths as there are travellers” (Hakim 2016: 72). In this sense, the journey symbolises a Sufi spiritual quest for the Sacred. Nasr (1971: 133) notes that the “nocturnal journey” of the Prophet encapsulates the “prototype of the spiritual journey of the Sufi.”

As the title of his book *Kitab Al-Isra (The Night Journey)* testifies, Ibn Arabi reveals that he experienced an ascent that mirrors that of the Prophet Muhammad. Written as an autobiography, *Kitab Al-Isra* is centrally based on the symbol of the journey. Morris (1987: 631-632) explains that *Kitab Al-Isra* has “an incredibly dense and allusive symbolic vocabulary” where Ibn Arabi describes his journey “through the heavenly spheres and the higher revelatory stages of the *Mi’raj*.” Morris (1987:

632) explains that the journey acts “primarily as a framework for evoking and clarifying various aspects of the author’s own spiritual achievement, as they mirror the even loftier rank of the Prophet.”

Chapter 367 of *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyah* (*Meccan Openings*) is another illustrative example that provides a detailed account of Ibn Arabi’s journey, which again mirrors the Prophet’s ascent through the heavens. In Ibn Arabi’s words:

In this night journey I gained the meanings of all the divine names. I saw that they all go back to a single Named Object and a Single Entity. That Named Object was what I was witnessing, and that Entity was my own existence. So, my journey had been only in myself. (Chittick 2005a: 25)

In this quotation, Ibn Arabi shows how his night journey like that of the Prophet enabled him to gain access to the Sacred, the “Single Entity.” The quest for the Sacred as Ibn Arabi describes it, is an inner experience that enables the seeker to receive visions of a Sacred realm. When I examine later the symbols of the “hidden”, the “openings”, “light” and “darkness”, I will stress the link that Ibn Arabi establishes between the Sufi journey and what he referred to in the quotation above as “divine names.” What I will emphasise is how Ibn Arabi symbolically connects the Sufi journey to the Sacred names of God.

In *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyah*, Ibn Arabi begins his journey with a passage through the natural elements of the world.¹⁵⁰ Following this passage through the physical world, Ibn Arabi ascends to the first heaven where he encounters Adam. In the second and third heavens, Ibn Arabi encounters Jesus, John the Baptist and Joseph. In the fourth heaven, he encounters Idris, in the fifth Aaron and in the sixth Moses. In the seventh heaven, Ibn Arabi meets Abraham before ascending above the heavens and journeying into what is referred to in the Qur’an as the Lotus-Tree of the

¹⁵⁰ Morris (1987: 644) lists these as earth, water, air and fire.

Limit (53: 14).¹⁵¹ In the last stage of his journey Ibn Arabi, like the Prophet, reaches spiritual illumination: “Then I was enveloped by the divine light until all of me became Light, and a robe of honor was bestowed upon me the likes of which I had never seen” (Morris 1988: 70). In this stage of his journey, Ibn Arabi confesses that he has “attained in this nocturnal journey the inner realities” that God bestowed upon him and that “the treasures of this station were opened up to him” (Morris 1987: 72-73). Like the Sacred journey of the Prophet Muhammad, the journey of Ibn Arabi symbolises a passage through several stages that lead to God, the Sacred.

Ibn Arabi’s *Kitāb al-Isfār (The Secrets of Voyaging)* revolves around Ibn Arabi’s spiritual journey, the Prophet Muhammad’s night journey and the journeys of seven Prophets mentioned in the Qur’an.¹⁵² In the Prologue to *Kitāb al-Isfār*, Ibn Arabi (2015: 40 original emphasis) defines three different types of the journey: “They are the voyage *from* Him, the voyage *to* Him and the voyage *in* Him.” Prophets and Sufi seekers, in Ibn Arabi’s view (2015: 46 original emphasis), are those who are “made to voyage *by* Him *in* Him.” The “voyage” or journey in Him, in reference to God here, allows Prophets and Sufis to experience what Ibn Arabi (2015: 47) called “spiritual openings.”¹⁵³

In the same way that the night journey of the Prophet Muhammad is formed of several stages, the journey of Ibn Arabi in his *Al-Futuhat Al-Makkiyah* forms a passage from one stage to another. This aspect is relevant to the discussion of the journey and the Sacred in Chapters IV and V where I demonstrate how the journeys

¹⁵¹ In each of these heavenly encounters, Ibn Arabi has conversations with the Prophets or receives advice from them. Central Qur’anic concepts are elucidated as well as some Qur’anic verses being explained and clarified. For full details of Ibn Arabi’s ascent and his encounters with the Prophets, see Morris (1987).

¹⁵² These are Adam, Idris, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Joseph and Moses.

¹⁵³ Contrary to those whose journey is *in* God, there are those whose “voyage from Him,” such as the devil and the sinners, and those whose “voyage is *to* God” such as those who separate their own reality for the reality of God. See Ibn Arabi (2015). For an explanation of these different categories of the journey, see Hirtenstein (1999).

of Isma in *Vaste est la prison*, of the narrators in *L'Enfant de sable*, of Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses*, of the female narrator in *Loin de Médine*, of Zahra in *La Nuit sacrée* and India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown* are also formed of several stages.

- **The Opening of the Heart**

In this section I will clarify the Sufi symbolic meaning of the heart and I will explain its intersection with the journey and the openings. The meaning of the heart can be interpreted in varying ways and one possible interpretation would be the symbolic link between the heart and love in medieval European literature and Romantic literature. In this regard, Ole Martin Høystad states that:

In the middle ages the symbolic heart gradually separates off from the physical. Heart and love become one [...] the heart is not the organ of love in a physical sense but a symbol and a synonym for love. Love is not bound by the heart-beat. It belongs to the non-physical heart with which it is identical. (2007: 126)

The heart is therefore a symbol of love rather than a purely physical organ. The strong passionate love between Isma and her Beloved in *Vaste est la prison* or between Shalimar and Boonyi in *Shalimar the Clown* can be explored in relation to European Romantic literary works such as, for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's well-known novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse* where the love bond between the protagonists Julie and Saint Preux is emblematic of Romantic love. However, the reading I propose of love, and particularly of the heart, in both novels is situated within the Sufi Islamic heritage. I will interpret the heart within a chain of signification that encompasses the journey and the openings. This chain of signification will in turn reveal the intersection between the heart and the Sacred.

Earlier in this chapter I indicated that both in the Qur'an and in Ibn Arabi's philosophy God is referred to as The Manifest. For Ibn Arabi, the seeker who

embarks on a spiritual journey can gain access to The Manifest through his or her heart. The journey in this sense is an opening of the heart to the Sacred. Thus, the heart when read from a Sufi perspective does not literally refer to a physiological organ in a human's body but carries a symbolic meaning.

The symbolic meaning of the heart occupies a central place in the Sufi works of Ibn Arabi.¹⁵⁴ For Ibn Arabi the heart is the symbolic site *par excellence* of spiritual openings. The heart is where God as The Manifest manifests Himself to the seeker.¹⁵⁵ As Ibn Arabi puts it:

the heart of the servant which contains God and where nothing else enters, under any aspect belonging to worldly realities, so that the heart being empty (*khali*) or free of every worldly reality, God manifests Himself there with His Being. (Twinch 1999: 47)

The opening of the seeker's heart signifies a spiritual encounter with the Sacred which is detached from what Ibn Arabi called "worldly realities." The journey towards The Manifest is therefore accompanied with an opening of the heart to spiritual realities. "Whoever voyages to the world of his heart," Ibn Arabi writes (2015: 84), "sees the secret of life, which is its spirit." Ibn Arabi's emphasis on the significance of the heart is inspired by the Qur'anic verse that reads: "Lo! Therein verily is a reminder for him who hath a heart, or giveth ear with full intelligence" (50:37).

What characterises the heart as a symbol of opening is its power to give access to what is hidden, to the secret world of the Sacred. Hume (2007: 19)

¹⁵⁴ Amongst the publications by the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society which can be cited here is a 1996 collection of papers entitled *The Journey of the Heart*. This collection pays particular attention to Ibn Arabi's treatment of the key Sufi concept the heart. See Aaron Cass (1996), Chodkiewicz (1996) and Morris (1996).

¹⁵⁵ According to Seyed Safavi (2009), union with God is a defining feature of Sufism. See Safavi (2009).

explains that the heart – which translates as *qalb*,¹⁵⁶ in Arabic – “is said to be one of the centres of ‘mystic physiology’” as it produces “true knowledge.” In a similar vein, Corbin (1969: 222) indicates that “the power of the heart is a secret force or energy (*quwwat khafiya*) which perceives divine realities.” Corbin (1969: 221) indicates that it is through the heart (*qalb*) that the seeker gains “comprehensive intuition, the gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of God and the divine mysteries.”

As the heart of the wayfarer allows access to the sacred realm of God, it opens up into what is hidden. As Ibn Arabi puts it (Chittick 1998: 111) “A mystery has appeared to you that has long been kept secret.” The opening of the heart of the Sufi seeker signifies the acquisition of the knowledge of God, who is both The Hidden and The Manifest. The heart enables the seeker to access a reality where the hidden can be seen and where spiritual meanings are physically perceived. The heart, in Corbin’s words (1969: 218) “gives existence to the Improbable” and “has the specific power to cause the impossible to exist.” Spiritual openings are therefore synonymous with “the apparition of an outward, extra-psychic reality” (Corbin 1969: 223). It is in this light that I read Isma’s journey in *Vaste est la prison* as an opening of her heart. In Chapter IV, I will explore the way Isma’s heart enables the latter to enter a world where her hidden Beloved can be seen.

The symbolic meaning of the heart in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy is closely interlinked with the meanings of paradise and garden. According to Ibn Arabi, the Sufi aspirant’s search for his or her inner heart is coterminous with a quest for an inner garden which is also synonymous with paradise. As Ibn Arabi puts it:

¹⁵⁶ The root verb of the word “*qalb*” is “*qlb*” and the present tense is “*taqallub*”. Both the root verb and the present tense, in Sells’ view (1984: 293), indicate the meaning of change: “the heart that is receptive of every form is in a state of perpetual transformation (*taqallub*).” See Sells (1984).

Know, my brother – may God guide and protect you with His mercy – that the Garden which is attained by those who are among its people in the other world is (already) visible *today* with respect to its place, through not its form. So you are *in* the Garden, transformed, in whatever state you happen to be, but you don't *know* you are in it. (Chodkiewicz 2002: 103; emphasis in original.)

In Ibn Arabi's citation, he refers to the heart as a "garden" that seekers attain when they have reached spiritual illumination. So in this sense, the heart like a "garden" or "paradise" is hidden from view, yet one needs constant journeying in order to find it and thence attain spiritual illumination.

In another often-quoted citation, Ibn Arabi poetically compares the heart to a garden:

Wonder,
A garden among the flames!
My heart can take on any form:
A meadow for gazelles,
A cloister for monks,
For the idols, sacred ground,
Ka'bah for the circling pilgrim,
The tables of Torah,
The scrolls of the Quran.
My creed is love;
Wherever its caravan turns along the way,
That is my belief,
My faith. (Nasr 2007a: 95)

Here again, Ibn Arabi establishes a connection between the heart of the seeker and the garden. The seeker in his or her quest for spiritual union with the Sacred, opens his or her heart which takes different forms depending on the different stages he or she passes through and the myriad visions he or she receives. Commenting on Ibn Arabi's poem cited above, Nasr observes that:

In the heart, the spiritual man lives in intimacy with God, with the Origin of all those theophanies whose outward manifestations constitute all the beauty that is reflected in the world around us. He lives in that inner garden, that inner paradise, constantly aware of the ubiquitous Gardener. (2007a: 95)

The symbolic link between the heart, garden, and paradise reinforces the Sufi understanding of the heart as an opening that leads to the Sacred. By seeking one's inner heart, or garden, one uncovers a Sacred and secret paradise. In Nasr's words:

one reaches the inner heart, where God as the All-Merciful resides, and by penetration into the heart-center, man moves beyond the realm of outwardness and the domain of individual existence to reach the abode of inwardness and the universal order. (2007: 95)

The journey of the Sufi seeker in this sense follows a movement from the outer visible world to the inner invisible heart which is the very site where the Sacred can be encountered. Seen in this light, I interpret the journey of India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown* as a symbolic quest for her inner heart. This symbolic dimension of the heart in Rushdie's text will be explored in Chapter V.

Thus far, I have clarified the significance of the meaning of the heart by underscoring its symbolic connection to the journey and the openings in Ibn Arabi's Sufi philosophy. When interpreting all three expressions of the heart, the openings and the journey within a chain of signification, they acquire a symbolic relation to the Sacred. It is in this light that I will provide a hermeneutic reading of Isma's heart in *Vaste est la prison* and of India/Kashmira's heart in *Shalimar the Clown*. In Chapter IV, I will explain how the journey of Isma symbolises a journey through the opening of her heart. Hence, Isma's journey is intricately intertwined with the Sacred since her heart enables her to gain access to the hidden realm of her Beloved. Similarly, in Chapter V, I explore how India/Kashmira's heart has a spiritual power that allows her to enter the sacred realm of her hidden mother. In chapter VI, I will explore further the ontological realities that both Isma and India/Kashmira experience in the same way that a Sufi experiences the Sacred in a realm that belongs to a different order from the physical world.

- **The Opening of Doors**

In addition to the relation between the “openings” and the heart, I will analyse the connection between the “openings” and doors. This point is relevant to my discussion in Chapter IV of the opening of doors in *L’Enfant de sable* and of its connection to the Sacred. The door as an expression can be interpreted in varying ways and yield several layers of meanings. Ayad B. Rahamn devotes particular attention to the symbolic dimension of doors in Franz Kafka’s novels, arguing that they represent architectural elements that symbolise the intricacies of the self. In *The Castle*, the protagonist K encounters doors throughout his journey in search for Klamm, the head of the castle. According to Rahman (2015: 42), one of the doors that separates K from Klamm “generates memories or at least one important one that takes K back to his childhood.” Even though “Klamm may be a person, king or an autocrat,” Rahman writes (2015: 43), “he is a symbol of challenge, daring us to pursue roads less travelled and cut through the layers of our own insecurity.” In addition to this symbolic connection between doors and the self’s inner insecurities, Rahman establishes a connection between doors and repressed desire. Referring to Freud, Rahman (2015: 51) observes that one of the doors in Kafka’s *The Trial* is akin to a “door of compromise” in which the leading character K tries to repress his desire for three little girls he encountered.¹⁵⁷ In a very similar way to Rahman, I interpret the doors in Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable* as symbols. However, while Rahamn particularly highlights the psychological trait of these doors in Kafka’s oeuvre, my reading of doors in Ben Jelloun’s text is primarily concerned with their symbolic relation with the Sacred. I propose instead to interpret the doors as symbols of a journey through openings by drawing from Ibn Arabi’s Sufi thought.

¹⁵⁷ For a detailed study of the symbolic meaning of doors in Kafka’s novels, see Rahman (2015).

Ibn Arabi and Sufis alike employ the expression of doors in order to signify the inner revelations or “openings” that give access to the Sacred. The Sufi seeker in his or her quest for the Sacred knocks on doors that open when an experience of spiritual realisation takes place. For example, Al-Hallaj (Renard 1996: 250 original emphasis) frequently uses the “Arabic letter *ba* [which] represents the word *door* (*bab*), indicating the entries through which the traveller arrives at the innermost circle, within which the Truth (God) resides.” A *bab* (door) is a symbol that refers to the spiritual “openings” that the Sufi wayfarer encounters throughout his or her journey.

In a similar way, Ibn Arabi speaks of the way the Sufi wayfarer is in constant search of “openings” that allow him or her to access the realm of the Sacred. In Ibn Arabi’s words:

When the aspiring traveller clings to retreat and the remembrance of God’s names, when he empties his heart of reflective thoughts, and when he sits in poverty at the door of his Lord with nothing, then God will bestow upon him and give something of Him, the divine mysteries. (Chittick 2005a: 15)

The spiritual wayfarer, by undertaking a journey of inner retreat and knocking on the doors of God’s Sacred realm, is enabled to experience “openings” or revelations of the “divine mysteries.” In his definition of the meaning of opening in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi thought, Chittick also refers to the symbol of door:

a mode of gaining direct knowledge of God and of the unseen worlds without the intermediary of study, teacher or rational faculty. God “opens up” the heart to the infusion of knowledge. The word “opening” suggests that this type of knowledge comes to the aspirant suddenly after he had been waiting patiently at the door. (1989: xii)

The Sufi seeker embarks on a journey through “openings” whereby he or she symbolically knocks on doors that can lead to the knowledge of the Sacred.¹⁵⁸ According to Ibn Arabi, the spiritual aspirant encounters doors that once opened can enable him or her to access the Sacred. In Ibn Arabi’s words:

My heart clings to the door of the Divine Presence, waiting mindfully for what comes when the door is opened. My heart is poor and needy, empty of every knowledge [...] When something appears to the heart from behind that curtain, the heart hurries to obey. (Chittick 1989: xv)

The quest for the Sacred entails a knocking on doors which signify the visions that the seeker receives in his or her heart.

The word key like the word door is a symbol of “opening” in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy. Etymologically, “The word *miftāh* or ‘key’ is derived from the same root as the word *fath* or ‘opening’. Literally, a *miftāh* is the means whereby opening is achieved” (Chittick 1998: 244). When Ibn Arabi employs the word key or keys he speaks of the stages that the seeker of God has to pass through. The closer the seeker gets to know God, the more doors will be passed through and opened. Ibn Arabi writes:

There is a key, an opening, and something opened. When the opened thing is opened, that which had been veiled by it becomes manifest. So the key is your preparedness for learning and receiving knowledge, the opening is the teaching, and the opened thing is the door at which you come to a halt. (Chittick 1998: 244)

In Ibn Arabi’s view, the Sacred is veiled from the heart of the seeker. So when the seeker embarks on an inner journey he or she gains access to the knowledge of the Sacred. This access is symbolised by a gaining of keys and “opening” of doors. Such “opening” necessitates a spiritual preparedness and a devotion to God:

¹⁵⁸ For example Sadia Dehlvi speaks of Sufis’ opening and closing of doors of “bounty,” “hardships,” “dignity,” “humility,” “repose,” “striving,” “sleep,” “vigilance,” “wealth,” “poverty,” “worldly expectations,” and “preparation for the next world.” See Dehlvi (2010).

Once the preparedness is gained from God, the key is gained. There remains the opening that teaching may occur. Thus He says, *The All-Merciful – He taught the Koran, He created the human being, He taught him the clarification* (55:1-4). The teaching is identical with the opening. (Chittick 1998: 245; emphasis in original.)

In this light, the journey of the seeker is an inner journey that enables access to sacred knowledge.

In Chapter IV, I will examine this symbolic feature of the “opening” of doors in relation to Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable*. I will explain how the journey of the narrators in *L’Enfant de sable* resembles the stages of a spiritual journey and this through a multiplicity of doors. The doors are akin to “openings” that enable the narrators in *L’Enfant de sable* to gain access to the realm of the Sacred of Ahmed/Zahra.

- **Visionary Openings**

In addition to the symbolic meaning of doors, and of the heart, Ibn Arabi employs the symbolism of visions to translate the idea of spiritual “openings” into a “hidden” realm. Of course there are numerous ways of approaching the notion of visions in literature. Two obvious examples are Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In both works, there are journeys closely interlinked with visions and more particularly with visions of God. In his study entitled *Paradise Lost and The Divine Comedy: A Comparative Study*, Hitesh Parmar (2002: 136) argues that “According to Dante and Milton God is not only objective, dwelling in high heaven but subjective too, who dwells in the heart of the individual.” Parmar (2002: 143-144) indicates that Dante’s journey is an “inward journey” where visions of God are not perceived with “physical eyes because he is beyond the sense perception.” Visions of God here convey the idea that the Sacred, albeit of a transcendental

nature, can be accessed through inner visions. In a very similar way, I explore the visionary dimension of Gibreel's journey in *The Satanic Verses* and establish their link with the Sacred. Just as Parmar draws from the Christian mystical tradition appropriate to the critical and spiritual contexts that inspired the works of Dante and Milton, I situate my reading of Gibreel's visions within Ibn Arabi's Sufi thought.

In *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyah (Meccan Openings)*, Ibn Arabi extensively makes a direct reference to his visions as spiritual "openings" which he received while visiting Mecca. Ibn Arabi reveals that the knowledge and understanding contained in *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyah* were not gained by study or discursive reasoning, but are rather the result of a constant inner quest for the "hidden" Presence of God. The whole of *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyah*, in other words, represents a large series of revelations and "mystical visions" (Chittick 2005a: 14). Hence, the symbolic meaning of "openings" in Ibn Arabi's work is closely linked to visions. As will be demonstrated later with *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel's journey is predicated on a series of visions that enable him to access a "hidden" world. Likewise, it will be argued in Chapter IV that Isma in *Vaste est la prison* undertakes an inner journey whereby she receives visions of her bygone Beloved. Similarly, Chapter IV also examines the visions of Zahra in *La Nuit sacrée* and India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown*, arguing that they open up what I have termed in this thesis "intermediate worlds".

From a Sufi perspective, visions are "openings" into the Sacred in the sense that they give access to an incorporeal world and allow the Sufi seeker to perceive or see things and persons in corporeal forms. Visions, in Ibn Arabi's philosophy (Knysh 2012: 2), share the quality of dreams because they form "windows into the hidden mysteries of both this world and the next." Alluding to Ibn Arabi, Katz (2012: 187)

argues that visions are a passage into “the intermediary world of incorporeal archetypes that become, through the imaginative faculty, sensibly intelligible.” The visionary experience of the Sufi wayfarer is therefore an entrance into “an intermediate world between that of concrete phenomenal reality and pure intellectual abstraction” (Katz 2012: 187). This intermediate aspect of visions will form the basis of my ontological discussion of the symbols of the Sacred in Chapter VI. In this regard, I will analyse this co-existence between two separate worlds, that of the seen and physical world and that of the “hidden” and spiritual world in the selected corpus of the three authors.

Ibn Arabi and Sufis alike have drawn the symbolism of visions from the Prophet’s night journey,¹⁵⁹ which I have defined earlier in this chapter. During his ascent, the Prophet Muhammad is said to have seen God in the form of a youth greeting him:

The Messenger of God said: I saw my Lord in the most beautiful of forms. He said to me, ‘O Muhammad! Do you know what the Concourse on High is disputing about?’ I answered, ‘I do not know, Lord.’ And so He put His hand between my shoulders, and I felt its coolness between my breasts, and I learned all that is in heaven and on earth. (Ghaemmaghani 2012: 54)

The vision of the Prophet testifies to the latter’s “seeing” God in a corporeal form. In a Sufi context, references to visions as “dreams” or “eyesight” are symbolic of inner “openings” that allow the seeker to “see” the Sacred. For example, Ibn Arabi (Knysh 2012: 1) observes how “a dreaming individual is capable of seeing disembodied intelligible entities in the form of corporeal, sensory objects.” As will be shown later in this thesis, in *The Satanic Verses*, the journey through “openings” is symbolised by Gibreel’s visions. In Chapter IV, I will analyse the connection between these

¹⁵⁹ The accounts of the visionary encounters of the Prophet are known as *hadith al-ru’ya*. *Al-ru’ya* can be translated as visions in English. For a more detailed study of these accounts, see Omid Ghaemmaghani (2012).

visions and the Sacred by showing how Gibreel sees and speaks to his dead lover Rekha, to Mahound and to the mystical seer Ayesha. Similarly, in Djébar's *Loin de Médine*, I will explore the symbolic dimension of Aicha's vision. Although literally referred to as "eyesight", the vision of Aicha is intricately linked to a spiritual access to the "hidden". Likewise, with India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown*, her "eyesight" symbolically refers to her visionary "insight" which constitutes part of her journey towards the Sacred.

- **The Hidden Sacred**

So far I have determined that from a Sufi prism, the journey towards the Sacred as The Manifest entails "openings" that can be expressed through different symbols such as the heart, doors and visions. What will be established in Chapter IV is that there is a chain of signification between the the journey, the "openings" and the Sacred. Exploring this chain hermeneutically demonstrates the creative engagement between the texts of the three authors and the Sufi symbols. In addition to the symbolic meaning of "openings", I will analyse the relation between the journey, the "hidden" and the Sacred in the selected corpus.

I argued earlier that, for Sufis and Ibn Arabi alike, the spiritual journey involves a constant search for God who is The Manifest. In addition to the name The Manifest, God is also referred to as The Hidden. Sufi Islamic literature in general and Ibn Arabi's works in particular comprise innumerable descriptions of the Sufis' spiritual experiences of the "hidden" realm of God. In his writings, Ibn Arabi often evokes the Sacred names of God that are referred to in the Qur'anic verse: "He is the First and the Last and the Manifest and the Hidden" (57:3).

The definition of God in terms of his "hidden" Presence entails the fact that the journey of the seeker is based on a quest for an unseen reality. Indeed, Sufis often

speak about the “knowledge of mysteries (*‘ilm al asrar*) and knowledge of the Unseen (*‘ilm al ghayb*)” (Affifi 1979: 105-106). The unseen in Arabic is *ghayb* and can be traced back to the Qur’anic usage of the term: “The Qur’an refers to *ghayb*¹⁶⁰ and *ghayba* in thirty-six verses where *ghayba* is defined as the unseen whose mysteries are hidden from men” (Papan-Matin 2010: 121). Amongst the verses that directly mention the unseen or *ghayb* is *sura An-Namla (The Ant)*: “Say (O Muhammad): None in the heavens and the earth knoweth the Unseen save Allah; and they know not when they will be raised (again)” (27: 65). How does Ibn Arabi symbolically express the “hidden” nature of the Sacred?

In this section I will explore three key expressions: the Beloved, treasure and the mystery which Ibn Arabi uses in order to symbolise the hiddenness of The Hidden. In Chapter IV, I will pay particular attention to the symbolic meanings of the Beloved, treasure and the mystery, when analysing the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. In relation to Djébar’s *Vaste est la prison*, I will demonstrate the symbolic relation between the female narrator’s Beloved and The Hidden. My hermeneutic reading of *L’Enfant de sable* will examine how the narrative in Ben Jelloun’s text is coterminous with a journey towards the “hidden treasure.” Similarly, I will explore the way *The Satanic Verses* begins with a mystery, which invites a Sufi interpretation of the Sacred dimension of Gibreel’s journey.

Sufis’ works in general,¹⁶¹ and Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy in particular, are infused with references to God as the Beloved and to the spiritual seeker as the lover. The Sufi works of Ibn Arabi are heavily steeped in a symbolic terminology pertaining to the mystic’s passionate love towards God. For Ibn Arabi, the seeker is

¹⁶⁰ In the Qur’an, God as The Hidden is constantly referred to as the *ghayb* (the unseen). Ruqayya Khan (2008: 38) defines *ghayb* as “that which is hidden from human perception and cognition.” For Qur’anic references to *ghayb*, see Khan (2008).

¹⁶¹ For a discussion on love and heart in Sufism, see Marietta T. Stepaniants (1994).

the lover who embarks on a spiritual journey in search of God who is the “hidden” Beloved. According to Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 106), the “Beloved keeps Himself absent (*ghayba*) from the lover.” Such an absence of the Beloved incites the spiritual wayfarer to travel towards The Hidden. As Ibn Arabi puts it (Chittick 1989: 106): “For if the lover is truthful in his claim, while God tests him by the absence of his Beloved, then there will appear from the lover a movement of yearning to witness him.”

Sufis commonly use the word *ishq* which can be translated in English as love or passion. Indeed, Sufis express their passion for God, their longing for a transcendental unity with the Sacred Beloved. *Ishq* is a term evocative of the power of desire to unite with the Beloved and the intricacies of the heart that are concomitant with the Sufis’ thirst to attain the Sacred. Hamid Dabashi (1996: 381) explains that in Sufism “‘love’ (*ishq* or *mahabbat*) is consonant with ‘ecstasy’ (*shawq*), ‘light’ (*nūr*), ‘fire’ (*nār*), and ‘unity’ (*wahdah*).” Thus, Sufis conceive of the spiritual experience as a love encounter with the Sacred. In this regard, Dabashi (1996: 381) argues that: “Through the ascetic and ecstatic exercise (fasting, invocation, Sufi dancing, singing, poetry, etc.) human-as-lover has to emulate the moment of union with God-as-Beloved.”¹⁶² Virginia Del Re McWeeny (2007: 35-36; emphasis in original) states that Sufis place a great emphasis on their passion for God and the “only *laws* in the mystic’s field of enquiry are the heart’s desire, the renunciation of the selfish Ego, and above all, Love.” Sufism is also described as “the heart’s science” or “the path to God through love.” In the Sufi tradition, Sufis express their admiration for God, as Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (1995a: viii) writes:

¹⁶² Similarly, Nasr (1969: 114) affirms that “The aim of all Sufism is union with the Divine which comes as a result of the love created in man for Divine Beauty. This union is generally conceived in terms of a gradual purification of the heart and the attainment of various spiritual virtues.” See Nasr (1969).

“[i]n their deep deep passion and longing for God they realized Truth as ‘The Beloved’, and therefore also became known as as ‘The Lovers of God’.”

According to Ibn Arabi, the journey towards the Beloved enables the Sufi seeker to receive visions of the “hidden” and to have access to the unseen. This parallels the night journey of the Prophet who himself experienced an encounter with God. Ibn Arabi writes:

When the Prophet – God’s blessing and peace be upon him – descended from his servanthood [...] he was made to journey by night to the ‘unseen of the unseen,’ which we have also mentioned. From there he contemplated his Beloved, the Real, as one Singular [...] The revelation was an intimate conversation, because it was at night. (2015: 68)

Ibn Arabi thus highlights how the journey of the Prophet, like the Sufi journey, is an attainment of the unseen. An encounter with the Beloved is thus similar to a nocturnal and intimate conversation whereby what is “hidden” is revealed to the heart of the seeker. Furthermore, Ibn Arabi states:

Glory be to Him, who made His servant journey to Him by night
So that he might see those signs of His that He has hidden
Such as his presence in absence. (2015: 62)

In this regard, Ibn Arabi conceives of the spiritual journey as a journey towards the “hidden” signs of the Beloved. Amongst these signs is that the Beloved is present through his very absence. In my analysis of *Vaste est la prison*, I will examine Isma’s journey and will establish its symbolic tie to the Sacred. I will read the Beloved as symbol of the “hidden” towards which Isma spiritually journeys, seeking his signs in her inner heart.

In addition to the Beloved, God as The Hidden is also symbolised by a treasure towards which the wayfarer journeys. Sufi seekers, according to Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1998: 219), are those “who dive after the hidden affairs and their realities,

extract their treasures, undo their knots.” In this sense, Chittick (1998: 70) argues that Ibn Arabi is inspired by the sacred Prophetic saying: “I was a Treasure but was not known, so I loved to be known; I created the creatures and made Myself known to them, so they came to Know me.”¹⁶³ For Sufis, God is a treasure which signifies that the Sacred is “hidden” and unseen. Nevertheless, Sufis seek the signs that lead to the “hidden” guided by their love.

The spiritual attainment of the “hidden” treasure equates with a knowledge of the unseen and the mysteries of God. As Ibn Arabi poetically puts it (Chittick 1998: 210): “In the ‘mystery’/His reality is nonmanifest/but He makes the ‘overt’/manifest to every eye.” The Sacred realm of God is a mystery and the seeker constantly seeks “openings” that can lead him or her to the “hidden”. In this sense, the journey towards The Hidden is a passage through the mystery for, as Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 201) puts it, “God addresses the heart of the servant within the mystery (*sirr*) which stands between them.” The word *sirr* which can translate as mystery symbolises the hiddenness of the Sacred. The Sacred is a hidden mystery, yet those embark on a spiritual journey receive an “special” knowledge:

Understand my allusions in this Station... Not all that is known can be divulged. There are special people for each kind of knowledge... and by [people] I mean one person in particular, in whose hands is the opening key to my symbol. (Bashier 2004: 66)

In this sense, the Sufi seeker in his quest for the “hidden” Sacred is exposed to signs that needs to be deciphered. Thus the Sacred presents itself as a hidden mystery and a secret that can only be divulged to a few people whose hearts open up to the “hidden” meanings. Sufi spiritual realisation is thus coterminous with what Ibn Arabi

¹⁶³ Nasr explains that Sufis link this symbol with the manifestation of God. Hence, Nasr (2007b: 48) indicates that the “hidden treasure” is a “symbol of the truth that everything in the universe has its origin in the Divine Reality and is a manifestation of that Reality [...] drawn from the treasury.”

calls the “Knowledge of Mysteries” (Bashier 2004: 67). This type of knowledge, Ibn Arabi argues (Bashier 2004: 67), is gained “through a special divine effusion that is outside ordinary learning and cannot be acquired through study and effort or reached by reason through its reflective powers.”

The spiritual quest for the “hidden” is accompanied by the death of the self also known by Sufis as *fanā*, which can also be translated as the annihilation of the self. The death of the self is another symbol that I explore in my later discussions of Gibreel’s journey in *The Satanic Verses* and Zahra’s journey in *La Nuit sacrée*. Ibn Arabi uses the expression of death to symbolise a spiritual death that describes the Sufis’ loss of self. *Fanā*, according to Ibn Arabi (Affifi 1979: 141), takes place when “the mystic realises that he, as a form, has no existence *per se*, but, owing to the very nature of the form he cannot completely pass away from it.” Furthermore, Al-Jīlānī indicates that *fanā*, annihilation of the self, forms part and parcel of a definition of Sufism. In Al-Jīlānī’s view (1992: 43), Sufism corresponds to an understanding of the “state of nothingness” which marks the moment when the “false self melts and evaporates when divine attributes enter one’s being, and when the multiplicity of worldly attributes and personalities leave.” The Sufi’s self, through the journey towards the “hidden”, experiences death and is reborn when reaching the Sacred.

Fanā is connected to the journey towards the “hidden” since it signifies the Sufis’ entrance into the unseen realm of the Sacred. Papan-Matin (2010: 83) defines “death” as the moment when the seeker “opens his heart to the unseen and calls out to God to allow him closer to His thresholds.” In the Sufi sense, *fanā* is thus a symbolic death that enables the seeker to gain inner realisation of the mysteries of the Sacred. As such:

Those mystics who have experienced death while still living in the world of matter go past these realms into unforeseen territories that are beyond thought and imagination and acquire knowledge by proximity to God. (Papan-Matin 2010: 76)

Citing the Persian medieval Sufi poet and philosopher Ayn al-Qudat, Papan-Matin underlines the connection between the meaning of death and the journey:

O friend, that world is all life upon life; and this world is all death entwined with death. Unless you pass through death you will not reach life [...] the wayfarer must be born twice. He should once be born through his mother, so that he can see himself and this perishing world, and he should once be born himself, so that he can see God and that everlasting world. (2010: 81)

The death that the Sufi seeker experiences is what enables him or her to achieve spiritual rebirth. Hence, the Sufi journey towards the “hidden” is symbolised by death in the sense that the seeker crosses the limits of the visible world and gains access unto the “hidden” realm of the Sacred. As the quotation above demonstrates, the mystical death is a harbinger of a new life since the seeker experiences a spiritual rebirth.

- ***Jihad: A Spiritual Struggle***

For Sufis in general, and for Ibn Arabi in particular, the spiritual journey symbolically entails a passage through “darkness” which eventually leads the seeker to reach the “light” of the Sacred. With reference to Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy, Claude Addas (1996: 6) defines the journey as “the voyage” which involves “the search for God: a long, albeit circular, peregrination that involves the *sâlik*,¹⁶⁴ the *viator*, in the dark and narrow labyrinth of his being, ultimately leading him towards the dazzling light of the peerless One.” The root of the noun “*sâlik*” is the verb

¹⁶⁴ Abdelilah Bouasria (2015: 191) defines “salik” as: “a person who walks in a spiritual path. To become a salik, one must follow both the outer path (exoterism, *sharia*) and the inner path (esoterism, *haqiqa*) of Islam.”

“*salaka*” which translates in English as to follow a path or to travel. As such, the journey of the Sufi wayfarer is not an easy and straightforward undertaking. It is a passage through “darkness” that signifies inner struggle. It is a long quest which entails a passage through a multiplicity of dark stages, and which Sufis have equated with the meaning of *jihad*. A Sufi, according to Al-Jīlāni,¹⁶⁵ strives to cleanse his heart from the “darkness” and this endeavour demands spiritual effort. In Al-Jīlāni’s words:

To rid oneself of these evils one has to cleanse and shine the mirror of the heart. This cleansing is done by acquiring knowledge, by acting upon this knowledge, by effort and valour, fighting against one’s ego within and without oneself [...] This struggle will continue until the heart becomes alive with the light of unity – and with that light of unity, the eye of the clean heart will see the reality of Allah’s attributes. (1992: 55)

The attainment of “light” which is consonant with an inner realisation of God’s sacred realm, is dependent on an inner struggle, a *jihad* that the Sufi seeker launches within himself or herself. Ibn Arabi compares spiritual struggle to a polishing of the heart’s mirror in the sense that the spiritual wayfarer struggles to remove the “darkness” that symbolically veils the heart. As Ibn Arabi (Hakim 2016: 83) puts it: “When you clean the mirror of your heart through exercises and spiritual endeavours until it is polished, clearing out the build-up of rust, so that, by means of this mirror [...] all the images of the world will be imprinted therein.”

The word *jihad*¹⁶⁶ in the Sufi vocabulary in general, and in Ibn Arabi’s philosophy in particular, is synonymous with an internal spiritual battle that the Sufi seeker experiences so that he or she can gain access to the Sacred “light”. Sufis have been inspired by the Prophet’s *hadith* where the latter speaks about the greater *jihad*:

¹⁶⁵ Qadir Al-Jīlāni is an 11th century Persian Sufi and Jurist. He is the founder of the Sufi order known as Qadiriya. The Qadiriya spread widely across Morocco and West Africa around the 15th century. See Afe Adogame (2014) and Michael Gomez (2005).

¹⁶⁶ Differently to *ijtihad* that demands the use of reasoning, *jihad* for Ibn Arabi is an inner striving that relies on the spiritual “opening” of the heart. Thus the knowledge of the Sacred in Ibn Arabi’s (1989: 148) view “is for the heart to acquire.” For more on this difference between Ibn Arabi and Islamic jurists, see Chittick (1989).

After he had returned from a military expedition, the Prophet said to his Companions: ‘We have returned from the lesser *jihād* to devote ourselves here to the greater *jihād*.’ To those who asked him what the greater *jihād* is, he answered, “That of the heart!” or, according to another account, “the struggle of the human being against his passions” (Bayhaqī). For Sufis, this *hadīth* establishes the superiority of the inward, spiritual battle over outward combat. (Geoffroy 2010: 157)

As the Sufi seeker journeys through several spiritual stages, he or she has to struggle through the “darkness” that veils the heart of the seeker from the “light” of the Sacred. Nicola Ziadeh (1958: 75) observes that Sufis place a great emphasis on the “spiritual struggle” which involves spiritual purification and an attainment of union with God, the Sacred. Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 211) speaks of “the strugglers”, those who “are the people of effort, toil, and putting up with difficulties.” In this regard, gaining access to the sacred “light” demands a *jihad* against what Ibn Arabi (1989: 167) calls “ignorance, obfuscations, doubts, or uncertainties.”

As indicated earlier, *jihad* is a noun that conveys the meaning of endeavour, effort and energy. Its verbal derivative is *mujahada* which means to struggle or to battle against something. “*Jihad*”, according to Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 20), is a constant journey formed of several stages. The Sufi journey in Ibn Arabi’s thought involves a continuous process of searching for the sacred “light” which is veiled and can only be unveiled to those who seek spiritual realisation. According to Ibn Arabi:

Those noble lights will never cease becoming manifest to him through his acts of spiritual struggle (*mujāhada*) and his striving until a greatest light is unveiled for him. The obstructions which prevent people from reaching those knowledges will be removed and mysteries of which he had nothing in himself and by which he was not described will be unveiled for him in their stations. (Chittick 1989: 223)

According to Ibn Arabi, the Sufi seeker’s passage through “obstructions” symbolises the journey through the “darkness”. The *mujāhid* is the person who undertakes a spiritual battle or *jihad*. In this sense, the Sufi seeker’s *jihad* is constituted of a

journey through a “darkness”, which once removed, an inner illumination takes place.

Geoffroy (2010: xvii) emphasises the way Sufis establish a close link between the spiritual journey towards God and their inner struggle: “Sufism [...] asks of the initiate that he devote himself to the greater *jihād*, that is, to the struggle against the various passions and illusions which assail him.” The spiritual experience is thus predicated on regaining a union with God which necessitates a passage through an inner struggle. It is a struggle through which the seeker, as Geoffroy (2010: 12) puts it, strives towards “the purification of the soul.” Such a process of inner purification is a battle against the darkness of the ego that veils the seeker from reaching the Sacred “light”. In Geoffroy’s (2010: 16) words: “For all those that travel the path of Sufism, purification is therefore an obligatory part of the passage: the initiate must consider the murky depths of his ego simply as a darkness that is stopping him from receiving the light of gnosis or from being united with the divine.” In Chapter V of this thesis, I will explore further this connection between the inner battle or *jihad* and the symbolic passage through “darkness” in *Loin de Médine*, and I will demonstrate that it correlates with a journey through “darkness”. Likewise, I will examine Zahra’s journey through seven stages of “darkness” in *La Nuit sacrée* and India/Kashmira’s own *jihad* as she embarks on a journey through the “darkness” that both Max and Shalimar the Clown represent.

- **Darkness and Unveiling**

The symbolic meanings of “darkness” and “light” that inspired Sufis and Ibn Arabi alike can be traced back to the sacred sources of the Prophet’s *hadith* and the Qur’an. Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 217) cites an often-quoted Prophetic saying: “God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were they to be removed, the Glories of His Face

would burn away everything perceived by the sight of His creatures.” God is The Light and He is in this sense symbolically veiled or hidden from view. Thus, the journey of the spiritual seeker is a passage through the veils of “darkness” which leads to an attainment of the Sacred “light”.

Amongst the numerous references to “darkness” and “light” in the Qur’an, the following verses suffice to illustrate the symbolism that inspired Ibn Arabi and Sufis:

He is the One Who sends to His servant manifest signs that He may lead you from the depths of Darkness into the Light and verily Allah is to you most kind and Merciful. (57:9)

And:

Wherewith Allah guides all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leads them out of darkness, by His will, unto the light – guides them to a path that is straight. (5:16)

According to the verses above, those who seek the Sacred are guided out of “darkness” and shown the signs towards inner illumination.

Drawing on the above-cited references to “darkness” and “light”, Ibn Arabi associates the journey towards the Sacred with a departure from non-knowledge to the knowledge of the Sacred. Hence, when the spiritual wayfarer responds to the Sacred call of the journey, he or she crosses several stages of “darkness” until spiritual illumination takes place in his or her heart. Therefore, the passage through “darkness”, according to Ibn Arabi, has epistemological implications since it leads to the attainment of the sacred knowledge of God: The Light. As Ibn Arabi says:

So Understand this! For I have pointed you toward things, which, if you only travel according to them, will reveal to you aspects of the Knowledge of God whose extent can only be gauged by God. Because the spiritual Knower (*‘arif*) who knows by immediate personal experience (*dhawq*) of the full extent of the Knowledge of God we have just mentioned is exceedingly rare today! (Morris 1996: 56)

The unveiling of “darkness” equates with reaching the knowledge of the Sacred. This experience, as Ibn Arabi describes it, differs from one Sufi to another due to the fact that it is a “personal experience.” Taking this into account, Chapter V will explore the different stages of “darkness” that are interlinked with the journey in Djébar’s *Loin de Médine*, Ben Jelloun’s *La Nuit Sacrée* and Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown*. I will do so by establishing a symbolic correspondence between the variety of passages through “darkness” and the Sufi journey towards the Sacred.

In relation to “darkness”, Ibn Arabi places a great deal of emphasis on the symbolic connotation of the veil. “Darkness” refers to the veils that hide the Sacred from the heart of the seeker. Encountering these veils entails a spiritual progress that leads to illumination. With reference to the Qur’an, Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1998: 105) asserts that God discloses Himself to the heart of the seeker through unveiling: “It belongs not to any mortal that God should speak to him, except by revelation, or from behind a veil” (42:51). The veils are signifiers of the “darkness” that halts the Sufi seeker from attaining the Sacred “light”. In Ibn Arabi’s (Chittick 1998: 109) words: “You veil the heart/from its absent mystery.” Nonetheless, it is through undertaking a journey of unveiling that the heart of the seeker can encounter The Light. As Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1998: 111) poetically puts it: “A mystery has appeared to you/that has long been kept secret/A morning has dawned/whose darkness is you.”

Chittick (1998: 104) defines Ibn Arabi’s concept of the veil as “something that prevents seeing the face. Inasmuch as everything in the cosmos prevents seeing God’s face everything is a veil.” Here, the face of God symbolically refers to the signs of His Presence rather than to a real physical face. When God, The Light, manifests Himself to the heart of the seeker, unveiling takes place. As Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 196) puts it, “the lights of unseen things [...] are unveiled to the

hearts.”

Unveiling in Arabic is *kashf*. David E. Singh defines it as following:

The *kashf*, in its fundamental sense, denotes immediate knowledge appearing in the heart. The verb *kasahfa* in the Qur'an refers to uncovering part of the body. So, *kasahfa* may be thought of as the opposite of the act of veiling (*satara*). The *kashf* brings up the picture of the veils lifting to enable a direct sight or awareness of the object behind the veil. As a technical term, *kashf* is often put side by side with other terms such as *tajalli*, *muhādara*, *Mukashafa* and *mushāhada* and *dawq*. (2003: 47)

As the heart of the seeker embarks on a journey through “darkness”, he or she encounters veils that cover the Sacred who is “hidden” and unseen. When unveiling takes place, the heart is enabled to see the signs of the Sacred. Here the heart is symbolically linked to “eye” and “vision”. The heart begins to “see” what has been veiled and unveiling becomes possible owing to the “light” that allows visions and eyesight to take place.¹⁶⁷

Chittick points out that unveiling in Ibn Arabi's philosophy is a mode of spiritual knowledge which enables the seeker to gain access to the Sacred:

Unveiling [...] is knowledge that God gives directly to the servants when He lifts the veils separating Himself from them and ‘opens the door to perception of invisible realities. (1998: xxii)

The lifting of the veil coincides with a spiritual opening which earlier in this section I defined in relation to the heart, doors and visions. Moreover, unveiling as an opening is closely connected to the expressions of “light” and “darkness” since it traces this movement between the lifting of the veil of “darkness” and the realisation of an inner “light”. In both Chapters V and VI, I will demonstrate how the journeys of the female narrator in *Loin de Médine*, Zahra in *La Nuit Sacrée* and India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown*, which albeit formed of different and varying stages, are symbolically linked to unveiling in the Sufi sense. The Sufi symbolic

¹⁶⁷ The knowledge of the Sacred, for Sufis, is attained through “unveiling”. According to Zailan Moris (2003: 56), “unveiling” constitutes “the highest and most certain of verification (*tahqiq*) of the knowledge and truth revealed in the Quran and *Hadith*.” See Moris (2003).

meaning of unveiling will prove to be a key expression in Chapters V and VI, since it will allow me to establish a chain of signification between the unveiling in *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée*, and *Shalimar the Clown*, the symbolism of “light” and “darkness” and the Sacred.

- **God is The Light**

As stated earlier in this chapter, Ibn Arabi draws the symbolism of “light” from the Qur’anic name of God: The Light. Citing both the Qur’an and *hadith*, Ibn Arabi foregrounds the visual symbolism of the spiritual experience of illumination:

God also says, *God is the light of the heavens and the earth* (Qur’an 24:35). Were it not for light, no entity would become manifest for the possible things. The Messenger of God said in his supplication, ‘O God, place in my hearing a light, in my eyesight a light, in my hair a light’ to the point where he said, ‘and make me into a light’ and so he was. He sought only the witnessing of that, so that it would become manifest to the eyesight. (Chittick 1998: 37)

Amongst the *suras* often quoted by Ibn Arabi and Sufis alike is *sura An-Noor* (*The Light*). In this *sura*, the name of God is accompanied with words that evoke the symbolism of “light”. John Walbridge (2001: 52) remarks that “*Nûr* with its derivative *munîr*, ‘luminous’, and its near synonym *diyâ*’ occur some fifty times in the Qur’ân, usually symbolising God’s guidance. Its antonym *zulma*, most often in the plural *zulumât*, ‘darkness’, and related forms occur with some frequency, often contrasted with *nûr*.” Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 217) is also inspired by the Prophetic *hadith* which I quoted earlier and which reads as follows: “God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were they to be removed, the Glories of His Face would burn away everything perceived by the sight of His creatures.”

Verses 35 to 37 in *sura An-Noor* are rich in symbolic allusions to “light”, and they read as follows:¹⁶⁸

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is like as it were a shining star. (This lamp) is kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon Light. Allah guideth unto His Light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is Knower of all things. (This lamp is found) in houses which Allah hath allowed to be exalted and that His name shall be remembered therein. Therein do offer praise to Him at morn and evening. Men whom neither merchandise nor sale beguileth from remembrance of Allah and constancy in prayer and paying to the poor their due; who fear a day when hearts and eyeballs will be overturned. (24: 35-37)

Ibn Arabi interprets these verses by emphasising the connection between the spiritual knowledge of God and “light”. It is through the name, The Light, that the seeker can attain knowledge of the Sacred. In this regard, Ibn Arabi indicates that:

if you did not possess visual light, you would not witness Him. So you witness Him only through light, and there is no light but He. You witness Him and you know Him only through Him, for He is the *light* of the heavens. (Chittick 1998: 37)

In Chapter V, I will return to this verse and show the importance of the symbolic character of *sura An-Noor* in connection to Djebbar’s *Loin de Médine*. I will observe that the direct mention, albeit partly, of *sura An-Noor* in *Loin de Médine* demonstrates the symbolic relation between the female narrator’s journey towards “light”, and the Sacred.

Ibn Arabi considers the Sufi’s attainment of the Sacred “light” as the opening of his or her heart. In Ibn Arabi’s (Chittick 1998: 279) words: “the heart is illuminated through the knowledge of the absent that it gains, especially if this pertains to the knowledge of God.” Hence, the Sufi seeker’s attainment of illumination quintessentially reposes on the seeker’s direct contact with God and on the unmediated nature of the knowledge bestowed upon his or her heart. For Ibn

¹⁶⁸ Amongst the influential commentaries on this *sura* one can cite here Muhammad Al-Ghazalli’s *The Mishkat Al-Anwar (The Niche of Lights)*. Al-Ghazzalli is a prominent 11th century Muslim theologian and jurist. See Al-Ghazzalli (2010).

Arabi (Chittick 1998: 279), once the knowledge of God, The Light, is realised, there is no room for “darkness” in the heart of the seeker.

Describing his own spiritual experience, Ibn Arabi (Hitenstein 1999: 114-115) stresses the close link between “light” and inner vision. For Ibn Arabi, the “light” that appears to the Sufi seeker is similar to the Sacred “light” revealed to to Prophet:

It is through the light [which shines] in front of him that [the Prophet] invites according to inner vision, while the one who invites as a follower does so through the light [which shines] behind [the Prophet]. (Hirtenstein 1999: 114-115)

By “follower”, Ibn Arabi here means the Sufi seeker who follows on the steps of the Prophet’s journey. Thus, the journey towards the Sacred encompasses an inner vision which is symbolised by the “light” that the heart of the seeker receives.

According to Ibn Arabi, remembering is tantamount to the Sufi seeker’s attainment of God’s sacred “light”. Ibn Arabi uses the concept of *dhikr* which can be translated as remembering, remembrance or recollection. Through *dhikr*, which involves the constant remembering of God, the journey of the Sufi seeker leads to the attainment of spiritual illumination. For Ibn Arabi (1989: 154), the wayfarer’s access to God’s Sacred “light” involves a journey of constant remembering since “man’s knowledge is always recollection.” Ibn Arabi (1989: 154) also states that “one of the divine mysteries” resides in the idea that “everything known by man and by every existent thing, without cease, is in reality a recollection and a renewal (*tajdīd*) of what he had forgotten.”

Ibn Arabi draws the meaning of *dhikr* from the Qur’an, where the concept is repeatedly used.¹⁶⁹ One of the verses that Ibn Arabi cites is from *sura Al-Araf* (*The Heights*):

¹⁶⁹ For example in *sura Al-Baqara* it is mentioned: “And when you have completed your devotions, then remember God as you remember your fathers or with a far more remembrance. But of people is

And when the Qur'an is recited, give ear to it and pay heed, that ye may obtain mercy. And do thou (O Muhammad) remember thy Lord within thyself humbly and with awe, below thy breath, at morn and evening. And be not thou of the neglectful. (7: 204-205)

Ibn Arabi insists on the intersection between the *dhikr* of God and the attainment of illuminative knowledge.¹⁷⁰ In order for “darkness” to be dispelled from the heart, the seeker recites the words of God, remembers His names in the hope of reaching the Sacred Light.¹⁷¹ Ibn Arabi speaks of the heart’s capacity to gain light by making reference to selected verses from the Qur’an:

Look at his words, ‘I respond to the call of the caller when he calls Me’ (2: 186). ‘God does not become bored that you should be bored;’ ‘When someone remembers (*dhikr*) Me in himself, I remember him in Myself’. (Chittick 1989: 109)

What transpires from the citations above is that *dhikr*, or remembering in the Sufi sense, is intersected with the Sacred because it is the medium through which the Sufi seeker is able to access God’s “light”. I will return to this link between remembering and “light” in my reading of *Loin de Médine* in Chapter V.

- **Spiritual Eye/Insight**

Quite often, when he speaks about the unveiling of the heart and the attainment of inner illumination, Ibn Arabi refers to vision and eyesight. The eye needs light to perceive objects in the visible world. Without light, the eye will remain blind and the

he who says: ‘Our Lord! Give to us in the world,’ and he has no portion in the Hereafter. And of them (also) is he who says: ‘Our Lord! Give to us in the world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good, and guard us from the punishment of Fire.’ For them there is in store a goodly portion out of that which they have earned. God is Swift at reckoning” (2: 200-202).

¹⁷⁰ Nasr explains that Sufis stress the link between their spiritual journey and *dhikr*. *Dhikr*, according to Nasr (2007a: 93), is “the sacred means” for attaining inner light. As Nasr (2007a: 93) puts it, “He who invokes with sincerity, persistence, fervor, and total faith in God becomes the possessor of an illuminated heart.” For a definition of *dhikr*, see Nasr (2007a).

¹⁷¹ Reza Shah-Kazemi explains that *dhikr* enables the attainment of a vision of the Sacred. Since *dhikr* is based on the remembering of God, it requires the forgetting of the self. As Shah-Kazemi (2007: 163) puts it: “This degree of *dhikr* demands the forgetting of the individual: the veil of the self must be cast aside if the spiritual vision of divine Reality is to be attained.” See Shah-Kazemi (2007).

objects of sight are hidden in darkness. Equally, the heart of the seeker is veiled and blind and only when the Sacred illumination is bestowed upon it then, as Ibn Arabi puts it (Chittick 1989: 223): “unseen things are unveiled.” The spiritual journey is thus a continuous passage through “darkness” which culminates in the heart’s realisation of the Sacred “light” which Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 224) calls “the light of sight.”

Hence, Ibn Arabi correlates the inner journey to a passage from visual blindness to a gaining of eyesight. For Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1998: 104) “This world is the locus of the veil” and the “darkness” of the veils can be overcome when the seeker undertakes an inner search for “light”. Ibn Arabi writes (Morris 1996: 67): “So God illuminated their hearts with the Lights of inspired knowing. And he opened up for them, in their reflection on these Signs and indications [...] a Prophetic inheritance.” Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1998: 68) indicates how the spiritual seeker “flees to God, travelling away from everything that keeps him distant from Him and veils him from Him.” Additionally, Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 223) states that “you will never cease being a traveller” because the “world of the Unseen is perceived through the eye of insight, just as the World of the Visible is perceived through the eye of sight.”

Eyesight in Ibn Arabi’s vocabulary symbolically corresponds to a spiritual insight so in this sense the heart is akin to an inner eye. As the heart/eye experiences “openings” and crosses several stages of “darkness”, it gains access to what Rabia T. H. Al-Jerrahi (1999: 31) calls “the realm of invisible reality.” The journey through “darkness” also corresponds to inner visions and an attainment of spiritual illumination. Nasr (2002: 38) explains that the heart of the seeker is “an eye which has opened and which can now see the Invisible Realm, just as the physical eyes are

able to see the external world.” Nasr (2002: 38) indicates that Sufism revolves around the key symbolic expression “*ayn al-qalb*” which translates as the “eye of the heart.” The eye/heart of the seeker is what enables access to “the heart of things, especially sacred forms, and to realize their inner unity” (Nasr 2002: 43-44).

Without “light”, spiritual vision cannot be achieved. Ibn Arabi (2015: 64) writes, “For the eye does not perceive any visible objects with its own particular light except through the darkness and light by which things are unveiled.” As the wayfarer crosses the “darkness” symbolised by the night, he or she gains access to the hidden “light” of the Sacred.¹⁷² The eye/heart of the spiritual seeker becomes “the source of a light resulting from [an] inner illumination” (Nasr 2002: 39). Thus, through the “light” of inner vision, the “hidden” world of the Sacred becomes seen. When the Sacred “light” reveals itself to the heart, that is when the seeker has overcome “darkness”. Later in this thesis, when I examine the texts of *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *Shalimar the Clown*, I will focus attention on the way the symbol of “light” has a structural connection with the meanings of eye and vision, hence corroborating the link between the symbols employed in the selected novels and the Sacred.

Thus far, I have examined the symbols of the Sacred that are closely connected to the names of God: The Manifest, The Hidden and The Light. These symbolic expressions will form the basis of my hermeneutic reading of the selected texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie in both Chapter IV and V. In the ensuing section I analyse further the ontological dimension of the Sacred with a particular

¹⁷² Rumi often makes references to “night” in his Sufi poetry. An example that can be cited here is the poem entitled “All Through the Night God is Calling Us.” Rumi writes: “Don’t sleep for just one night, my beautiful friend/And the treasure of Eternity will appear before you/The Sun of the Invisible will warm you all night/The collyrium of mystery will open your eyes/This evening I beg you, fight against yourself,/don’t sleep/So you discover those splendors that spread ecstasy/It is at night that beauties unveil themselves/The one who sleeps never hears their soft calls” (Harvey 1999: 53). Here “night” coincides with the time when the eyes or the heart of the seeker experiences an opening into the Sacred. For more on the Sufi poetry of Rumi, see Andrew Harvey (1999).

focus on the concept of the *barzakh*. Understanding both the symbolic expressions and ontological experience of the Sacred from a Sufi angle enables me to explore the creative engagement between the selected texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie with the Sacred.

iv. The Experience of the Sacred and the Concept of the *Barzakh* in Ibn Arabi's Sufi Philosophy

In Chapter II on methodology, I explained how the hermeneutic reading of the symbols of the Sacred involves two stages. The first stage entails a structural analysis of the symbols of the Sacred in the selected corpus, and this will be carried out in Chapter IV and V. The second stage proposes an ontological understanding of the worlds of the Sacred in the three authors' selected texts. For the second stage of the hermeneutic interpretation, I draw from Ibn Arabi's concept of the *barzakh*. While Chapters IV and V focus mainly on demonstrating how the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie creatively engage with the symbols of the Sacred, Chapter VI argues that these symbols project worlds that are characterised by their intermediate aspect. In this respect, Ibn Arabi's concept of the *barzakh* is a notion that can help determine the connection between these worlds and the Sacred.

What will be established in Chapters IV and V is that in the selected texts there are opposite symbolic expressions at play: the "openings" vs. the "hidden" and "darkness" vs. "light". Yet, these symbolic expressions are interlinked through the variegated journeys that are unravelled in *Vaste est la prison*, *L'Enfant de sable*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *Shalimar the Clown*. It will be argued that these journeys are symbolic expressions of the Sacred. Furthermore, I

will argue that beyond the parameters of the three authors' texts, these symbolic expressions project intermediate worlds that are akin to the experience of the Sacred. In this regard, I demonstrate that the intermediate worlds projected by the texts parallel the intermediate experience of the *barzakh* in the Sufi sense.

The widely perceived intermediate dimension in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's texts has already been explored in previous readings primarily through the prism of postmodern and postcolonial theories. For example, Orlando and Lowe have both drawn from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomadic¹⁷³ and Bhabha's cultural hybridity. The title of Orlando's book, *Nomadic Voices of Exile*, testifies to the significance of Deleuze and Guattari's theorising of nomadic thought to her approach to the works of Djébar and Ben Jelloun. Nomadic writing, as exemplified in the works of Djébar and Ben Jelloun, creates "[p]athways to new modes of reflection" and an "interstitial space" that goes beyond the limitations of an essentialist definition of culture (Orlando 1999: 5). While essentialist definitions of culture repose on polarities, "nomadic voices of exile," in Orlando's view (1999: 6), "eradicat[e] all opposition based on gendered, racial, or ethnic denominators." As a result of such a nomadic thinking of culture, the literary texts of Maghrebian authors like Djébar and Ben Jelloun create a "positive space of production promoting new becomings and places of identity that are constantly moving, making connections, and supporting the active agency of women" (Orlando 1999: 6).

In a similar line of thought, Lowe draws from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomadic thought to demonstrate the resistance of Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de*

¹⁷³ It is worth noting in this context that Deleuze used the concept of nomad in his reading of Nietzsche's philosophy. In Deleuze's view (1977: 142), the originality of Nietzsche's philosophy lies in its resistance to "instruments of codification" which include the "laws, contracts and institutions" in a given society. The nomadic aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, according to Deleuze (1977:142), consists in the way it deciphers "former, present, or future codes [...] by expressing something that cannot be codified." See Deleuze (1977).

sable to binary oppositions. Lowe (1993: 47) explains that the concept of nomadism enables a reading of postcolonial literatures that “interrupts the persistently binary schemes which tend to condition the way in which we read and discuss [...] postcolonial situations.” Lowe (1993: 47-48) further adds that nomadism “explores not only the category of space, but a movement across spaces.”

Erickson explores how Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the nomadic has influenced postcolonial and postmodern studies, defining the concept of nomadic thought as what “has come to connote becoming, movement, and pluralist values as opposed to the static, totalistic, reductionist ideology and strategies of statist and theocratic institutions” (2005b: 67). Brian Massumi in his Foreword to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, explains that the concept of the nomadic implies movement which signals a departure from constructed paths and from pre-established identities. In Massumi’s words (1987: xiii), nomadic thought constitutes a “break away from beaten paths,” indicating it “does not repose on identity” but rather “rides difference” (1987: xii).¹⁷⁴

Woodhull (1993: 89) also explains that the concept of the nomadic is a trope which when applied in a postcolonial context, acquires the meaning of negotiating cultural “tensions” between France and its “other” the Maghreb. Woodhull interprets the concept of “textual nomadism” in Maghrebian literature in relation to the geographical movement of intellectual writers from the Maghreb to France. “Nomadic texts” produced by Maghrebian authors, according to Woodhull (1993: 89), “directly address problems of cultural hybridity.”

¹⁷⁴ For a definition of the meaning of nomadic thought and how it is applied in Maghrebian writing, see Erickson (2005b). For a political reading of nomadic identity, see Chantal Mouffe (1993).

Bhabha's theorising of cultural hybridity is very similar to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomadic thought. Bhabha's (1994: 1) understanding of hybridity reflects an "articulation of cultural differences" which situate identity within the "in-between spaces" of "cultural temporalities." The intermediate aspect of the concept of cultural hybridity is conveyed through such expressions as "liminal space", "transit", "in-between", and "cultural interstices" (Bhabha 1994: 1-9). According to Bhabha (1994: 1), cultural hybridity is a powerful theoretical and political tool that enables minorities to "think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities" and occupying "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity." Taking the example of *The Satanic Verses*, Bhabha (1994: 315) argues that the character of Chamcha represents "the minority position" since he is emblematic of the "liminality of migrant experience." Such an intermediate position is perceived by Bhabha (1994: 318-319) as "an empowering condition of hybridity," because it challenges the binary thinking upon which "assumptions of cultural supremacy" is predicated.

In addition to such concepts as the nomadic and hybridity, some of the previous readings which I examined in Chapter I have relied on a set of opposites to show how these are negotiated in the texts and by the authors themselves. Examples of these opposites include, but are not limited to, patriarchal vs. feminist (Orlando 1999, Woodhull 2003), silence vs. voice (Erickson 1998, Hayes 2000, Pessoa-Miquel 2007), coloniser vs. colonised (Dutheil de la Rochère 1999), religious vs. transgressive (Bhabha 1994), male vs. female (Hess 2004), oppression vs. emancipation (Hamil 2001), and self vs. other (Reif-Hülser 1999, Sanga 2001).

My own reading complements the idea that the three authors challenge cultural and linguistic boundaries. Whether this challenge is described either as

nomadic or hybrid, the emphasis is on these processes of writing that suggest the creativity play in the three authors' works. Furthermore, I agree with the argument that the three authors and their texts open up a space of negotiation between opposites. What I am proposing is to explore further this intermediate dimension in three authors' selected corpus from a different perspective, shifting the focus to a study of the Sacred.

I therefore propose to use the concept of the *barzakh* which has not been explored beforehand in relation to the Sacred in the works of the three authors. The concept of the *barzakh* enables me to understand how the journey in the texts of the three authors project an intermediate space which I have called in this thesis "intermediate worlds." Chapter VI will explore how these worlds are projected by such symbols as the "opening," the "hidden," "darkness" and "light". Again, I will have recourse to Ibn Arabi's philosophy, in particular to his theorising of the *barzakh*. Ibn Arabi's ontological understanding of this Islamic concept will provide a theoretical platform that will help clarify the connection between the symbols of the Sacred and the intermediate worlds.

The *barzakh* is a complex concept that many Muslim thinkers and interpreters of the Qur'an have employed in their discussions of matters pertaining to eschatology. In this sense, the world of the *barzakh* is the world in-between life and the Day of Resurrection. The Qur'an speaks about the *barzakh* as the realm where the soul, after its departure from the body, awaits the judgment day:

And I seek refuge in Thee, My Lord, lest they be present with me, Until when death cometh unto one of them, he saith: My Lord! Send me back, That I may do right in that which I have left behind! But nay! It is but a word that he speaketh; and behind them is a barrier (*barzakh*)¹⁷⁵ until the day when they are raised. (23: 97-100)

¹⁷⁵ In the original Arabic text of the Qur'an the word *barzakh* is used in this sentence.

In Pickthall's English translation of the Qur'anic verse above the word "barrier" is used to translate the meaning of the *barzakh*. However, the way I understand the concept of the *barzakh* rather emphasises its intermediate dimension. As an illustration, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* defines the *barzakh* as an "isthmus" which is "A point of transition where entities similar yet different come together" (Glassé 2002: 78). It is therefore defined "not only a separation, but also a bridge" (Glassé 2002: 78).

Ibn Arabi's contribution lies in his expansion of the meaning of the *barzakh* beyond the traditional eschatological interpretations.¹⁷⁶ In *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyya*, Ibn Arabi devotes four chapters to the concept of the *barzakh*, exploring its ontological and epistemological links with Sufi imagination. For the precise scope of this thesis, I will mainly focus on the ontological aspect of the *barzakh*. Drawing on the Qur'anic verse cited earlier, Ibn Arabi clarifies the meaning of the *barzakh* and acknowledges that the *barzakh* acts as a separating line between two realities as understood by eschatologists:

Know that the word "barzakh" is an expression for what separates two things without ever becoming either of them, such as the line separating a shadow from the sunlight, or as in His Saying – may He be exalted!: "He has loosened the two Seas. They meet/between them a *barzakh*, they do not go beyond" (55: 19-20) — meaning that neither of them becomes mixed with the other. (Morris 1995: 106)

What Ibn Arabi further stresses is that the *barzakh* brings together two opposed realities, thus also acting as a meeting-point.

The *barzakh* is an intermediate reality where the Sufi seeker encounters two opposed realities, it is therefore the site *per se* of the experience of the Sacred. The intermediate character of the experience of the Sacred is conveyed through Ibn Arabi's definition (Chittick 1998: 333): "The *barzakh* is between-between/a station

¹⁷⁶ For detailed readings of death and references to the *barzakh*, see Farnáz Ma'súmián (1995) and Idelman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (2002).

between this and that/not one of them, but the totality of the two.” In this sense, the Sufi seeker’s experience of the Sacred finds its grounding in a realm akin to the *barzakh*, an intermediate realm that is neither physical nor spiritual yet an amalgamation of both.

Ontologically speaking, Ibn Arabi (Morris 1995: 106) argues that the wayfarer enters an intermediate world just like the *barzakh* whose “ontological status” can be defined as “both existent and non-existent.” In this regard, Toshihiko Izutsu (1984: 13) explains that this world for Ibn Arabi “is ontologically an intermediate domain of contact between the purely sensible world and the purely spiritual.” The *barzakh* here is synonymous with an intermediate reality that acts as a separating line between two other opposite realities, yet it also acts as a joining line of the two opposed realities. It is neither this nor that, but it bridges both realities.

To clarify the meaning of the *barzakh* I will refer to the metaphor of the mirror¹⁷⁷ that Ibn Arabi uses to illustrate the intermediate dimension of the *barzakh*:

This is like a human being perceiving their (reflected) form in the mirror. The person definitely knows that they have perceived their (own) form in a certain respect, while they know just as absolutely that they have not perceived their form in another respect. (Morris 1995: 106)

The mirror is metaphorically likened to a *barzakh* which acts as a dividing line between a person and the image reflected in the mirror. In this sense it separates the person from his image. Yet, owing to its unitive character the *barzakh*, like the mirror, constitutes a bridge between both the person and his or her reflected image.

In addition to the similarity between the *barzakh* and the mirror, Ibn Arabi correlates the reality of the *barzakh* to visions. Earlier in this chapter, I touched on the symbolic dimension of visions, and explained its relation to the Sacred. From an

¹⁷⁷ For a detailed analysis of the metaphor of the mirror, see Michael Sells (1994) Chapter III “Ibn Arabi’s Polished Mirror: Identity Shift and Meaning Event.”

ontological perspective, visions allow the Sufi seeker to enter an intermediate realm. As the Sufi seeker embarks on his or her spiritual journey towards the Sacred, he or she experiences the manifestation of a non-corporeal world in corporeal forms. Spiritual meanings in this sense, which belong to the reality of the Sacred, appear to the heart of the seeker in physical forms. This sounds paradoxical, for the spiritual is opposed to the physical, the non-existent is opposed to existence; however, within the reality of the *barzakh* contraries meet. As will be argued later, the visions of Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses*, the visions of Aicha in *Loin de Médine*, and the visions of India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown* not only form part of their journeys, but they also enable them to enter an intermediate realm where the corporeal meets the spiritual. Chapter VI will elucidate further how the symbolic expressions of the Sacred in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected texts project intermediate worlds, like that of the *barzakh*, where the "hidden" meets the "openings", where the "darkness" meets "light".

In Ibn Arabi's view, the *barzakh* stands between two ontologically different worlds and therefore constitutes a limit that separates these worlds. Yet in their difference the two worlds are joined as they meet in the intermediate realm of the *barzakh*:

The *Barzakh* is like the dividing line between existence and nonexistence. It is neither existent nor nonexistent. If you attribute it to existence, you will find a whiff of existence within it, since it is immutable. But if you attribute it to nonexistence, you will speak the truth, since it has no existence. (Chittick 1989: 205)

The ontological dimension of the *barzakh* is emphasized in this bringing together of existence with non-existence. While the *barzakh* cannot be described in terms of existence nor non-existence, it has the attributes of both. As Ibn Arabi puts it:

[...] He whom they have realized is He who brings together opposites, and through Him the gnostics know. For He is the First and the Last and the Manifest and the

Nonmanifest (57:3). In respect of one entity and one relation, not in respect of two diverse relations [...] so they are and they are not. (Bashier 2004: 69)

In Chapter VI of this thesis, I will illustrate further this intermediate aspect of the *barzakh* by showing how the symbolic expressions in the selected texts project “intermediate worlds” that are akin to the experience of the Sacred.

Before concluding this final section of this chapter, I wish to pursue further the intermediate meaning of the *barzakh* by making a brief detour via Victor Turner’s concept of liminality. Turner’s definition of liminality¹⁷⁸ provides a useful comparison with the concept of the *barzakh*. Analysing the structure of rituals in the African Ndembu society, Turner (1967: 96) speaks about the “liminal persona” as the one who is initiated into rituals. The “liminal” person is “neither one thing nor another; or maybe both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere” (Turner 1967: 96). Liminality is interpreted by Turner (1967: 97) as a “condition of ambiguity and paradox” which can be defined as a “betwixt and between all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification.” Turner (1967: 97) stresses the idea that liminality is a “realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.”

Turner’s definition of liminality shares with Ibn Arabi’s concept of the *barzakh* the characteristic of a paradox that brings opposites together, that can be defined by both attributes, yet is neither one nor the other. What both concepts also share in common is the idea of possibility which I will explore further in Chapter VI. Correlating Turner’s concept of liminality to literature, Hein Viljoen and Chris. N. Van der Merwe recognise that:

¹⁷⁸ In relation to the concept of liminality, Turner is inspired by the anthropological work of Arnold Van Gennep (1960) entitled *The Rites of Passage*. Both Turner’s and Van Gennep’s theorising of the concept of liminality has a widespread influence on cultural and literary interpretations of identity. See for example the collection of essays in Hein Viljoen and Chris. N. Van der Merwe (2007).

The relevance of the idea of liminality for literature is not only that many texts describe and represent liminal states, persons and transformations, but also that the space of the text itself is a symbolically demarcated liminal zone where transformations are allowed to happen – imaginary transformations that model and possibly bring into being new ways of thinking and being. (2007: 11)

When applied to literary works, liminality is understood as an opening up of a possible space which comes about as a result of the joining between contraries. This is the feature that I will emphasise as the crux of the creative dimension in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's, and Rushdie's texts. I will argue that because of the intermediate aspect of the worlds projected by the selected text, the ontological reality that unfolds itself in those texts is distinguished by its possibility. What this leads to is an interpretation of the Sacred not as a fixed category, delimited by one single meaning. On the contrary, the multiplicity of the expressions of the Sacred reflects the multitude of possible worlds that come about as a result of the meeting between contraries, like the *barzakh*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I started by defining the meaning of the Sacred in Islam and by clarifying what the main sources of the Sacred are in an Islamic context. I have paid particular attention to the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad, the *hadith* and the *Shari'a*. This paved the way for understanding the relation between Ibn Arabi's Sufi concepts and the Sacred. I then analysed the symbols of the Sacred: the journey, the "openings", the "hidden", the "darkness" and "light" from Ibn Arabi's perspective and have clarified their intersection with the names of God: The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light. I have also clarified the relation between the chosen symbols of the Sacred in this thesis and the names of God, the Sacred: The Hidden,

The Manifest and The Light. In the final section of this chapter, I have examined Ibn Arabi's concept of the *barzakh* and I observed how it relates, from an ontological viewpoint, to the experience of the Sacred. The philosophical and conceptual framework provided in this chapter provides a platform for my later hermeneutic analysis and aims to shed light on the creative engagement between Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected corpus and the Sacred.

Chapter IV: The Sacred and the Journey through “Openings” and Towards the “Hidden”

Introduction: A Hermeneutic Analysis of the Journey through “Openings” and towards the “Hidden” in *Vaste est la prison*, *L’Enfant de sable* and *The Satanic Verses*

The aim in this chapter is on the one hand to carve out affinities between the Sufi religious symbols in *Vaste est la prison*, *L’Enfant de sable* and *The Satanic Verses*, and on the other to show how these texts engage creatively with the Sacred. This chapter applies a hermeneutic model of interpretation, more particularly the first stage of structural reading as expounded in Chapter II of this thesis. My reading here is focused on a close textual reading of the symbols of the journey, the “openings” and the “hidden” in *Vaste est la prison*, *L’Enfant de sable* and *The Satanic Verses*. The conceptual and philosophical framework of Ibn Arabi’s writings informs my reading in this chapter. In this regard, Ibn Arabi’s Sufi symbolic expressions act as a point of reference that help clarify the interplay between the literary texts of the three authors and the Sacred.

Previously in this thesis, I indicated that my choice of exploring the meanings of the journey the “hidden” and the “openings” is motivated by two main reasons. The first reason is that the journey has a significant connection with the Sacred since it is both related to the night journey of the Prophet and to the Sufis’ spiritual understanding of the journey. The second reason is that the expressions of the “hidden” and the “openings” have symbolic connection to the Sacred Names of God: The Hidden and The Manifest.

As clarified in Chapter II of this thesis, the hermeneutic explanation of the selected corpus involves a close textual analysis of the structural relations between the symbols of the Sacred. The interpretation of the three authors’ texts are here

dissociated from external references to authorial intention and are treated in terms of their internal structures: “we can, as readers, remain in the suspense of the text, treating it as a worldless and authorless object; in this case, we explain the text in terms of its internal relations, its structure” (Ricœur 1991a: 51). I am therefore applying here Ricœur’s hermeneutic bracketing of authorial intention. The focus in this chapter, as well as in Chapter V, is centrally on the texts and is deliberately “removed from the finite intentional horizon” of the author (Ricœur 1981: 99).

Adopting Ricœur’s hermeneutic methodology in this chapter is coterminous with aligning my reading “to what the text says, to what it intends, and to what it means” (Ricœur 1981: 67). In this regard, what the texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie “say” and “mean” is explored within the texts, and I argue that it is found in the symbolic expressions of the Sacred. What their texts “intend” is the ontological dimension of the Sacred which they project and which will be my central point of discussion in Chapter VI.

In the proposed hermeneutic reading in this chapter, I will establish the “synchronic” relations (Saussure 160: 102) between signifiers which can then be associated with the signified, the Sacred. The first set of signifiers are the journey, the “hidden” and the “openings”. In relation to these three signifiers I will explore a chain of signification made up of separate units in the texts, which also connect to the meaning of the Sacred. As such, the keywords “the heart” and the Beloved in *Vaste est la prison*, the doors and the treasure in *L’Enfant sable*, the visions and the “mystery” in *The Satanic Verses* appear as separate linguistic units in the texts. However, this chapter will show how this cluster of words is not to be taken at face value; instead they will be read as signifiers that are interdependent on the meanings of the journey, the “hidden”, and the “openings”. Hence, I will explain the structural

relationship between the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, “the heart” and the Beloved in *Vaste est la prison*, between the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, the doors and the treasure in *L’Enfant de sable*, and between the journey, the “hidden”, and the “openings”, the visions and the “mystery” in *The Satanic Verses*.

The hermeneutic explanation of the symbolic expressions in this chapter starts from the literal meaning of a set of words, then explores the double-intentional reference to the Sacred. I recall here Ricœur’s definition of the symbol:

I define “symbol” as any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first. This first circumscription of expressions with a double meaning properly constitutes the hermeneutic field. (Ricœur 1971: 12)

The analysis of the symbols of the Sacred in the selected corpus foregrounds the double-intentional aspect of the interpreted expressions. The “indirect” meanings of the expressions explored in this chapter will be clarified through the prism of Ibn Arabi’s Sufi conceptual framework.

i. Isma’s Journey through the “Openings of her Heart” in *Vaste est la prison*

Vaste est la prison is composed of an introduction entitled “Le Silence de l’écriture,” followed by four chapters entitled consecutively “L’Effacement dans le cœur,” “L’Effacement sur la pierre,” “Un Silencieux désir” and “Le Sang de l’écriture.” All four chapters are built around the theme of journeying. In the first chapter, Isma journeys back in time, thus reviving a secret and silenced passion. In the second chapter, the female narrator searches for the lost Berber language and its “mystère de l’écriture” (VP: 131). In the third chapter, the narrator undertakes an imaginative quest for the buried maternal voices of her mother and her grandmother, voices that

represent “la plainte hululante des ombres voilées flottant à l’horizon” (VP: 11). Finally, the last chapter, which is made up of only five pages, revolves around the female narrator’s poetic mourning of Algeria’s buried stories of death and history of violence.

The reading in this section focuses attention on the first chapter of *Vaste est la prison* since it is densely interspersed with key expressions that signify the connection between the journey of Isma and the Sacred. My choice to focus on this chapter is also motivated by the direct reference to Ibn Arabi. In the fifth part of the first chapter, Isma speaks of her visit to the national library and her immersion in readings. She quotes two paragraphs by Ibn Arabi where the latter describes his adolescent years. Isma then relates how she herself imagines Ibn Arabi as an adolescent:

Sous l’emprise du récit d’Ibn ‘Arabi évoquant ainsi son adolescence et ses années de formation mystique en Andalousie, je voyais avec précision sa route – éclairée de passion – qui menait vers Séville; j’imaginai [...] Ibn ‘Arabi, jeune homme courant en se tenant à l’étrier, qui ne voyait rien du ronces du chemin, enivré qu’il était par le récit des grâces du saint. (VP: 72)

Here, Isma clearly depicts the way her reading of Ibn Arabi had an impact on her. She pictures the journey of Ibn Arabi which is illuminated by “passion”. Taking this direct reference to Ibn Arabi as a point of departure, I will explore the passion experienced by Isma and her own journey in the light of Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy.

On a literal level, the first chapter of *Vaste est la prison* revolves around the personal memories of Isma. Isma describes in seven parts a secret passion that she briefly experienced as a married woman with a younger man. What my reading will show in this section is that this secret passion has a symbolic dimension which intersects with the Sacred.

In the first chapter of this thesis I carried out a literature review of the prevalent feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern approaches to Djébar’s *Vaste est la*

prison. I remarked that previous critics have paid particular attention to Djébar's defiance of patriarchal norms, her subversion of Colonial representations of women and her blending of autobiographical and historical genres with fiction. My reading in this section shifts the attention from feminist, postcolonial and postmodern preoccupation in order to explore the creative encounter between Djébar's text and the Sacred. In her reading of *Vaste est la prison*, Hiddleston (2006: 102) pays particular attention to the first chapter, contending that Isma's experience of love signifies "liberation" in a feminist sense. According to Hiddleston (2006: 102), Isma's visual descriptions of her Beloved represent the way Djébar advocates "feminine agency" by allowing her characters to seize "control of the gaze," thus subverting "feminine subordination and masculine authority." While Hiddleston interprets the visual descriptions of the Beloved as part of Djébar's feminist project, I propose to situate Isma's visions of her Beloved within a Sufi conceptual framework. Hence I will argue that Isma's visions constitute her inner "openings" to the Sacred that are reminiscent of a Sufi's "opening" of his or her heart.

Hence, my hermeneutic reading in this section focuses on explaining the structural relation between the journey, and the "openings". Establishing that there is a relation between the journey and the "openings" will allow me to identify the connection between these two key expressions and the Sacred in Djébar's text. Therefore, I will demonstrate that the journey of Isma, like a Sufi journey, involves a passage through seven stages and this passage entails an "opening" of her heart. Thus, the three key expressions, the journey, the "openings" and heart form three interconnected symbols in the chain of signification that refer to the Sacred in Djébar's text. The key word that engages attention in the first chapter is the word "cœur" which appears in the title "L'Effacement dans le cœur" and is repeatedly

used throughout the chapter. The word “cœur”, as I argue, is invested with a Sacred symbolic meaning and it constitutes a connective thread between all the seven parts of the first chapter in *Vaste est la prison*.

The hermeneutic explanation of the word heart demonstrates that it is a symbol whose double-intentionality refers to a meaning beyond the literal and physical understanding of the word. In this regard, there are seven stages, as previously noted, that can be identified in relation to Isma’s “opening” of her heart. Isma’s journey in search of the Beloved is thus a passage through her heart’s opening, a passage that mirrors a Sufi wayfarer’s journey towards the Sacred.

The first stage of Isma’s journey commences with listening to a “voix” of “l’inconnue” that gnaws inside “le cœur” (VP: 15). The narrator, following her “quête muette de lumière et d’ombre,” begins the “opening” of her heart by extracting “une flèche de silence qui transperça le fond de mon cœur” (VP: 13). This first stage of Isma’s journey begins first and foremost from the sacred space of the prayer mat:

Ecrire sur le passé, les pieds empêtrés dans un tapis de prière, qui ne serait pas même une natte de jute ou de crin, jetée au hasard sur la poussière d’un chemin à l’aurore, ou au pied d’une dune friable, sous le ciel immense d’un soleil couchant (VP: 11).

The word “chemin”, denoting a journey, refers to Isma’s feet being metaphorically caught up or tangled up in a prayer mat. Her journey is a passage through dust: “la poussière du chemin” (VP: 12). The words “chemin” and “quête” and their connection with the prayer mat slowly prepare and move the reader into the second stage of Isma’s journey.

The second stage of Isma’s journey is marked by an “opening” of her heart to a new “sensation” (VP: 20). Lying on a sofa in her father’s library, Isma “somnole, le

corps émietté par une soudaine lassitude” (VP: 20). As she drifts into sleep, Isma wanders away from her “corps absent” and follows “la montée intérieure” of her journey and its “vibrations imperceptibles” (VP: 19). As Isma falls asleep, she notes her father’s prayer mat beside her. The second repeated mention of the prayer mat reinforces the Sacred dimension of the journey undertaken by Isma. Here the prayer mat acquires a Sufi dimension since it is connected to the journey undertaken by Isma.¹⁷⁹

As Isma wakes up, she feels as though she has experienced a miraculous awakening that exposes her to “un cœur secret, gorgé d’ombre” (VP: 21). Connected to the word “cœur” are such verbs as “découvrir” and “revivre” and nouns such as “commencement”, “changement”, “éclairage”, “flux”, “réveil” and “reviviscence” (VP: 20-23). The meanings of these words stress the symbolic “opening” of Isma’s heart which coincides with a mysterious awakening and an overwhelming feeling of ecstasy:

Je fais effort pour comprendre peu à peu, malaisément, puis avec certitude, que quelque chose de neuf et de vulnérable à la fois, un commencement de je ne sais quoi d’étrange – en couleur, en son, en parfum, comment isoler la sensation? – que « cela » est en moi et cependant m’enveloppe. Je porte en moi un changement et j’en suis inondée. (VP: 20)

The journey of Isma is therefore experienced as an awakening, a new beginning and a revelation of a “cœur secret” (VP: 21).

Following the “opening” of her heart, Isma experiences an inner change. The “opening” of Isma’s heart enables her to witness “l’éclat de ma vision” and to

¹⁷⁹ In Islam, the prayer mat, in Arabic *sajjadah*, is used to perform *salat*, which translates in English as prayers. In Sufism, the prayer mat has symbolic connotations. Phyllis G. Jestice (2004: 410) indicates that venerated saints use the prayer mat not simply as “a ritualistic space for performing *salat*” but it rather “becomes the locus of theophanic experience.” Jestice (2004: 410) notes that the prayer mat is used by Sufis “in initiation ceremonies” and it is often referred to as “the carpet of God.” For a definition of prayer in Islam, see Sheikh Ramzy (2012). On the symbolic meaning of the prayer mat, see Jestice (2004).

experience her awakening as a “miracle” (VP: 22). At first Isma experiences this feeling “malaisément” as she does not know how to describe it in words, referring to it as “cela” (VP: 20). Slowly, Isma realises that she has uncovered a “palpitation secrète” that enables her to experience an inner change (VP: 23). Owing to the “opening” of her heart, Isma is no longer haunted by the harrowing “harcèlement d’une passion à la face aveugle,” instead, “Je me sens nouvelle. Je découvre en moi une surprenante, une brusque reviviscence” (VP: 21-24). The miraculous awakening in her father’s library that Isma depicts as “le miracle de mon réveil” signals “un début de stabilité paisible” (VP: 22). The sense of a new beginning or transition that envelops Isma resembles the experience of the Sufi seeker who unfailingly journeys through several stages in order to receive an inner knowledge of the Sacred.¹⁸⁰ For Isma, her miraculous awakening allows her to witness “le monde” as “un être invisible” (VP: 21). Existence, for Isma, acquires a new meaning: “Puis la vie repart en flux, glissando. Il me semble saisir sa trance, la palpitation d’un cœur secret, gorgé d’ombre” (VP: 21). This stage marks the “opening” of Isma’s heart and her uncovering of its secret “battement” (VP: 24).

The third stage of Isma’s journey entails the “opening” of her heart to the Beloved. In this stage, Isma begins to see the “visage” of the Beloved. Later in this chapter, I will clarify further the connection between the meaning of the Beloved, the “hidden” and the Sacred. What is of particular interest here, is that Isma starts to have inner visions of her Beloved and of his “face”, which brings to mind the Sufi visions of Ibn Arabi himself in his *Meccan Openings*. In Ibn Arabi’s words:

Now when I persisted in knocking on God’s Door
I was always attentive, nor was I distracted,
Until there appeared to my eye ‘the Splendor of His Face’
until - O wonder! - there was nothing [or ‘you were

¹⁸⁰ For a discussion of the different stages of Sufi wayfaring, see Safavi (2009).

nothing'] but It.
So I encompassed in knowing (all) Being - nor did we
know in our *heart* any other than God. (Morris 1995: 2; my emphasis.)

Ibn Arabi here describes how his journey towards God enables him to attain knowledge of the Sacred. This spiritual attainment, which takes place in his heart, symbolically corresponds to a vision of the “face” of God. Similarly, Isma’s “opening” of her heart allows her to see the Beloved’s “face.” What reinforces the significance of this relation between the journey of Isma and her heart is the fact that the title of this second stage is indeed “Le Visage”. As Isma drifts into sleep, she experiences an inner “navigation” that enables her to see “l’image de l’autre” (VP: 26). Despite his absence, the Beloved “parut” and Isma could clearly see a vision of his “face”, describing in minute details “le dessin des sourcils, l’ourlet de l’oreille, la légère pomme d’Adam, la lèvre supérieure [...]” (VP: 26). In Chapter VI of this thesis I will return to Isma’s vision of her Beloved and I will analyse the ontological aspect of the reality that presents itself in *Vaste est la prison*. I will compare her visionary journey to an intermediate world like that of the *barzakh*, a concept that Ibn Arabi uses to define the ontological experience of the Sacred.

As Isma progresses on the fourth stage of her journey, she has visions of herself with the Beloved, exchanging memories. The “opening” of Isma’s heart in this stage is emphasized with the reference to the Qur’anic *sura Al-Fatiha* which translates in English as “the Opening”.¹⁸¹ Isma finds herself reciting *Al-Fatiha*, hoping to chase away her desire and temptation towards the Beloved:

Tout à l’heure j’avais prononcé la *fatiha*, sans doute pour la première fois de ma vie [...] comme si seul Allah, dans le noir de ce corridor du sixième étage, m’avait protégée. (VP: 45; emphasis in original.)

¹⁸¹ *Al-Fatiha* is the opening chapter of the Qur’an. For a detailed analysis of the linguistic symbols employed in *Al-Fatiha*, see Abdul Karim Bangura (2004).

Al-Fatiha etymologically derives its root from *fath* which also means “opening”. In Chapter III, I have alluded to Ibn Arabi’s work *Meccan Openings* which derives its meaning from the *sura Al-Fatiha*. Corbin (1969: 249) remarks on the significance of *Al-Fatiha* which not only “opens the sacred book” but also provides the basis for Ibn Arabi’s contemplative prayers. According to Corbin:

The secret psalmody of the *Fatiha* accomplishes the essential unity between the man who prays and the Lord who is “personalized” for him, so that the faithful becomes the necessary complement to his Lord. In this exchange, the Worshipper is the Worshipped; the Lover is the Beloved. (1969: 256)

Al-Fatiha, as its title indicates, signals the moment when the heart of the seeker opens up to God, prays to Him in the hope of attaining the knowledge of the Sacred (Corbin 1969: 249).

Hence, the textual reference to *sura Al-Fatiha* by the female narrator reinforces the Sacred aspect of her journey. Isma’s journey entails the “opening” of her heart which symbolically brings her into a spiritual contact with her “hidden” Beloved. This parallels the Sufi seeker’s “opening” that enables him or her to gain a direct contact with the Sacred.

In the fifth stage of her journey, the heart of Isma opens up to suffering as a result of her separation from the Beloved. According to Ibn Arabi, suffering is a seminal stage in the journey of the Sufi seeker. In this light, Morris observes that amongst the themes that Ibn Arabi tackles in his *Meccan Openings* is the theme of suffering:

Certainly this is the case with [Ibn Arabi’s] discussions of the central role of earthly suffering in every person’s spiritual growth, and with his clarification of the complex role of suffering in the nexus connecting our (mis)deeds, their painful (but potentially liberating) consequences, and their ultimate fruits of illumination (2012: 27).

In a similar vein, as Isma progresses on her inner journey she experiences suffering which constitutes one of the stages in her journey that brings her closer to the Beloved. This stage of suffering soon leads to a feeling of liberation that she calls “*sakina*”, which is synonymous with serenity. With the “cœur griffé,” and le “cœur oppressé,” Isma searches for the Beloved (VP: 67-68). Isma’s heart is in this stage marked by an “effacement”, an erasure of “une passion à la face aveugle, à la vie séchée” where “le cœur vacille” (VP: 23-24). Isma’s inner quest for the Beloved in this stage is explicitly paralleled to Ibn Arabi’s own mystical journey, thus reinforcing the Sacred aspect of her journey. Isma explicitly refers to Ibn Arabi and to her readings in the library as she tries to cope with the weight of suffering and the pain of separation from the Beloved.

As such, Isma’s journey through the “opening” of her heart is marked by an inner suffering. As much as she longs for her “hidden” Beloved, he nonetheless belongs to an invisible world. Isma experiences a spiritual suffering that comes with the realisation of the absence of the Beloved. More importantly, Isma’s allusion to her separation from the Beloved appears few paragraphs after her reference to her reading of Ibn Arabi (VP: 66).

In the sixth stage of her journey, Isma confesses openly her passion. In her own words, Isma admits: “moi, j’aime. J’aime” (VP: 105). In this stage, Isma’s heart opens up to her passion and reveals visions of her Beloved who “revivait” through his voice, his confessions and his silences (VP: 86). Thus, Isma uncovers the “lien secret” that brings her closer to the presence of the absent Beloved (VP: 91). The “opening” of Isma’s heart to this secret passion enables her to see the Beloved “intérieurement” as he “redevient vivant” (VP: 96-99).

Isma reaches the final stage of her journey as her heart is overwhelmed by a sense of serenity. This stage is reminiscent of the Sufi experience of “peace and joy” that comes as result of an inner spiritual purification of the heart (Al-Jīlāni 1992: 41). The journey of Isma is here coterminous with a “quête” that leads to “*sakina*, c’est-à-dire à la sérénité pleine et pure” (VP: 106; emphasis in original). Isma’s journey leads to the “parages du lac de la sérénité! Celle-ci qu’on appelle en arabe la *sakina*” (VP: 331).¹⁸² The meaning of serenity – *sakina* in Arabic – emphasises Isma’s passage through “openings” which takes place within her heart. In fact, the final stage of her journey is not an end in itself:

Mais la sérénité des passages qui semblent ne devoir jamais finir: dans leur défilé, la “sakina-sérénité” vous emplit le cœur et l’âme, vous arme de liquidité, vous rassasie alors qu’autour de vous, tout penche, et chavire, et transmute. Or vous avez décidé d’avancer, yeux baissés, de suivre votre chemin sur le sol mystérieusement tracé. La sakina de qui ne sait pas perdre la route, de l’aveugle qui voit le mieux dans la nuit. (VP: 331)

In the above citation, the journey which fills the heart and “soul” of Isma with “*sakina*” is without an end, it follows a road that has been mysteriously traced. It is a journey of inner visions suggested in the comparison with a blind person seeing better at night time. The passage through seven stages and the indication that the journey is still continuous stresses the Sacred aspect of Isma’s “opening” of her heart which resembles Sufi seeker’s passage through an invisible road that leads to a “hidden” reality of the Sacred. The “opening” of Isma’s heart makes it possible for Isma to journey towards the secret reality that the Beloved belongs to, thus achieving a spiritual union with him, a union very similar to that achieved between a Sufi

¹⁸² *Sakina* is a Qur’anic term that appears in several verses. Its meaning is synonymous with tranquillity, serenity and peace. Its root verb is *sakana* which means dwelling. For example, in *sura Al-Baqara* the word *sakina* is mentioned: “And their Prophet said to them: Lo! The sign of his kingdom (being from God) is that there shall come to you the ark wherein is peace (*sakina*) of reassurance from your Lord, and a remnant of that which the house of Moses and the house of Aaron left behind, the angels bearing it. Lo! Herein shall be a sign for you if (in truth) you are believers” (2: 248). For a definition of *sakina*, see Jane F. Casewit (2007).

seeker and the Sacred Beloved. In Chapter VI, I will return to this point again and I will explore further the ontological dimension of Isma's "opening" of her heart in connection to the experience of the Sacred.

In conclusion, my hermeneutic reading in this section allowed me to identify seven stages pertaining to Isma's journey. These stages all revolve around the "opening" of Isma's heart. I argued that the journey, the "opening" and the heart are structurally linked in the first chapter of *Vaste est la prison*, thus demonstrating that the text of Djébar creatively engages with the symbols of the Sacred. In my textual analysis I relied on Ibn Arabi's Sufi concepts in order to clarify the Sufi symbolic aspect of such key expressions as the journey, the "opening" and the heart and their intersection with the concept of the Sacred. What transpires is that in such a reading within the Sufi tradition, the significance of the first part of the novel is not about telling a romantic story about an amorous encounter, it is rather the tracing of Isma's inner journey within her heart, where she experiences "openings". This experience will be explored further in Chapter VI of this thesis whereby I will compare it to the ontological reality of the *barzakh*, a key ontological concept that Ibn Arabi uses in his Sufi philosophy.

In the next section I will analyse the structural relation between the journey of Isma and the "hidden". As noted in this section, Isma's progress in her journey in *Vaste est la prison*, coincides with the "opening" of her heart to the visions of the Beloved. The Beloved belongs to an invisible realm that reveals itself to Isma's heart. Hence, the journey through the "opening" of her heart allows Isma to gain access to an invisible reality. In the same way that a Sufi wayfarer, through spiritual journeying, gains access to the sacred world of God, Isma departs from the physical world she inhabits in order to meet the invisible world of her Beloved. Thus the

symbolic expressions connected to the journey of Isma have contrasting meanings. On the one hand there is the “opening” of Isma’s heart and on the other there is the “hidden” Beloved. This contrast in symbolic meanings, as I argue in Chapter VI, is essential to a hermeneutic understanding the experience of the Sacred in *Vaste est la prison*.

ii. Isma’s Journey towards the “Hidden Beloved” in *Vaste est la prison*

In this section, I will explain the Sacred meanings of the journey, the “hidden”, and the Beloved. In a literal sense, as noted earlier, the Beloved refers to the young man that Isma falls in love with. The repetitive use of the word “L’Aimé” with a capital letter in the first chapter of *Vaste est la prison* in conjunction with Isma’s direct reference to her readings of Ibn Arabi indicate that the word “L’Aimé” needs particular attention.

Interpreted symbolically, and from a Sufi angle, the word “L’Aimé” signifies the “hidden” in *Vaste est la prison*. The word “L’Aimé” stresses Isma’s longing to unite with the Beloved, a longing akin to the Sufi quest for the Sacred. The first chapter is far from being a simple description of an ordinary extramarital love story that was kept secret. On the contrary, the passion that Isma experiences bursts with Sufi connotations. Isma’s passion for her Beloved is a sacred secret that cannot be shared with others and that has to remain concealed inside her heart. As such, the Beloved:

portait au-devant de moi son secret. Me le proposait. Seule, je le déchiffrerais; je le partagerais avec lui, sans lui avouer que mon cœur fléchirait pour cela même, et j’espérais que ma lucidité, ordinairement si froide, s’exercerait: le saccage en cet homme, et l’absence. (VP: 27)

Despite his absence, the secret of the Beloved has signs that Isma endeavours to decipher. Hence, seeking the Beloved entails an inner journey into a secret that cannot be revealed.

Isma's quest for the Beloved is akin to a Sufi wayfarer's search for the "hidden" Sacred.¹⁸³ Faced with the inevitable absence of her Beloved, Isma embarks on a search, "à marcher", in the hope of crossing "la secrète frontière" that separates her from her Beloved (VP: 67-68). Isma ventures into "les pentes" seeking "quel fantôme," to the point of calling herself "la marcheuse" (VP: 67). In the first stage of Isma's journey, there is a plethora of words that signify the "hidden". In the opening pages of the novel, nouns such as "pénombre", "ombres" and "secrets" and adjectives like "voilées", "obscure" and "inconnu" all form a chain of signification that convey the relation between the journey of Isma and the "hidden". As Isma progresses on her journey, it becomes clear that what is "hidden" is the Beloved and that Isma is embarking on a quest for his concealed presence.

As Isma enters the second stage of her journey, which takes place, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, in her father's library, she employs words that reinforce the meaning of the "hidden". Isma speaks of "vibrations imperceptibles" and of "un labour obscur" that she experiences from within (VP: 19). Isma notes that her "mots sont voilés" and that she senses an "ensevelissement de tout ce qui s'exhume profond en moi" (VP: 19). The meanings of these expressions highlight the meaning of the "hidden" and prepare the reader for the absence of the Beloved that Isma seeks.

Like the Sufi seeker who experiences suffering as a result of the absence of the Beloved,¹⁸⁴ Isma is afflicted by the absence of "L'Aimé." It is not easy for Isma to speak about her secret love, for she has to battle with the difficulty of searching for

¹⁸³ In his poetry, the 13th century Sufi poet and scholar Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rumi also speaks about his sacred love for the Beloved as a secret. See Fatih Çitlak and Hüseyin Bingül (eds) (2009).

¹⁸⁴ For a discussion of the theme suffering in the Sufi poetry of Rumi, see Çitlak and Bingül (2009).

his presence: “mon amour silencieux, auparavant si difficilement maîtrisé, changeait de nature; il subsistait en moi toujours secret” (VP: 116). Hence, Isma experiences the “inexorable morsure de l’absence,” wondering whether “L’Aimé s’était-il évanouit, et dans quel néant?” (VP: 67).

So far, I have examined the keywords heart and the Beloved in the text of *Vaste est la prison*. The hermeneutic analysis has shown that both keywords are symbols that convey Isma’s journey through the “opening” of her heart as well as her journey towards the “hidden”. The structural link between the journey, the “opening” of Isma’s heart, and “the hidden” Beloved is situated at the crossroad of the concept of the Sacred. Isma’s passage through the “opening” of her heart entails a miraculous awakening and an uncovering of a secret palpitation. In a similar vein, Isma’s search for her Beloved is incumbent upon her quest for a “hidden” realm. The double-intentionality of the heart and the Beloved has been examined by explaining how the meanings of both words can be symbolically interpreted through Ibn Arabi’s Sufi perspective. I have demonstrated that the structural relations between the heart and the “openings”, and the Beloved and the “hidden” signify the Sacred aspect of the journey undertaken by Isma. Chapter VI will explore further the ontological dimension of Isma’s journey by understanding how it projects an intermediate world that parallels Ibn Arabi’s concept of the *barzakh*. The next section will move to a hermeneutic explanation of Ben Jelloun’s text *L’Enfant de sable* and will identify the commonality between *Vaste est la prison* and *L’Enfant de sable* in relation to the symbolic associations of the Sacred.

iii. The Journey through “Open Doors” in *L’Enfant de sable*

This section therefore proposes a hermeneutic explanation of the journey, the “hidden” and the “openings” in Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable*. Like the heart of Isma which symbolises her journey through “openings”, the word door in *L’Enfant de sable* equally symbolises an “opening” in the Sufi sense. Taking into account Ricœur’s definition of the symbol in terms of its double-intentionality, the word door is not to be interpreted here as a physical object.

In the literature review carried out in Chapter I, I examined the prevalent postcolonial, postmodern and feminist approaches to Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*. For example, in his reading of *L’Enfant de sable*, Hayes claims that Ben Jelloun reveals sexual taboos and unveils “marginal sexualities” as a form of political resistance to dominant discourses. Hayes’ argument implies that what is hidden and excluded by the nationalist discourse is inscribed in a subversive manner in Ben Jelloun’s novel.

Hayes probes the secret in *L’Enfant de sable* with a particular emphasis on its sexualised nature. For Hayes (2000: 169), *L’Enfant de sable* reflects “Ben Jelloun’s stated desire to publicly disclose sexual secrets.” The ambiguous identity of Ahmed/Zahra, in Hayes’ view, and his/her ambiguous sexuality occupies a marginal status and it is therefore “veiled” by official discourse on national identity. Hayes writes that (2000: 2) Ben Jelloun’s “revelation of sexualities that should remain secret contradicts the official discourses of nationality that deny the existence of nonnormative sexualities.” In this sense, Ben Jelloun’s novel not only alludes to the secret but also reveals it in a subversive gesture to counter the repressive national discourse.

Differently to Hayes, I will situate my reading within the conceptual framework of Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy and I will demonstrate that the “hidden”

when examined in conjunction with the expressions of the “openings” and the journey constitutes a central symbol that signifies the Sacred. My reading expands further the position of Gontard (1993) and Bourget (2002). Gontard and Bourget, as noted in Chapter I of this thesis, proposed readings of Ben Jelloun that highlight the significance of the religious aspect in their writing. While Bourget underscores the intertextual references to Sufism and Gontard inscribes the Sufi aspect within a postmodern frame, I propose to pay particular attention to the concept of the Sacred and to provide a hermeneutic explanation of the Sufi symbols in Ben Jelloun’s text.

In Ben Jelloun’s text the Sacred as a signified is conveyed through Sufi signifiers such as doors and treasure. It will be argued later in this section that Ahmed/Zahra’s story is a Sacred treasure, the deciphering of which necessitates a journey through open doors. I will clarify in the ensuing section the Sufi meaning of the Sacred treasure. My focus now is on reading the key word door from a Sufi angle in order to show how it symbolises an “opening”.

L’Enfant de sable revolves around the life of Ahmed/Zahra, a child born a girl but raised as a boy. Following the birth of seven daughters, Haj Ahmed decides that no matter what the sex of the eighth child, he will announce the birth of a male heir. On the independence day of Morocco, an eighth baby girl is born; however, Haj Ahmed gives it the name of Ahmed. Throughout his/her adolescence years, Ahmed/Zahra learns how to perform the role of a male character. As the central narrator of Ahmed/Zahra’s story disappears, multiple narrators take over the story and claim to hold the true version of events.

L’Enfant de sable is composed of nineteen chapters. In the first thirteen chapters, it is the voice of a central storyteller that tells the story of Ahmed/Zahra the protagonist. Surrounded by an audience, listening to the story of Ahmed/Zahra

unfolding, the main storyteller describes the seclusion of the protagonist and informs his audience that Ahmed/Zahra has left behind a secret journal. Right from the outset, the central storyteller invites his audience to embark on a narrative journey. Chapter fourteen announces the disappearance, then the death of the main storyteller. Salem, Amar and Fatouma are three characters who present themselves to the audience. Each one of them claims to know the truth about Ahmed/Zahra's life and therefore compete in giving their own versions of events. Near the end of the story, a strange character named the Blind Troubadour continues the story of Ahmed/Zahra until it ends.

Describing his fear of being caught by the police and the possibility of being mistaken for a member of Muslim brotherhood, Amar, one of the narrators in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* remarks: "J'ai envie de leur dire: l'Islam que je porte en moi est introuvable [...] Mais leur parler d'Ibn Arabi ou d'El Hallaj¹⁸⁵ aurait pu me valoir des ennuis" (ES: 146). While Amar's comment calls attention to the spread of religious hypocrisy in society, it also underscores his affiliation to the spiritual dimension of Islam. Taking into account Amar's direct reference to such influential Sufis as Ibn Arabi and Al-Hallaj, this section examines the creative engagement between Ben Jelloun's text and the Sufi Islamic heritage.

The inner structure of the narrative in *L'Enfant de sable* is built around a secret. Although the secret *per se* cannot be divulged, the reader is incited to embark on a journey. The central storyteller confesses to his audience that Ahmed/Zahra's "livre du secret" can be revealed if one embarks on a quest:

Soyez patients; creusez avec moi le tunnel de la question et sachez attendre, non pas mes phrases [...] mais le chant qui montera de la mer et viendra vous initier sur le chemin du livre. (ES: 13)

¹⁸⁵ For more on Al-Hallaj, see footnote 42 on page 24.

Like a Sufi journey, the journey in search of Ahmed/Zahra's secret is symbolised by an "opening" of doors. This inner structural relation between the journey, the "opening" and doors convey the creative engagement between Ben Jelloun's text and the Sacred.

L'Enfant de sable begins by preparing or rather initiating the reader to cross seven doors:

Sachez aussi que le livre a sept portes percées dans une muraille large d'au moins deux mètres et haute d'au moins trois hommes sveltes et vigoureux. Je vous donnerai au fur et à mesure les clés pour ouvrir ces portes. (*ES*: 13)

The word door is repetitively used in the novel. In total there are seven chapters that embed the French word "porte" and its Arabic equivalent "bab" in their titles. The second, third and fourth chapters are consecutively entitled "la Porte du jeudi" (Thursday Gate), "la Porte du vendredi" (Friday Gate) and "la Porte du samedi" (Saturday Gate). The fifth chapter is entitled "Bab el Had" (the Sunday gate). "La Porte oubliée" (The Forgotten Door) is the title of the sixth chapter and the seventh chapter comes under the title "la Porte emmurée" (The Walled-Up Gate). The ultimate chapter is entitled "la Porte des sables" (The Gate of the Sands).

Ahmed/Zahra's secret is hidden, yet the storytellers, together with the audience, like a Sufi seeker, need to open each of these doors so that what is concealed is revealed. The seven chapters that carry the title door refer to the seven stages of the spiritual journey that Sufis embark upon. In relation to the mystical significance of number seven, Pont-Humbert explains:

Le septénaire est compris dans toutes les démarches philosophiques et mystiques, dans la mesure où le septième degré est celui de toute initiation ésotérique arrivée à son terme. (2003: 376)

In this sense, the journey through “openings” in *L’Enfant de sable*, symbolically mirrors a spiritual ascension through seven stages and a quest for the Sacred.¹⁸⁶

The recurrence of the word door can be noticed not only in the chapters’ titles but also throughout the novel. The story of Ahmed/Zahra is replete with secret doors that are awaiting to be opened, nevertheless, “Ni vous ni moi ne saurons jamais la fin de l’histoire qui n’a pu franchir toutes les portes” (*ES*: 204). In his/her notebook, Ahmed/Zahra speaks of himself/herself as the “porteur du secret” (*ES*: 152) and the challenge that faces the storytellers as well as the audience is to try and find the doors that might lead to the hidden secret, even though Ahmed/Zahra might be the person who “seul avait les clés” (*ES*: 9).

The secret of Ahmed/Zahra, which I will argue later is interrelated with the symbolism of the “hidden” and the Sacred, demands close attention from the listener, otherwise “the doors” risk remaining closed, behind “un mystère pesant” (*ES*: 93). The first door, “la porte du Jeudi,” symbolises the beginning of the journey through “openings”. At the start of “la porte du Jeudi,” the main storyteller speaks to his audience as “Amis du Bien” and announces that they are all united by a secret “itinéraire” (*ES*: 15). The main storyteller further stresses the fact that the journey will only be made possible if one is equipped with a strong faith, “une foi immense” coupled with meditation (*ES*: 16). In “la porte du Jeudi” the verbs “marcher” and the nouns “chemin,” “désert” and “voyage” highlight the meaning of the journey:

Car cette histoire est aussi un désert. Il va falloir marcher pieds nus sur le sable brûlant, marcher et se taire, croire à l’oasis qui se dessine à l’horizon et qui ne cesse d’avancer vers le ciel, marcher et ne pas se retourner pour ne pas être emporté par le vertige. Nos pas inventent le chemin au fur et à mesure que nous avançons; derrière, ils ne laissent pas de trace. (*ES*: 15)

¹⁸⁶ Souad Boussem notes that the number seven has a Sufi connotation in Ben Jelloun’s novel *La Nuit sacrée*. Boussem examines how the Zahra in *La Nuit sacrée* embarks on a journey through seven spiritual encounters. For more details, see Boussem (2015).

Listening to the story of Ahmed/Zahra is therefore akin to a journey through seven doors. Such a passage through open doors is compared to a crossing of a desert, whereby the wayfarer is involved in continuous process of walking. This “voyage,” as the storyteller confesses, leads to liberation and inner transformation (*ES*: 16).

The journey through “opening” is also symbolised by the opening of the second door, “la porte du Vendredi.” This door opens into the celebrations linked to the birth of Ahmed/Zahra. It is a door that brings physical and spiritual peace: “La porte de vendredi est celle qui rassemble, pour le repos du corps, pour le recueillement de l’âme” (*ES*: 29). This door, albeit unstable, is a harbinger of feelings of joy:

Cette porte ne laissera passer que le bonheur. C’est sa fonction, ou du moins telle est sa réputation. Chacun de nous a un jour vu cette porte s’ouvrir sur ses nuits et les illuminer même brièvement. Elle n’est percée dans aucune muraille. C’est la seule porte qui se déplace et avance au pas du destin. (*ES*: 29)

Those who follow this door will find their way to their destiny but they need the devotion and “patience du pèlerin” (*ES*: 40). In addition to the celebratory tone of this “opening,” this door reveals some of the childhood memories that are kept in Ahmed/Zahra’s secret journal. Amongst these memories is Ahmed/Zahra’s joining his father for prayer at the mosque. Ahmed/Zahra describes the way he follows the movement of the “chant coranique” and of the Arabic letters (*ES*: 38). Ahmed/Zahra feels as though he/she was transported by the Qur’anic verse that reads: “Si Dieu vous donne la victoire/personne ne peut vous vaincre” (*ES*: 38). Ahmed/Zahra imagines himself/herself ascending with the Sacred words and letters to the ceiling of the mosque: “J’étais ainsi pris par toutes les lettres qui me faisaient faire le tour du plafond et me ramenaient en douceur à mon point de départ” (*ES*: 38).

In addition to the Sufi symbolic connotation of doors in Ben Jelloun's text, the word key accentuates the meaning of "opening" and stresses its connection with the Sacred. In the opening chapter, the central storyteller acknowledges that the seven doors will provide keys to the secret of Ahmed/Zahra:

Sachez aussi que le livre a sept portes percées dans une muraille [...] Je vous donnerai au fur et à mesure les clés pour ouvrir ces portes. En vérité les clés, vous les possédez mais vous ne le savez pas. (ES: 13)

Fatouma, who, following the disappearance of the main storyteller, continues the story of Ahmed/Zahra speaks about a lost "clé" that will lead to a hidden secret (ES: 167). Towards the end of the novel, again we learn that there exists "une clé magique devant ouvrir des portes oubliées" (ES: 200). Hence, those who seek the secret of Ahmed/Zahra embark on a passage through doors and gain access to keys. Like a Sufi spiritual aspirant, those who embark on a journey in *L'Enfant de sable* are in a constant search of "l'Empire du Secret, là où le Secret est profond et caché" (ES: 203).

Thus far, the hermeneutic explanation of *L'Enfant de sable* has demonstrated that there is a structural relation between the journey, the "opening" and doors. What transpires from this textual connection between these key expressions is that they form a chain of significations that symbolise the Sacred. To make my argument I have drawn from Ibn Arabi's Sufi writings, which allows for a better understanding of how the journey in *L'Enfant de sable* is similar to the Sufi journey through an "opening" of doors.

iv. The Journey towards "The Hidden Treasure" in *L'Enfant de sable*

While with Djébar's *Vaste est la prison* the hermeneutic textual analysis emphasised the symbolic connotations of the Beloved, and its intersection with the Sacred, in the case of Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* I will draw attention to the symbolic meaning of the treasure and how it is related to the Sacred. The hermeneutic reading of *L'Enfant de sable* in this section shows that the reference to a "hidden treasure" reinforces the creative engagement between Ben Jelloun's text and the Sufi Islamic heritage.

Throughout *L'Enfant de sable*, the language can best be described as cryptic and the storyline presents itself in a labyrinthine manner. Numerous storytellers claim to know the truth about Ahmed/Zahra's life. There are different versions of Ahmed/Zahra's story which sometimes conflict with one another. Notably there are truths being told about Ahmed/Zahra rather than one single truth being proclaimed by one single voice. I argued earlier that the storytellers' and the audience's journey through doors signify "openings" in the Sufi sense. In this section I will explore the symbolism of the "hidden" which contrasts with the meaning of "openings". Both opposed symbols are closely interlinked to the journey and they both signify the Sacred. This opposition at the symbolic level will be examined further in Chapter VI as I will focus my attention on how the meeting of contraries projects intermediate worlds in the texts of the three authors.

In Chapter III, I examined how Sufis, in their search for the Sacred, embark on a spiritual journey towards The Hidden. I also noted that Ibn Arabi employs the expression "hidden treasure" to convey symbolically the idea that God is unseen, yet his signs can be revealed to the heart of the seeker.¹⁸⁷ Sufis in this regard are in quest of this sacred secret which, albeit hidden, can reveal itself through "openings". In a

¹⁸⁷ Rumi also refers to God as the "hidden treasure." In Rumi's words (Chittick 2005b: 61): "God said to him: O temporal man, I was a hidden treasure/I sought that that treasure of lovingkindness and bounty should be revealed."

similar vein, the journey of the storytellers and the audience in *L'Enfant de sable* corresponds to a spiritual search for a Sacred treasure which can only be partially divulged to those who look for its signs, and follow the intricacies of its secret.

What signifies the Sacred in *L'Enfant de sable* is the structural relation between the journey, the “hidden” and the treasure. The storytellers’ journey is a quest for Ahmed/Zahra’s secret treasure which parallels the quest of the Sufi seeker. I have explored in the previous section how the journey of the storytellers entails a passage through doors and that these are akin to spiritual “openings”. As the journey reaches its end, Ahmed/Zahra’s niece says in the closing pages of the novel:

Je vous laisse un trésor et un puits profond. Attention, il ne faut pas les confondre, il en va de votre raison! Soyez digne du secret et de ses blessures. Transmettez le récit en le faisant passer par les sept jardins de l’âme. (ES: 208)

It becomes clear that the journey undertaken since the start of the novel is a quest for a treasure. The word “un trésor” is understood in its relation to the secret “voyage” through the seven “jardins de l’âme.” The journey in *L'Enfant de sable* is a quest for a treasure which can be found in “L’Empire du Secret, là où le Secret est profond et caché” (ES: 203). The use of the Arabic words “Es-ser El Mekhfi”, (the Hidden Secret), in capital letters further reinforces the Sacred aspect of the treasure that corresponds to “le Secret suprême” (ES: 203). The adjective “suprême” that describes Ahmed/Zahra is also used to describe God in Ben Jelloun’s text. As the main storyteller puts it: “O mes amis, je n’ose parler en votre compagnie de Dieu, l’indifférent, le suprême” (ES: 65). Here it is clear that if the adjective “suprême” describes both the secret and God, then it is possible to say that the secret of Ahmed/Zahra is akin to the Sacred. Thus, the journey in *L'Enfant de sable* is a quest for a Sacred secret that parallels the Sufi wayfarer’s search for the Sacred.

The symbolic aspect of the “hidden” in relation to the treasure is emphasised through the use of vocabulary pertaining to secrecy. The truth of Ahmed/Zahra’s treasure cannot be revealed for it is concealed within a “secret naturel” (ES: 43). It is a secret truth “qui ne peut être dite” and “qui ne peut non plus être révélé” (ES: 43-45). It cannot be seen and its concealment is connected to such words as “voile,” “masque,” and “ombre” (ES: 45). Furthermore, the quest for the “hidden treasure” parallels a search for a “mosquée dans le désert” where “les gens du crépuscule viennent déposer leur tristesse” (ES: 47). There is “[t]ant de mystère” that runs throughout the text and a plethora of “questions [qui] n’ont pas de réponses” (ES: 57-59). Zahra/Ahmed is a Sacred treasure whose truth cannot be revealed, unless one listens to the “silence du cœur” (ES: 56). The journey towards the sacred “secret” is not a revelation of what the “hidden” is; on the contrary, it is a quest mysteriously anchored in “une couche épaisse de mots et de phrases” (ES: 70-71).

The main storyteller who reads from Ahmed/Zahra’s journal compares it to a “livre du secret” and “livre rare” (ES: 12). This comparison suggests a resemblance between the journal of Ahmed/Zahra and the sacred book the Qur’an. In this sense, the “journal” of Ahmed/Zahra, like a sacred book, is replete with verses. Each time the doors open in *L’Enfant de sable*, “les pages du livre” reveal “des phrases ou versets” that point to “ce lieu inaccessible” (ES: 107-108). What also reinforces further the sacred aspect of Ahmed/Zahra’s “hidden treasure” is the explicit comparison with the Prophet Mohammad. Seeking the “hidden” in *L’Enfant de sable* is akin to uncovering “la voix de l’absent” which resembles “la voix de notre Prophète Muhammed” (ES: 100). The search for the “hidden” is therefore an inner experience of a Sacred voice that necessitates a journey from within, “entièrement en soi, à l’intérieur” (ES: 100).

As the journey progresses, the main storyteller reveals that Ahmed/Zahra is an “absence” and a secret surrounded by “la grâce” (*ES*: 59-61). The meaning of “grâce” here emphasises the sacred aspect of Ahmed/Zahra whose journal, like the sacred book of the Qur’an, proffers “grâce” on its listeners or followers.¹⁸⁸ Nasr (1989: 135) remarks that Sufis attain the Sacred through “the grace issuing from the Quranic revelation.” In the Qur’an, it is also stated that “grace” is bestowed on those who seek the sacred knowledge:

Then We have given the Book as an inheritance to those whom we have chosen from among Our servants [...] some of them are those who are foremost in deeds of goodness by Allah’s will. That is the greatest grace. (35: 32)

Hence, those who read Ahmed/Zahra’s journal are likely to receive the sacred “grace” if they follow the journey that will enable them to attain the “hidden treasure.” Ahmed/Zahra is unseen. It is difficult to “dévoiler” his/her truth. Instead, those who embark on a journey towards the treasure need to “marcher sur ce chemin avec la patience nourrie d’espoir par le rêve” (*ES*: 60). Hence, there is solely a “fil invisible” that links both the journey and the “hidden” to the storytellers and to the audience (*ES*: 28). While Ahmed/Zahra’s secret is unseen and remains secretly “hidden”, the journey through “septs portes” continues, like a Sufi seeker who constantly tries to find the “hidden” Sacred (*ES*: 63).

The journey towards the “hidden” in *L’Enfant de sable* necessitates faith as it leads those who embark on it to spiritual illumination. The “conteur” confesses to his

¹⁸⁸ The term grace, *fadh*l in Arabic, is repeated in several verses. It is mentioned for example in *sura Al-Baqara*: “And (remember, O Children of Israel) when We made a covenant with you and caused the Mount to tower above you, (saying): Hold fast that which We have given you, and remember that which is therein, that you may become pious. Then, even after that, you turned away, and if it had not been for the grace of God and His mercy, you had been among the losers. And you know of those of you who broke the Sabbath, how We said to them: Be you apes, despised and hated! And We made it an example to their own and to succeeding generations, and an admonition to the God fearing” (2: 63). For a definition of the meaning of grace in Sufism, see Hidayat Khan (1994).

audience that Ahmed/Zahra's story is not an ordinary one, it is a "hidden" secret that demands "une foi immense" from those who are prepared to listen to it (*ES*: 16). The "conteur" insists that he needs the audience to be committed to this journey: "J'ai besoin de vous. Je vous associe à mon entreprise" (*ES*: 16). Each time the journey progresses, "Chaque arrêt sera utilisé pour le silence et la réflexion" (*ES*: 16). Moreover, at the start of the journey, the central storyteller addresses his audience asking only those who are prepared to raise their "main droite pour le pacte de fidélité" (*ES*: 16). Hence, those seeking the treasure need to uncover the signs that will eventually lead to deliverance:

Amis du Bien, sachez que nous sommes réunis par le secret du verbe dans une rue circulaire, peut-être sur un navire et pour une traversée dont je ne connais pas l'itinéraire. Cette histoire a quelque chose de la nuit; elle est obscure et pourtant riche en images; elle devrait déboucher sur une lumière, faible et douce; lorsque nous arriverons à l'aube, nous serons délivrés. (*ES*: 15)

The central storyteller addresses his audience as, "Amis du Bien," the "Friends of Good,"¹⁸⁹ whose passage through the "darkness" of the "night" will enable them to gain access to the hidden "light", hence recalling the Sufi quest for the "light" of the "hidden" which I explained in Chapter III in relation to the name of God, The Light. The emphasis by the "conteur" on the commitment of his audience testifies to the sanctity of the knowledge that will be revealed through the secret of Ahmed/Zahra. Speaking about the knowledge of the Sacred, Ibn Arabi (2015: 48) describes it as "both unique and diffused. It calls for people to bear it. Whenever its bearers becomes numerous – as long as they are righteous, for it is knowledge belonging to the righteous – it is divided among them."

¹⁸⁹ The key word "friends" deserves a special attention. In Sufism, Sufi saints are called "friends of God". Jawid Mojaddedi devotes a whole book to the study of "friendship" in early Sufi work. What characterises Sufi "friendship," according to Mojaddedi (2012: 53), is "the ability to receive divine communication, to be directed by God rather than law, and to perform miracles."

Ahmed/Zahra is a “hidden treasure” whose essence remains unknown. The revelation of Ahmed/Zahra’s secret is an inner experience that takes place if one “ouvre mon cœur,” as the main storyteller admits. Ahmed/Zahra, like the Sacred, is an “énigme” who has “le pouvoir de l’être invisible” (ES: 85-90). Ahmed/Zahra as a Sacred “secret” has a “vérité cachée” that can only be unveiled to those “recherchant le visage intérieur de la vérité” (ES: 84-85). Seeking the “hidden treasure” in *L’Enfant de sable* necessitates a “réserve d’amour” (ES: 87), an acquaintance with mystical poetry, and a commitment to “l’amour absolu” (ES: 104). Those who attain the Sacred *L’Enfant de sable* experience a “joie [...] intérieure et silencieuse” (ES: 86-87). Adjectives such as “caché” and “invisible” reinforce the meaning of the “hidden” in relation to Ahmed/Zahra (ES: 93). Hence, Ahmed/Zahra is a being who is “invisible,” “personne ne le voyait” and is veiled under a “mystère pesant” (ES: 93). As such, what remains “hidden” is the truth germane to Ahmed/Zahra for he/she is “porteur de deux vies” (ES: 170). At the same time, the secret resides in grasping the interdependence between Ahmed and Zahra; one is different from the other, but they cannot be dissociated from one another. In Chapter VI of this thesis I will return to this point and I will clarify the relation between the two selves of Ahmed/Zahra and the intermediate experience of the Sacred.

In conclusion, I have examined the structural relation between the journey, the “hidden”, and the treasure. Demonstrating this connection within the text shows that the journey in *L’Enfant de sable* corresponds to a Sufi quest for the Sacred, the “hidden treasure”. I explained that the text of Ben Jelloun is replete with expressions that signify secrecy, thus highlighting the “hidden” meaning associated with the sacred secret of Ahmed/Zahra. The aim of my hermeneutic reading of the inner structure of *L’Enfant de sable* is to establish how the text of Ben Jelloun engages

with the Sufi Islamic heritage through the use of symbolic expressions. Having established that there is a journey in *L'Enfant de sable* that pertains both to the “opening” of doors and to the “hidden” treasure I will explore further in Chapter VI the contrast between the symbols of the “openings” and the “hidden” in connection to the ontological experience of the Sacred.

v. Gibreel's Journey through “Visionary Openings” in *The Satanic Verses*

The hermeneutic explanation proposed in this section will focus on the internal structural relations between Gibreel's journey, visions, and the Sacred. The analysis of “the opening” of Isma's heart in *Vaste est la prison* and of “the opening” of doors in *L'Enfant de sable* demonstrated the creative engagement between Djébar's and Ben Jelloun's texts and the Sufi symbols of the Sacred. The same holds true for *The Satanic Verses* whereby Gibreel's visions can be interpreted as the spiritual “openings”, akin to those experienced by a Sufi seeker during his or her search for the Sacred.

The Satanic Verses is composed of nine chapters. On a literal level, these chapters are interspersed with the journey of Gibreel that began the moment he fell from the aeroplane. Chapter I, “The Angel Gibreel”, introduces the two main protagonists, Gibreel and Chamcha. They are depicted as falling from an aeroplane that was blown up by a terrorist act. In this chapter, the narrative shifts back and forth between the past histories of the two protagonists and the present of their fall. Chapter II, “Mahound”, recounts the dream of Gibreel about Mahound and the latter's fictional journey back to the early years of the Islamic history, more precisely to the time when the Prophet was met with resentment by the Pagan community. Chapter III, “Ellowen Deeowen”, returns to the fall of Gibreel and Chamcha. They

are both found on the beach and rescued by Rosa Diamond. Following their descent, both Chamcha and Gibreel undergo a metamorphosis. Chamcha turns into a Devil and Gibreel into an Angel. When the police come to detain Chamcha for allegedly entering the UK as an illegal immigrant, the latter tries to prove his innocence and asks Gibreel for help. As a result of Gibreel's reluctance to offer help to Chamcha, the two characters develop a feeling of animosity towards each other which will animate the plot of the novel.

Chapter IV, "Ayesha", moves onto recounting two separate dreams of Gibreel. One is about a fundamentalist Imam and the other about a mystical girl known as Ayesha. Chapter V, "A City Visible but Unseen," depicts the transformation of Chamcha into the Devil and shows how the black community began to hear about the satanic figure. In conjunction with Chamcha's metamorphosis there is the journey of Gibreel in contemporary London. Gibreel is portrayed as hovering over the streets of London as a "celestial being" (SV: 335). Chapter VI, "Return to Jahilia," returns back to Gibreel's dreams about the early years of Islam and represents the cynicism of both the poet Baal and scribe Salman towards the revelations of Mahound. Chapter VII, "The Angel Azrael," renders the strong animosity that developed between Chamcha and Gibreel. Gibreel here dreams of himself as the Angel of Death and at the end of the chapter he ends up overcoming the feelings of hatred towards Chamcha, thus rescuing him from a fire that wrecked the community. Chapter VIII, "The Parting of the Arabian Sea," goes back to Gibreel's dream about Ayesha, the mystical girl, who alongside a group of pilgrims, perish on their way to Mecca. Chapter IX, "The Wonderful Lamp," shows both Chamcha and Gibreel returning to India. This chapter marks the end of the journey

for Gibreel who ends up shooting himself, thus marking the “end of many stories” (SV: 543).

In the first chapter of this thesis, I presented an overview of the prevalent postmodern and postcolonial approaches to Rushdie’s selected texts, and I argued that there is to date no detailed study of the Sacred in relation to Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. Presenting a political reading of the fall of the two characters, Papai Pal (2014), for example, argues that Rushdie’s novel addresses the issue of racism through the exploration of the migrant’s condition in British society. Pal (2014: 3) explains that the transformation of both characters mirrors the intricacies of such questions as politics, identity and racism. In Pal’s words (2014: 3): “A migrant is forced to adjust to a new society and a new world”, hence “he frequently faces the politics of racism and discrimination.” Hence the journey of both characters is here located within a discussion of racism in the British society.

Differently to Pal and to the critics who have underlined the postmodern and postcolonial aspects of *The Satanic Verses*, Maha Meeray, in her book-length study *Salman Rushdie the Believer: A Satanic Journey Mirroring Belief*, proposes a reading of Rushdie’s text that highlights the relevance of the Islamic heritage. Meeray (2010: 2) argues that *The Satanic Verses* represents the author’s own “quest of knowledge about Islam by way of Islamic history.” While Meeray acknowledges the transgressive dimension of the novel, she also demonstrates that the author himself is seeking to grapple with questions of belief. Meeray indicates that (2010: 2) “Rushdie tries to make sense of the two worlds he is torn between.” Thus, Meeray (2010: 2) situates the journey of the main characters in *The Satanic Verses* within a psychological understanding as she claims that Rushdie attempts to reach a better understanding of “his other self, the Muslim self.” Even though I agree with

Meeray's view on the relevance of the Islamic heritage to a study of *The Satanic Verses*, I will not consider in my reading the psychological intention of the author himself. Thus, my reading, as clarified in Chapter II on methodology, explains the inner structure of the text while bracketing authorial intention.

Therefore, my reading in this chapter aims to underscore the creative interplay between the text of Rushdie and the Sacred. I will show that the structural relations between the symbols of the journey, the "openings" and the "hidden" signify the Sacred in Islam. The overview carried out above of the chapters in *The Satanic Verses* displays how the structure of narration revolves around the journey of Gibreel and Chamcha. However, my reading in this section will focus solely on Gibreel as I will explore how his journey is intersected with the "opening" in order to show that they both signify the Sacred. I will therefore argue that the journey of Gibreel is made up of visions that can be interpreted through a Sufi prism.

Through his visions, Gibreel gains access to a "hidden" world that extends beyond the human capacity of a number of characters in the novel. As such his "serial visions" and his visionary encounters with an "unseen" reality do not pertain to an objective and visible world. The visions of Gibreel are interchangeably defined as his "dreams" in the text of *The Satanic Verses*. From a Sufi perspective, visions are also synonymous with "dreams" that allow the Sufi seeker to see the unseen. Commenting on Ibn Arabi's concept of "dreams", Knysh explains that (2012: 1) "a dreaming individual is capable of seeing disembodied intelligible entities in the form of corporeal, sensory objects." In the world of "dreams", in Ibn Arabi's view, "the mysteries of God and his creation, otherwise impenetrable to the human intellect and sense perceptions, are unveiled" (Knysh 2012: 1). The Sufi seeker, in Ibn Arabi's understanding of the spiritual journey, "perceives in sensible imagery some of the

things that properly belong to the world of the Unseen” (Izutsu 1984: 260). A seeker’s spiritual journey therefore involves an “opening” onto what Chittick (1989: 29) calls “an intermediate reality standing between spirit and body.” For Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 342), the Sacred realm of God is a world where “Mysteries (*al-asrār*) are unseen (*ghayb*)” and only those who embark on a spiritual journey can receive visions from that “hidden” realm.¹⁹⁰

Gibreel’s visions are likened to “dreams” in *The Satanic Verses*, thus stressing their symbolic relation to the Sacred. The “dream-worlds” of Gibreel are situated in a non-intelligible realm, which is where corporeal appearances take place (SV: 205). Through his visions, Gibreel sees and speaks to Rekha, Mahound and Ayesha who are all three “disembodied entities,” yet they appear in a corporeal form to Gibreel. Hence, Gibreel’s visions symbolise an “opening” into the “hidden”. Chapter VI of this thesis will examine the ontological dimension of Gibreel’s visions and will show how they project an intermediate world that parallels Ibn Arabi’s concept of the *barzakh*.

In the first chapter of *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel descends from the aeroplane. His journey begins with his visions of his dead former lover Rekha, “emerging from the swirl of cloud” (SV: 7). At first, Gibreel thought that Chamcha could also see Rekha. However, Chamcha “saw nothing, heard nothing, said nothing” (SV: 7). Gibreel later realises that Rekha is “invisible to all eyes but his own” (SV: 200). Rekha herself confirms that “I am strictly for your eyes only” (SV: 7). Rekha, like the Beloved in *Vaste est la prison* and Ahmed/Zahra in *L’Enfant de sable*, belongs to the “hidden” in the same way that the Sacred is The Hidden in the Sufi sense.

¹⁹⁰ Ibn Arabi often writes about his “visions” of the Prophets in general and of the Prophet Muhammad in particular. For a detailed study of Ibn Arabi’s “visions” of the Prophet Muhammad, see Elizabeth Sirriyeh (2015).

Nevertheless, Gibreel's visions enable him to gain access to this incorporeal world. The sacred dimension of Gibreel's journey is therefore underlined through the symbolic connotations of his visions as an "opening" unto a "hidden" world. What further reinforces this sacred dimension is the use of the keyword "revelation" in the opening pages of the novel:

Slow down; you think Creation happens in a rush? So then, neither does revelation...take a look at the pair of them. Notice anything unusual? Just two brown men, falling hard, nothing so new about that, you may think; climbed too high, got above themselves, flew too close to the sun, is that it? That's not it. Listen. (SV: 5)

Here the emphasis is on how the descent of both Gibreel and Chamcha is akin to a "revelation." In the seventh chapter, the word "revelation" is used once again when describing Gibreel:

He is the Archangel Gibreel, the angel of Recitation, with the power of revelation in his hands. He can reach into the breasts of men and women, pick out the desires of their inmost hearts, and make them real. (SV: 461)

Owing to his journey, Gibreel undergoes transformation and through his visions he perceives himself as the Archangel who receives sacred revelations. There are two possible ways of interpreting the connection of the expression "revelation" to the Sacred. Firstly, the "revelation" of Gibreel mirrors the revelation of the sacred Qur'an that the Prophet received on the "Night of Power," as discussed in Chapter III. Secondly, Gibreel's "revelation" symbolises a visionary "opening" in the Sufi sense. Here the "power of revelation" intersects with Gibreel's ability to receive inner visions of others' "inmost hearts" (SV: 461). In this regard, Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 404) equates the meaning of "revelation"¹⁹¹ with the spiritual visions that a

¹⁹¹ Ibn Arabi differentiates between Prophetic revelation and Sufi revelation. While Prophetic revelation takes place through the intermediary of the Archangel, Sufi revelation is a direct experience of the Sacred. In Ibn Arabi's words (Chittick 1989: 403): "One of the characteristics of prophecy is that it comes through an intermediary, since there must be an angel involved. But heralding visions

Sufi receives, that stem from “an inborn knowledge of God through revelation, through which God discloses Himself.”

The journey of Gibreel which begins with his fall and with his visions of Rekha, continues its course, taking Gibreel to the early years of Islamic history. The second and sixth chapters are an account of Gibreel’s visions of Mahound and the story of the satanic verses. Words such as visions and “dreams” are used interchangeably, thus conferring the idea of Gibreel’s access to a concealed realm. Gibreel metamorphoses into the Archangel Gabriel and starts receiving visions of Mahound. His visions are situated: “halfway into sleep, or halfway back to wakefulness” (SV: 111). It is as though Gibreel was actually “*inside the Prophet*” (SV: 110-111; emphasis in original). Gibreel listens to Mahound, sees him and even perceives “a shining cord of light” that attaches him to the Prophet (SV: 110). Within his “dream-worlds”, Gibreel also experiences a “vision” of the Divine whereby he feels renewed: “Certain now of his archangelic status, he banished from his thoughts all remorse for his time of doubting” (SV: 320). Gibreel’s “serial visions” and his visionary encounters with a transcendental reality do not pertain to an objective and visible reality that others around him can perceive.

What characterises Gibreel’s visions is that they are like “dreams” transporting him into a supra-sensory reality. At the same time they resemble the state of wakefulness. As Gibreel states, “the dream-worlds of his archangelic other self begins to seem as tangible as the shifting realities he inhabits while he is awake” (SV: 205). It is as if “the world of dreams was leaking into that of the waking hours, that the seals dividing the two were breaking, and that at any moment the two firmaments could be joined” (SV: 304). There is no definitive separating line between

are not like that.” Hence, Sufis in Ibn Arabi’s view (Chittick 1989: 403) receive inner revelations or visions: “revelation is that which God casts into the hearts of His servants without intermediary.”

the physical world that Gibreel inhabits and the “hidden” spiritual world where he sees what others cannot see. I will return to this point in Chapter VI where I explore further the connection between the intermediate world in *The Satanic Verses* and Ibn Arabi’s concept of the *barzakh*.

As Gibreel progresses on his journey, he gains visions of Ayesha. I will further explore this particular “vision” because it highlights the symbolic relation between Gibreel’s journey and the “openings” that Ayesha emblematises. Ayesha is an orphan and a poor girl who mysteriously appears one day on a piece of land owned by Mirza Saeed Akhtar, situated in a Muslim village called Titlipur. From the moment Mirza Saeed catches sight of the unannounced visit of Ayesha, his life and that of his wife Mishal take an unexpected turn.¹⁹² Moreover, Ayesha is a mystical girl who is said to be constantly “staring into another world” (SV: 221) and who has the gift of “profound spiritual experience” (SV: 498).

There are two instances that highlight the symbolic connotation of the “openings” in relation to Ayesha. The first instance is the “opening” of Ayesha’s mouth and the second instance is the “opening” of the Red Sea. Surrounded by butterflies, Ayesha “picked them up and put them in her mouth. Slowly, methodically, she breakfasted on the acquiescent wings” (SV: 219). The butterflies are seen “to be funnelling downwards from the brightening air, going willingly towards her outstretched palms,” as “she kept her mouth open” (SV: 219).

In addition to the “opening” of her mouth, Ayesha announces to those who will follow her on a pilgrimage that the Red Sea will “open.” In Ayesha’s words:

¹⁹²Ayesha foretold Mishal’s cancer and disclosed that she would be cured if she travelled with the rest of the pilgrims. However, Mirza Saeed refuses to accept Ayesha’s mystical revelation (SV: 232). Filled with anger, Mirza Saeed declares to his wife that he would not allow her “to embark upon this suicidal venture” (SV: 238). Mirza Saeed reacts with disbelief to his wife’s insistence on taking part in the pilgrimage and crossing of the Red Sea. Sceptical towards Ayesha’s revelations, Mirza Saeed protests that “There is no God,” maintaining that “the mystical experience is subjective” and the Red Sea “will not open” (SV: 239).

I have flown with the angel into the highest heights [...] The archangel, Gibreel: he has brought us a message which is also a command. Everything is required of us, and everything will be given. (SV: 235)

Ayesha adds:

It is the angel's will that all of us, every man, and woman and child in the village, begin at once to prepare for pilgrimage. We are commanded to walk from this place to Mecca Sharif, kiss the Black Stone in the Ka'aba at the centre of the Haram Sharif, the sacred mosque. There we must surely go. (SV: 235)

Ayesha discloses that she will journey alongside the pilgrims to the Sacred mosque and that the waters of the Red Sea will open so that they are enabled to cross the waters:

We will walk two hundred miles, and when we reach the shores of the sea, we will put our feet into the foam, and the waters will open for us. The waves shall be parted, and we shall walk across the ocean-floor to Mecca. (SV: 236)

The parting of the Red Sea will therefore miraculously allow the pilgrims to reach the Sacred place of Mecca.

From a symbolic perspective, Gibreel's "vision" of Ayesha underscores the connection between the "opening" and the Sacred. His journey juxtaposed to Ayesha's journey of pilgrimage is like a Sufi "opening" that leads to the Sacred. Ayesha seeks the sacred mosque and Gibreel seeks the "hidden" Sacred that, as I argue in the ensuing section, revolves around a "mystery". In addition, the correlation between the "opening" of the Red Sea and hearts strongly resonates with a Sufi connotation. In Ayesha's words: "Gibreel says the sea is like our souls, when we open them, we can move through into wisdom, if we can open our hearts, we can open the sea" (SV: 501). Ayesha further adds: "The sea only opens for those who are open" (SV: 502). It is clear that Ayesha's insistence on the "opening" of the sea in relation to the "opening" of the heart testifies to her belief in spiritual "opening". As

such, this “vision” of Ayesha underlines Gibreel’s symbolic journey of “opening” in which the heart enables access to a reality that can only be accessed through the heart. In a way this harks back to Isma’s “opening” of her heart that also allows her to enter a spiritual world, where her sacred Beloved can be seen.

In this section I aimed to explain the structural relation between the journey, the “opening” and the Sacred in Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. The reference to Ibn Arabi’s symbolic expressions allowed me to clarify the creative engagement between Rushdie’s text and the Sufi Islamic heritage. Furthermore, the first stage of the hermeneutic explanation carried out in this section offered evidence that Gibreel’s journey which is composed of visionary encounters is akin to “openings” that parallel a Sufi seeker’s spiritual “openings” into the Sacred. In the ensuing section, I will analyse further the symbolic connotation of the journey, but I will be examining its relation with the meaning of the “hidden”.

vi. Gibreel’s Journey towards the “Hidden Mystery” in *The Satanic Verses*

This section explores the relation between the journey and the “hidden” in *The Satanic Verses*. When I examined Djébar’s *Vaste est la prison*, I explained that the journey of Isma is a quest for the “hidden” Beloved. Likewise, when I interpreted the journey of the storytellers and the audience in *L’Enfant de sable*, I indicated that Ahmed/Zahra in Ben Jelloun’s text is a “hidden treasure” which embodies a sacred secret in the Sufi sense. In a similar vein, the journey of Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses*, when read through a Sufi prism, symbolically correlates with a “hidden mystery.” In order to underscore this sacred aspect of Gibreel’s journey I will explain its structural relations with the key expressions of “mystery” and “death”.

The journey of Gibreel from the outset is symbolised by a “mystery” (SV: 4). This “mystery” is accompanied by unanswered questions and by a metamorphosis of both Gibreel and Chamcha, whose “secret nature” is hardly revealed (SV: 8). Throughout the journey of Gibreel there are “signs” that present themselves as “our secret tongue” (SV: 18). Hence, the fall of Gibreel signals the beginning of a journey towards a “mystery” that cannot be defined, yet that can rather be found in “our secret selves” (SV: 49). Gibreel’s journey is guided by movement towards the “secret mystery of the universe” (SV: 428). Like the Sufi seeker who seeks the “mysteries” of the Sacred, the journey of Gibreel is triggered by a “mystery” and is propelled by a movement towards a “hidden” secret.

From a Sufi angle, the journey of Gibreel parallels a spiritual quest for a sacred “mystery”. In this regard, Ibn Arabi “interprets the knowledge of the sacred as the mystical unveiling of hidden realities. Hence Sufis often speak about the knowledge of mysteries (*‘ilm al asrār*) and knowledge of the Unseen (*‘ilm al ghayb*)” (Affifi 1979: 105-106). The sacred “hidden” is symbolised by the “mystery” and the “unseen.” As Firoozeh Papan-Matin (2010: 119) puts it: “The unseen is the mystery of God and the hidden realm of realities that are in His vicinity (*al-ladunni*). These realities are inaccessible to reason and thus unknowable.” In order to gain access to the “mystery” of God and to his “unseen” realities, Sufi seekers embark on a journey searching for inner revelations.

In addition to the symbolic connection between the journey of Gibreel and the “mystery”, there is a correlation between his quest and the satanic forces that he grapples with. Here, again, the spiritual dimension of Gibreel’s journey comes to the fore. Like the Sufi seeker who encounters “unseen creatures” (Papan-Matin 2010: 116), Gibreel experiences an encounter with Chamcha, who symbolises Satan.

Gibreel is caught up in battle against the forces of evil, the “dark fire of evil,” whose “gravitational force” was imposing “deceptive feints” on Gibreel (SV: 463).¹⁹³ In this regard, Papan-Matin (2010: 116) states that the Sufi wayfarer is faced with “creatures and forces in the unseen that can lead the [seeker] astray.” Papan-Martin (2010: 116) also indicates that: “Satan is the one who orchestrates these assaults and even personally appears to the wayfarer with the intent to bemuse himself and deceive the wayfarer.” Hence, the Sufi wayfarer’s journey involves a battle against satanic temptations that can obstruct him or her from attaining inner realisation.

With the “mystery” of the fall and the satanic forces that Gibreel battles against, the latter undergoes a metamorphosis that results on the one hand in his “death” and on the other in his access to a “hidden” realm. From a Sufi perspective, the “death” of Gibreel in this case can be interpreted as *fanā*. Gibreel begins his metamorphosis into an Archangel and mysteriously experiences visions that others around him cannot see: “One man’s breath was sweetened, while another’s, by an equal and opposite mystery was soured” (SV: 133). Gibreel therefore undergoes a “transformational process” that enables access to a “world [...] visible but unseen” (SV: 351-353). Gibreel’s access to the “hidden” is accentuated by his childhood burgeoning belief in a “hidden” reality. As a child, Gibreel used to listen to his mother’s stories about the Prophet. He then grew “convinced of the existence of the supernatural world” (SV: 21). As a child, he believed that beyond “the visible world” there exists another “world beneath” that was “concealed from his eyes” (SV: 21-22).

¹⁹³ The figure of Satan has marked the works of Sufis like Al-Hallaj and Al Qudat. Peter Awn in his book-length study shows that Sufis appropriate the figure of Satan not necessarily as a negative force but as a symbol of faith. For example, Al-Hallaj sees both the Prophet and Satan as symbols of mystical love. Al-Hallaj, Awn writes (1983: 124), conceives of Satan as a “spiritual model for all Muslims because he, more perfectly than any other created being, witnessed the Unity and Oneness of God, even at the expense of self-destruction.” Similarly, Ayn Al Qudat sees the Prophet and Satan as interdependent. In Ayn Al Qudat’s words: “Muhammad could never exist without Iblīs. Obedience could not exist without disobedience, nor unbelief without faith” (Awn 1983: 140). See Awn (1983).

Gibreel's journey towards the "hidden" is symbolically connected to his "death". The novel opens with the following statement: "To be born again, sang Gibreel Farishta from the heavens, first you have to die" (SV: 3). Gibreel reiterates this idea of death and rebirth when speaking to Chamcha, stating that after the fall he is now "regenerated, a new man with a new life" (SV: 31). In the concluding sentence of the novel's first chapter, the narrator captures the idea of the symbolic aspect of "death" in the form of negation: "No, not death: birth" (SV: 87). Hence, the "death" of Gibreel is not an ordinary physical death but is rather a spiritual rebirth akin to the Sufi encounter with the Sacred. As such, the journey of Gibreel which began with his fall signals his entrance into a "hidden" world where his "old self is dying" and his "dream-angel [...] is trying to be born" (SV: 85). The "secret of the selves" that Gibreel's journey epitomises is intersected with his "death" that brings about "transformations," "fusions" and "conjoinings" (SV: 8). In Gibreel's words, "*We are creatures of air, Our roots in dreams And clouds, reborn in flight*" (SV: 13; emphasis in original).

To sum up, in my reading of *The Satanic Verses* I explained the structural relation between the journey and two opposed symbols the "openings" and the "hidden". The aim of my reading was to demonstrate that the literary text of Rushdie creatively engages with the Sacred. I clarified that the visions of Gibreel constitute "openings" into the Sacred in the same way that a Sufi seeker experiences visionary encounters with the Sacred. Similarly, I argued that the journey of Gibreel is a quest for the "hidden" which is symbolised both by the key expressions the "mystery" and "death". What transpires is that Gibreel's journey is symbolically intersected with the Sacred. My aim in Chapter VI is to explore further this symbolic connection between

the journey, the “hidden” and the “openings” by trying to reflect on their ontological dimension.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a hermeneutic explanation of the symbols of the Sacred in Djébar’s *Vaste est la prison*, Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable* and Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. The aim of this first structural stage of analysis was to demonstrate the creative engagement between the three authors’ texts and the Sufi Islamic heritage. Hence, I focused my attention on the inner symbolic relation between the journey, “the “hidden”, and the “opening” in *Vaste est la prison*, *L’Enfant de sable* and *The Satanic Verses*. When read through the lenses of the Sufi conceptual framework of Ibn Arabi, these symbols underline the interplay between the three texts and the Sacred. Although different symbolic expressions of the “opening” and the “hidden” are found in *Vaste est la prison*, *L’Enfant de sable* and *The Satanic Verses*, they are all connected to the concept of the Sacred.

In *Vaste est la prison*, I argued that Isma’s heart symbolises an “opening” akin to the Sufi journey of openings that enable access to the Sacred. I indicated that the Beloved in *Vaste est la prison* symbolises the “hidden” towards which Isma journeys. In relation to Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable*, I analysed the symbolic meaning of the doors and treasure and showed that the journey is on the one hand a journey through “openings” and on the other a journey towards the “hidden”. With Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, I focused attention on Gibreel’s visions and explained how they emblematised an “opening” from a Sufi perspective. I also demonstrated that Gibreel’s journey towards the “hidden” is symbolised by a spiritual “death” of his old “self”.

The next chapter provides a textual explanation of the symbols of the Sacred in Djébar's *Loin de Médine*, Ben Jelloun's *La Nuit sacrée* and Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*. While in this chapter I focused attention on the connection between the journey and two sets of contrasting symbols, that is, the "hidden" and the "opening", the next chapter explores the symbolic intersection between the journey and two symbolic opposites: "darkness" and "light".

Chapter V: The Sacred and the Journey through Darkness and Towards Light

Introduction: A Hermeneutic Analysis of the Symbols of the Journey, Darkness and Light in *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit Sacrée* and *Shalimar the Clown*

Chapter IV explained the structural links between the symbols of the journey, the “hidden” and “openings” and showed their connection to the Sacred from a Sufi perspective. Similarly, this chapter applies the first stage of my hermeneutic reading, which consists in analysing the structural relations between the symbols of the journey, “darkness” and “light” in Djébar’s *Loin de Médine*, Ben Jelloun’s *La Nuit sacrée* and Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown*. The aim of this reading is again to demonstrate their connection to the concept of the Sacred and to show that the three authors’ texts engage with the Sufi Islamic heritage.

As noted previously in this thesis, the central attention paid to the journey, “darkness” and “light” as symbols is key to understanding the creative engagement between the selected texts and the Sufi Islamic heritage. In Chapter III, I explained that the journey is one of the central sacred symbols of the Prophet’s night journey which inspired Ibn Arabi and Sufis. Moreover, I have chosen to analyse two contrasting symbols, that of “darkness” and that of “light”, since on the one hand they are both structurally interrelated with the journey, and on the other they are closely connected to the Sacred Name of God: The Light.

In this chapter, I am applying the first stage of my hermeneutic reading which consists in explaining the structural links between the signs of the journeys, “darkness” and “light”, and the signified: the Sacred. This explanation is focused on the relations between the symbolic signs within the inner structures of the texts *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée*, and *Shalimar the Clown*. I have clarified in Chapter II on methodology how the first hermeneutic stage consists in reading a given text as a

structural body of inner connections which, according to Ricœur (1976: 30), “escapes the finite horizon lived by its author” and escapes authorial intention. I will therefore interpret the meanings of the symbolic expressions while taking into account “the semantic autonomy” of the texts (Ricœur 1976: 30). This suspension of authorial intention allows my reading to demonstrate the creative connections between the symbols of journey, “darkness”, and “light” and the concept of the Sacred.

Additionally, this first stage of my hermeneutic interpretation of the symbols of the Sacred, which relies on what Ricœur termed (1976: 36) “the eclipsing of reference,” will pave the way for the second stage. In the second stage of the hermeneutic reading carried out in this thesis, which will be illustrated in Chapter VI, I will show how the symbols of the journey, “darkness” and “light” in *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée*, and *Shalimar the Clown* ontologically project “worlds”. The analysis of “darkness” and “light” as opposite symbols and of their relation to the Sacred in this chapter will help clarify, at a later stage in this thesis, how the journeys in the three authors’ texts are built around contrasting symbolisms and project what are conceived of here intermediate “worlds”. These projected “worlds” are neither “dark” nor “light” but have the attributes of both. This essential point will be examined in more detail in Chapter VI of this thesis, where I will demonstrate that these “worlds” are similar to the Sufi experience of the *barzakh*.

i. The Journey through Darkness in *Loin de Médine*

In this section, I will demonstrate how in *Loin de Médine*, the female narrator’s passage through “darkness” symbolically confers the sacred aspect of her journey. The structural explanation of the text will focus on the meaning of *jihad* alongside

the frequent usage of nocturnal imagery in *Loin de Médine*, since they both highlight the symbolic associations of the journey with the Sacred.

In Chapter I of this thesis, I examined previous readings of Djébar's selected texts and I observed that *Loin de Médine* has largely attracted feminist, postcolonial and postmodern approaches. I also indicated that only few readings have signalled a new direction in studying the work of Djébar. This new direction is focused on exploring the relevance of Islamic heritage to a study of Djébar's *Loin de Médine*. For example, I recall here that Wehrs (2008) and Bourget (2002) showed how Djébar's engagement with Islamic tradition is similar to the intellectual legacy known as *ijtihad*.¹⁹⁴ In this sense, Djébar's return to history, in Bourget's and Wehrs' views, is inscribed within the legacy of *ijtihad*, which by definition constitutes a method of reaching decisions on new challenges and of creating new solutions.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ The concept of *ijtihad* is quite often understood as opposed to *taqlid* which denotes imitation and acceptance. *Ijtihad* is a concept used in Islamic judicial law. Watt (2008: 151) identifies "*ijtihad*" as the "giving of independent decision" and "the person qualified to do so was a *mujtahid*." Ramadan (2006: 11) explains that *ijtihad* is a concept associated with the interpretation of Islamic laws: "*ijtihad* includes all the instruments used to form judgements through human reasoning and personal effort. *Ijtihad* is, in fact, the rational elaboration of laws either on the basis of sources or formulated in the light of them." Taraq Ramadan (2006: 10-11) further elaborates on the definition of *ijtihad* which could be "applied at various levels: to understand a specific text (in the light of the whole Islamic legal corpus); to classify texts on the basis of their clarity or their nature (e.g.: *qati* [indisputable], or *zanni* [conjectural]; *zahir* [obvious], or *nass* [explicit]; *khass* [specific], or *aamm* [general]), or to formulate judgments where no text exists." Another useful definition is offered by Waleed El-Ansary (2009: 206) who states that the word *ijtihad* relates to "a creative but disciplined effort to give fresh views on old issues or derive legal rulings for new situations." See Watt (2008), Ramadan (2006) and El-Ansary (2009).

¹⁹⁵ It is worth mentioning in this context the work of Umar Faruq Abd-Allah (2007: 10) whose understanding of *ijtihad* is focused on its relation to creativity in Islam. According to Abd-Allah, "the intellectual process of *ijtihad*," which is part of the Islamic legislative system, is "a process and methodology for arriving at judgments about new challenges by means of utmost intellectual inquiry." According to Abd-Allah's (2007: 8) the Prophet Muhammad himself has encouraged the practice of *ijtihad*. Abd-Allah (2007: 9). states that: "the question of who was qualified to perform *ijtihad* was not posed by the Prophet but by later scholars. Their stipulations typically required that a person performing *ijtihad* be an upright Muslim of sound mind with full command of the Arabic language and mastery of the core disciplines of Islamic learning, including knowledge of the Qur'an and *sunna*, consensus, methods of legal reasoning, and the overriding objectives of the law." In Abd-Allah's view, the classical definitions of *ijtihad* seem to impose rigorous eligibility criteria. It is also evident that the criteria described in the above citation testify to the scholastic nature of the process of *ijtihad*. In this sense, *ijtihad* is not only limited to native Arabic speakers, but it is also restricted to those who have gained scholarly theological knowledge. Abd-Allah further adds (2007: 9) "the process of

Following in the steps of Wehrs and Bourget, my reading in this chapter of *Loin de Médine* aims to demonstrate how Djébar's text engages with the Islamic heritage. Unlike Bourget and Wehrs, I will not draw from the classical traditional understanding of *ijtihad*. On the contrary, I will focus on reading Djébar's text through the optic of Ibn Arabi's Sufism. I will therefore provide a reading of the Sacred with a particular emphasis on the symbolic aspect of the journey, "darkness" and "light". How does this journey begin and what expressions convey its sacred dimension?

From a Sufi perspective, what conveys the sacred aspect of the female narrator's journey in *Loin de Médine* is the structural connection with key expressions that are related to "darkness". One of these key expressions is the word "*djihad*" which appears in the footnote of the novel's opening pages. The female narrator speaks of her "*volonté d'Ijtihad*"¹⁹⁶ in the sense of an intellectual endeavour

speculative *ijtihad* was the monopoly of traditional scholars, and the requirements they set for it remained largely unchallenged." In relation to the contemporary intellectual scene pertaining to Islamic studies, Abd-Allah explains the importance of reinterpreting *ijtihad* as a mode of creative thinking. The act of reinterpreting the classical view of *ijtihad* is anchored at the heart of revising Islamic tradition. As Abd-Allah (2007: 11) puts it: "Only then can we draw upon the classical legacy in a manner that is constructive and not retrogressive. The tradition must be reviewed with an eye to what it originally meant in its historical and anthropological context." *Ijtihad*, in Abd-Allah's view (2007: 10), is "a process for inducing Islamic creativity." By virtue of its creative potential, *ijtihad* can embody an "empowering" and "forward-looking" critical tool (Abd-Allah 2007: 7). Thus, Abd-Allah redefines the parameters of the process of *ijtihad* beyond the domain of Islamic jurisprudence. Although the concept as such is inspired from classical Islamic tradition, it can serve to shed light on contemporary religious debates. A sound conception of the process of *ijtihad* should serve as a positive source of inspiration for the entire Muslim community, scholars and non-scholars alike, in the search for meaningful answers to contemporary challenges (2007: 11). In a similar line of thought, Anouar Majid addresses the idea of revisiting Islamic tradition. Revisiting the past, in Majid's view (2007: 13), is meant "to reinvigorate the intellectual traditions of the distant Islamic past." Majid (2007: 12-13) underlines the empowering force of "self criticism" and he sees that the majority of Muslims, albeit the weight of religious beliefs, need to fight the silence resulting from "self-censorship, intellectual solipsism, or historical amnesia." See Abd-Allah (2007) and Majid (2007).

¹⁹⁶ Djébar also refers to this Islamic concept in her collection of essays *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*. Being a writer, writes Djébar (1999: 216), is "être né pour l'écriture, en somme, dans l'*ijtihad* exercer sa volonté de comprendre, d'interpréter, de rechercher dans l'effort et le mouvement de la pensée." In Djébar's sense, the writer through his or her writing undertakes an intellectual exploration of the past: "Il y a un mot splendide en langue arabe, qui laisse transparaître l'effort intérieur et également, dans cet effort, le rythme de celui-ci, son ahanement, c'est le mot *ijtihad*. Il signifie la « recherche », la

of reading the chronicles of male Muslim historians and excavating the female voices.¹⁹⁷ In the footnote to “*ijtihad*”, the concept is defined in terms of “*djihad*” which is referred to as a “lutte intérieure” (*LM*: 6). This concept of “*djihad*” – or as spelt in English as “*jihad*” – can be traced back to the Sufi meaning of spiritual struggle.¹⁹⁸ Right from the start, the female narrator inscribes her journey within a sacred context by establishing a correspondence between her quest and an inner struggle.

Looking closely at the opening pages of the novel, it becomes clear that the female narrator’s anchoring of her journey within the meaning of *jihad* is intersected with a passage through “darkness”.¹⁹⁹ I have already clarified in Chapter III how the Sufi seeker encounters several veils and that his or her journey in search of the Sacred entails a passage through “darkness”.²⁰⁰ From a Sufi angle, the female narrator encounters the veils of male chronicles that obscure and conceal the “light” of women in *Loin de Médine*. The narrator speaks of her desire to “ressusciter” those “Femmes en mouvement” whose voices and bodies have been eclipsed by the “Transmetteurs” who are “portés, par habitude déjà, à occulter toute présence

recherche ardente sur soi, la quête intérieure et intellectuelle, et morale: c’est pourquoi ce mot se trouve autant au centre de la pensée religieuse, quand elle commente un texte sacré, ou liturgique, que dans le domaine de toute création humaine” (Djebar 1999: 114-115). As such, writing as *ijtihad* is an intellectual and creative quest. In Chapter I of this thesis, I referred to the readings of Wehrs and Bourget which stressed Djebar’s use of the concept of *ijtihad*.

¹⁹⁷ Djebar refers to her readings of the chronicles of Tabari and Ibn Saad in both *Loin de Médine* and *Ces voix qui m’assiègent*. In Djebar’s words: “Ecouter le son, le rythme, le chatolement des images de l’autre langage, celles des chroniques de Ibn Saad et de Tabari, puis tirer, je dirais grâce aux trous du récit premier (surgis autant de difficultés que me présentait cette langage, qu’également de l’ambiguïté, par moment, du texte d’origine), tirer donc cette mémoire féminine, lambeau après lambeau, muscle après muscle, peut-être aussi souffrance après souffrance” (Djebar 1999: 53).

¹⁹⁸ Abd-Allah (2007:11) indicates that there exists an etymological similarity between *jihad* and *ijtihad*: “Their common radical, JHD, denotes expending extreme effort to achieve a difficult but worthy goal or to overcome a great obstacle for the sake of something good.”

¹⁹⁹ It is important to note here that the meaning of *jihad* is understood purely from a Sufi perspective as inner spiritual struggle. However, in a contemporary context, *jihad* is defined as a military struggle. Since this is a vast and intricate subject that demands discussion beyond the scope of this thesis, I will refer to some of the works that have paid particular attention to the military definition of *jihad*. See for example, David Cook (2005), Andrew Murphy (2011) and Devin R. Springer, James L. Regens and David N. Edgar (2009).

²⁰⁰ Nasr (1989: 126) notes that the veil is one of the significant symbols that Sufis deploy when they speak about the knowledge of the Sacred.

féminine” (*LM*: 5-6). “Darkness” is here implied in the verb “occultier” which can be translated as the act of hiding. The verb “ressusciter”, which denotes bringing the bodies and voices of women back to life, is also evocative of unveiling in a Sufi sense. The female narrator is seeking the “lumière originelle” that has been hidden and by doing so she crosses the “darkness” that conceals these women like Sufi wayfarer who embarks on a journey towards The Light (*LM*: 5).

The *jihad* or spiritual battle announced in the opening pages of *Loin de Médine* needs to be understood against the background of an “héritage noirci” (*LM*: 342). Here the verb “noirci” reinforces the meaning of “darkness”. While it is true that the female narrator is reading through the gaps of historians to excavate the silences of women, she also embarks on a journey akin to the Sufi’s spiritual battle through “darkness”. In this case, the female narrator crosses the “darkness” bequeathed by the obfuscations of male Muslim chroniclers. Symbolically, the journey in *Loin de Médine* is a search for the veiled presence of women. In order to uncover the hidden presence of women, a passage through “darkness” becomes a necessity and a journey through the male heritage presents itself as a difficult endeavour that delves into “cette richesse de pénombre” (*LM*: 26).

From a Sufi perspective, the female narrator in her quest for the female voices and bodies also undertakes *jihad*, seeking a sacred “light” that can only be unveiled through a passage through “darkness”. This passage through “darkness” in *Loin de Médine* involves a plethora of encounters with female figures in the early years of Islam. The journey of the female narrator involves several stages whereby she travels through veiled stories, that she calls visions, of the Yemenite Queen,²⁰¹

²⁰¹ The unnamed Queen is remembered as a heroine in Djébar’s text, contrary to the chronicles of Tabari where she is depicted as “victime” (*LM*: 18). Djébar unearths the story of Aswad, the chief of the Ans tribe, who proclaims himself a prophet and rebels against Islam. When the Prophet Muhammad sends Shehr to fight the rebellion of the Ans tribe, Shehr is killed and Aswad marries his

Selma the rebellious, Fatima the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, Aicha the Mother of Believers, Habiba, Djamila, Oum Hakim, Oum Keltoum, Sirin, Esma, Agar, Kerama, and many other female voices (*LM*: 5). Those women are all in a constant movement and they manifest themselves as the journey progresses and despite “l’ombre opaque” bequeathed by a male-dominated heritage.

The *jihad* of the female narrator consists in struggling through the “darkness” that veils these women, for they all have been “engloutie par l’ombre” (*LM*: 27). Here “engloutie” connotes the way these women have been engulfed in total “darkness” and a sweeping “obscurcissement” (*LM*: 66). The role of the narrator as “*rawiya*”, which means female transmitter, entails seeking those voices that have been veiled. This search is an inner quest like a Sufi quest for the Sacred, for she can sense “cette voix étouffée plonger d’avantage à l’intérieur de mes entrailles” (*LM*: 101).

Amongst these encounters, the “vision” of Fatima is the most strikingly connected to the symbolism of “darkness”. Fatima is the daughter of the prophet Muhammad and she is a sacred female figure in Islam. Additionally she is known for being a mystic, “la fille mystique” (*LM*: 337). The passage of the female narrator through “darkness” is a passage through the hidden “versant nocturne” (*LM*: 337) of Fatima, for she, like other female figures in *Loin de Médine*, has been shrouded under the darkness of an “héritage noirci.” (*LM*: 342).

What stresses the symbolic connotations of “darkness” are words such as “ombre”, “nuit” and “nocturne,” which are repetitively used in conjunction with Fatima. Following the death of her father, Fatima visits her father’s tomb. Fatima appears as a shadow, an “ombre nocturne en pleine lumière du matin” (*LM*: 70).

wife, the Yemenite Queen. In Djébar’s text, the Yemenite Queen is said to have uncovered Aswad’s false claims to prophecy and she decides to plot her vengeance.

What can be glimpsed is the shadowy presence of Fatima, for both her body and voice have been veiled. Through her journey, the female narrator crosses through the “darkness” that veils Fatima like a Sufi who undertakes a passage through the veils that hide the Sacred.

The encounter with the sacred figure of Fatima entails a passage through her suffering. The suffering of Fatima is semantically expressed through the adjective “noir” and the noun “nuit”:

Oh oui, vous avez bien tué cette vérité! Vous voyez l’Aimé blessé à travers moi, et vous ne réagissez pas!... La terre devient noire, les montagnes elles-mêmes semblent se repentir et c’est là un signe dont Lui a parlé! (*LM*: 88-89)

Imploring God to alleviate the pain she feels as a result of her father’s death, Fatima improvises the following poetic verses:

O terre de mon père, hélas,
Laisse-moi te humer!
Car je hume ainsi le parcours de la peine
Qui s’ouvre devant moi !

And then she adds:

O Dieu ! Que la douleur pleuve sur moi
Car si elle pleuvait sur les jours,
Les jours deviendraient soudain nuits !

Facing the denial of her right to inheritance, Fatima experiences the suffering of dispossession. In the poetic verses above, Fatima equates her suffering with the “darkness” of the “nights” and with the “darkness” of the earth.

What makes the journey through “darkness” a struggle in the Sufi sense is the excavation of the suffering that Fatima undergoes. The journey in *Loin de Médine* is akin to an inner struggle against the injustice inflicted upon female figures in general and Fatima in particular. Fatima’s suffering emerges as a result of two major

incidents. The first one is the denial to her husband Ali of the right to succeeding the Prophet Muhammad, and the second is the denial of her right to inheritance. Fatima, who is referred to as “seule héritière en ligne directe du sang du Prophète” is disqualified from taking part in the decision on the succession of her father (*LM*: 87). The succession of the Prophet by Abu Bakr is strongly resented by Fatima who “incarne l’interrogation constamment ouverte sur le bien fondé de cette succession” (*LM*: 93).²⁰² In Fatima’s eyes, the successor should have been Ali her husband because he directly belongs to the Prophet Muhammad’s family.²⁰³

In addition to the issue of succession, Fatima is afflicted by the denial of her right to inheritance. For that, she unequivocally shows her discontent. Fatima, “la déshéritée”, not only disputes Abu Bakr’s succession to her father but she also blames him for depriving her of her basic rights (*LM*: 92). Instead of her inheritance rights, Fatima “ne reçoit, en fait d’héritage, que les pleurs de sa douleur filiale” (*LM*: 92). In a public address at the Mosque ‘El ‘Ançar’ Fatima decries the way her Muslim fellows witness her “dépossession” and do not react:

Dites-moi, ô Croyants, quel est ce retard à me porter secours, quel sentiment vous habite au point que vous assistiez, le cœur tranquille, à ma dépossession? Avez-vous oublié le Prophète quand il disait que toute personne se continue dans ses enfants ? (*LM*: 88).

²⁰² Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Muslim community faced the predicament of succession because the Prophet himself did not appoint anyone in particular before his death. Through the eyes of Fatima, Djébar revives the history of the political and religious ramifications of the Prophet’s death. In addition to the dilemma of political ascension to power, there was also the religious turmoil that was caused by the insurgency of a number of tribes against Abu Bakr who eventually succeeded the Prophet Muhammad. As Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’ (2004: 272) puts it: “On hearing of the death of the Prophet, many tribes (essentially outside of Hijāz) withdrew their pledges of allegiance to the young Muslim state and opted for centuries-old freedom. Abu Bakr, with the help of that political nucleus built in Hijāz, was able to crush the Ridda with his followers, especially those from Medina.” See Abu-Rabi’ (2004).

²⁰³ Historically speaking, the conflict over succession created a civil war within the Muslim community. As a result, two factions were created, one Sunni and one Shi’ite. Mernissi (1993c: 36) speaks about the “great Islamic schism” which “divided Islam into two groups.” See Mernissi (1993c) and Lesley Hazleton (2009).

Fatima further adds: “Ainsi, vous écoutez mon appel tandis que je m’adresse à vous: et vous restez là! Ma voix vous l’entendez” (*LM*: 89). Fatima condemns all those so-called “Believers” who watched her dispossession and remained silent. The symbolic darkness associated with Fatima reaches its apex with her death. As the latter passes away, she is buried “la nuit” (*LM*: 95). As she dies, Fatima is entombed at night time: it is as if her burial reflects the “darkness” of a buried truth.

What has been “explained” thus far is how the journey in *Loin de Médine* is symbolically associated with “darkness”. The key word *jihad* that appears at the start of the novel alongside the expression of “night” that appears with particular frequency in the novel, reinforce the symbolism of “darkness” and demonstrate its connection to the Sacred. Like the Sufi wayfarer’s passage through “darkness” and search for the sacred “light”, the journey in *Loin de Médine* encapsulates a constant search for what has been veiled, a search that can allow the narrator to find the sacred “light” of women in general, and of the sacred figure of Fatima in particular. In the ensuing section, I will turn to the symbolic meaning of “light” and I will show its connection with the Sacred in *Loin de Médine*.

ii. The Journey towards Light in *Loin de Médine*

In conjunction with the symbolism of the journey through “darkness” in *Loin de Médine*, there is a prevalent symbolic association between the journey and “light”. What I will show in this section is that the journey towards “light” in *Loin de Médine* is akin to a Sufi wayfarer’s quest for spiritual illumination. The explanation of the text will focus on the meanings of “vision” and remembering and their interrelation with the journey towards “light”.

The female narrator's quest for "light" entails a passage through the story of Aïcha who is a sacred figure in Islam known as "Mère des Croyants" – Mother of Believers – and is the wife of the Prophet (LM: 290). I will focus attention here on the way Aïcha symbolises "light", for it is through her "vision" and her remembering that the journey in *Loin de Médine* acquires a sacred dimension.

Vision as defined in Chapter III and as illustrated in the example of Gibreel's visions in *The Satanic Verses* in Chapter IV, is synonymous with spiritual insight. With Gibreel the meaning of visions was explored in relation to his dreams. With Aïcha in *Loin de Médine*, my interpretation of "vision" is focused on the link between visual eyesight and inner insight as understood by Sufis and Ibn Arabi alike.

In *Loin de Médine*, the female narrator's journey towards "light" is predicated on a passage through Aïcha's "vision". Whenever Aïcha is mentioned in Djébar's text, key semantic words that relate to "regard" can be detected. One of the possible ways of translating "regard" in this context is "eyesight" since Aïcha's "regard" is closely associated with her "eyes". For example, there are repeated references to the eyes of Aïcha which are described as "les yeux ouverts" (LM: 288) and "les yeux [...] immobilisés" (LM: 292). In addition to the "eyes", the verb "to see" is used frequently in connection with Aïcha: "Muette, celle-ci regarde, regarde" (LM: 292). Examining the structural links between the "eyes", the action of "seeing" and the plethora of nouns revolving around these words demonstrates that the meaning of "eyesight" is not to be interpreted literally. What can be seen through the "eyes" of Aïcha does not belong to the physical world that she inhabits. Indeed, Aïcha "voit son destin se dessiner" and her memories catapult her "dans l'avenir" (LM: 332-333). Through the "regard" of Aïcha, the journey of the female narrator in *Loin de Médine* moves towards what cannot be seen by the physical eye. What first seems to be

Aicha's "eyesight" turns out to be a symbolic "insight" that propels the narrator towards reaching illumination.

Owing to Aicha's "vision", a spiritual realm opens up that cannot be seen merely through the physical eye. In this sense, through the "vision" of Aicha the journey of the female narrator in *Loin de Médine* moves into a reality that lies beyond physical boundaries. Hence, Aicha has the ability to see the "secret des adultes" and to gain access to a veiled "lumière" (*LM*: 297). "Vision" here is intricately linked to the symbolism of "light". Aicha can even see those who no longer belong to the world of the living. Barira, an ex-slave liberated by Aicha, indicates how the latter's "eyes" allow her to inhabit a world where her dead father can be found: "[Aicha] yeux ouverts, lèvres serrés, nous contemple, comme si, du côté où vogue l'âme de son père qui, j'en suis sûre, nous écoute, elle s'est installée avec lui" (*LM*: 288).

Through Aicha's "vision", the female narrator sees the unseen like the Sufi wayfarer whose inner "eye" reaches towards the "light" of the Sacred. The symbolic association between Aicha's "vision" and "light" is further stressed through the connection with remembering. In the ensuing section, I will show how the quest for "light" in *Loin de Médine* entails a process of remembering that resembles the Sufi's remembering of the Sacred.

The sacred dimension of this relation between Aicha's "vision", remembering, and "light" is underscored in the textual reference to the *sura An-Noor* (*The Light*). In *Loin de Médine*, the Prophet Muhammad receives the revelation of the *sura An-Noor* following an incident that involves his wife Aicha.²⁰⁴ I have

²⁰⁴ Historically speaking, the revelation of *sura An-Noor* revolves around an incident involving Aicha. In one of the military expeditions led by the Prophet Muhammad against the Arab tribe of Banu Moustaliq, an incident takes place. Aicha is mistakenly left behind by the travelling expedition. She is found by a young horseman named Soffyan ben el Mo'tal. The latter brings her back to the Prophet

clarified in Chapter III how *sura An-Noor* is a *sura* often quoted by Sufis in general and by Ibn Arabi in particular. In this *sura*, the name of God as “light” is permeated with the symbolism of light.

It is relevant here to quote verses thirty-five, thirty-six and thirty-seven which, although they are not directly cited in Djebbar’s text, help to clarify further my discussion of the symbolism of “light” in relation to Aicha. The verses read as following:

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were like to a shining star. (This lamp) is kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon Light. Allah guideth unto His Light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is knower of all things. (This lamp is found) in houses which Allah hath allowed to be exalted and that His name shall be remembered therein. Therein do offer praise to Him at morn and evening. Men whom neither merchandise nor sale beguileth from remembrance of Allah and constancy in prayer and paying to the poor their due; who fear a day when hearts and eyeballs will be overturned. (24:35-37)

In the verses above the symbolism of “light” is related to the act of remembering. In a similar way, Sufis’ spiritual journey is predicated on the remembering of God, for it is through remembrance that inner illumination is attained.

The passage through Aicha’s “vision”, like the Sufi journey of remembering, revolves around the act of remembering. Aicha’s vision is indicative of a journey through memory which illuminates the “darkness” of oblivion. Aicha is depicted as the “rayonnement, sur le versant d’aube” for she defies “les oublieux”:

Muhammad. The problem that later arises is that a group of people known as ‘the Hypocrites’ spread suspicious allegations against Aicha and Soffyan. The rumours of the slander against Aicha spread in Medina and reached the Prophet Muhammad who began to get troubled by those rumours. In Djebbar’s text, Aicha confesses to the Prophet: “Je déclare: je sais que vous avez entendu ce que les gens racontent de moi, que cela a fait impression sur vous et que vous y ajoutez foi. Si je vous dis que je suis innocente, et Dieu sait que je suis innocente, vous ne me croirez pas!” (LM: 323). Aicha has a strong belief that “La patience seule me protégera. Et Dieu seul m’aidera contre ce qui est prétendu” (LM: 323). Following the slander against Aicha, the Prophet Muhammad receives a revelation. It is *sura An-Noor* in which God condemns the slanderers of Aicha. Djebbar cites the eleventh verse of the *sura*: “Ceux qui ont colporté le mensonge forment un groupe parmi vous. Ne croyez pas que cela vous nuise ; au contraire, c’est un bien pour vous, car chacun d’eux aura à répondre du péché qu’il commet. A celui d’entre eux qui s’est chargé de la plus grande part est réservé un terrible châtement” (LM: 324). This verse in particular confirms the innocence of Aicha. See Reşit Haylamaz (2012).

Ce faisant, elle source un début de transmission: non pas conservation pieuse et compassée. Plutôt une exhumation lente de ce qui risque de paraître poussière, brume inconsistante. Elle ne sait pas encore comment, mais eux, les bavards, les déjà si sûrs de leurs anecdotes, les « compagnons » mais de fraîche date, les oublieux aussi – inconscients de leur mémoire lâche, de leur esprit n’ayant rien saisi des nuances – , bref, “eux” qu’elle ne voit pas mais qu’elle écoute quand, dans son vestibule, elle les entend entrer dans *sa* mosquée et tant palabrer, oui, « eux », ils vont faire écran à ce passé rougeoyant de vie, ils vont durcir la pâte encore en fusion, ils vont transformer la peau et les nerfs des sublimes passions d’hier en plomb refroidi. (*LM*: 338; emphasis in original.)

The journey in *Loin de Médine* involves a passage through Aicha’s vision as well an act of remembering. Without Aicha’s vision, one cannot speak of a journey towards “light”. Likewise, without Aicha’s remembering illumination cannot be attained.

Tracing back the meaning of remembering in *Loin de Médine* to the meaning of *dhikr* in Sufism affirms the sacred dimension of remembering and its symbolic connection to “light” in Djébar’s text. Bringing Aicha back to life does not only constitute a celebration of her forgotten memory but it also symbolically reflects the significance of remembering as a journey towards “light”. It is a journey in search of the veiled presence of women like the veiled presence of the Sacred. Aicha’s remembering, like the sacred recollection of the Sufis, interweaves acts of evocation and creation, of searching for words and of unveiling:

Elle évoque. Elle revit. Elle se souvient. D’abord pour elle, et pour son public d’enfants: ses nièces également qui s’assoient. Ce faisant, elle trouve les mots: les mots qui n’emmaillotent pas les jours d’hier, non, qui les dénudent. Les phrases qui ne durcissent pas en formules: qui restent poésie. Elle se cherche une forme. Doucement devant les enfants, filles et garçons sous le charme, elle raconte. Elle conte. Elle n’invente jamais: elle recrée. (*LM*: 339)

The successive use of such verbs as “évoque”, “revit” “se souvient” “se cherche” “raconte” “conte” and “recrée” all denote action. The mystical aspect of the journey towards light” in Djébar’s text is encapsulated in the movement that those verbs semantically convey. Other verbs that symbolically connote the act of remembering

include the meaning of searching and learning. Hence, Aicha “au Cœur de Médine. Elle cherche, elle se cherche” (*LM*: 330). Aicha “enveloppée de ses voiles, elle écoute. Elle observe, elle entend les avis, les débats; elle réfléchit,” and “Elle apprend” (*LM*: 330). Above all “Aicha se remémore” (*LM*: 338).

What I have explained so far in the text of *Loin de Médine* is the centrality of the symbolic connotations of Aicha’s “vision” and remembering and their relatedness to the journey towards “light”. The recurrent references to meanings pertaining to “vision” as well as the relation between *sura An-Noor* and Aicha all testify to the way Aicha emblematises a quest for a spiritual illumination. Additionally, I have examined the Sufi meaning of “*dhikr*” and have demonstrated that remembering is a symbolic act of the Sacred in *Loin de Médine*, thus allowing the journey in the text to progress towards a hidden illumination.

iii. Zahra’s Journey through Darkness in *La Nuit Sacrée*

In this section I will demonstrate the connection between the journey, “darkness” and the Sacred in *La Nuit sacrée*. I will apply the first stage of my hermeneutic analysis by relying on a textual explanation of the structural chain of signification that forms both the meanings of the journey and “darkness”. I will therefore establish how that the journey of Zahra encompasses a search for a sacred truth which can be unveiled via a passage through seven stages.

In Chapter I of this thesis I examined some readings of *La Nuit sacrée* and I showed that critics like Orlando (1999), Hayes (2000) and Hamil (2001) focus particular attention on the way Ben Jelloun’s text transgresses patriarchal norms. All three critics emphasise both Zahra’s subversion of gender norms and Ben Jelloun’s resistance to Colonial discourse. In his reading of *La Nuit sacrée*, Hamil (2001)

speaks of Zahra's journey across prohibited territories, whether linguistic, cultural, and political." In Hamil's view, Zahra embarks on a quest for her repressed desire, searching for venues of liberation from patriarchal restrictions. Taking into account Hamil's emphasis on the theme of the journey in *La Nuit sacrée*, I propose to read Zahra's journey from a different angle by shifting the discussion to the symbolic connection between the protagonist's quest and the Sacred. I will therefore demonstrate in this section that Zahra's journey is akin to a Sufi quest for the Sacred.

To corroborate my choice of analysing Zahra's journey from a Sufi angle, it is relevant to allude at this stage to the comparison that the protagonist establishes between herself and Al-Hallaj. When asked about her views on Islam, Zahra observes that: "Moi j'ai renoncé, je suis une renoncée dans le sens mystique, un peu comme Al-Hallaj" (NS: 83). Zahra further adds: "Je suis en rupture avec le monde, du moins avec mon passé, j'ai tout arraché. Je suis une errance qu'aucune religion ne retient" (NS: 83). Zahra's self-confessed rupture with the past and the parallel she establishes between herself and Al-Hallaj might mean that her search for her identity is very similar to a spiritual quest undertaken by a Sufi seeker.

In Chapter III, I have explained that in addition to the "hidden" and the "openings", "darkness" and "light" are key Sufi symbols that Ibn Arabi employs in relation to the Sufi wayfaring towards the Sacred. I showed how in Ibn Arabi's Sufi philosophy, the Sufi aspirant through his or her journey undertakes a passage through a multiplicity of veils that hide the Presence of God. I recall here the Prophetic saying that Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 217) and Sufis alike often refer to: "God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were they to be removed, the Glories of His Face would burn away everything perceived by the sight of His creatures." Hence, the journey of the Sufi wayfarer entails a passage through a multitude of veils and stages

of darkness that hide the Presence of God from the heart of the seeker. Gaining access to the “light” of the Sacred is achieved, as Ibn Arabi writes (Chittick 1989: 223), once “the obstructions which prevent people from reaching these knowledges will be removed.”

Hence, I will argue that Zahra’s journey in *La Nuit sacrée* is akin to a struggle in the Sufi sense, for she is striving to find the hidden truth about her identity. Zahra has been veiled from knowing her true self due to the illusions and lies bequeathed by her father. Although *La Nuit sacrée* is the sequel to *L’Enfant de sable* and seems to continue the story of Ahmed/Zahra, it signals a new beginning right from the opening pages. The protagonist is no longer ambiguously called Ahmed/Zahra, she is now named Zahra and takes charge of her own story telling. As such, there are no longer stories being told about Ahmed/Zahra by different storytellers.

When I explained *L’Enfant de sable*, I observed that Ahmed/Zahra is an ambiguous and enigmatic character whose secret story remained “hidden” like a Sacred treasure. While the narrative in *L’Enfant de sable* follows the myriad stories being told about Ahmed/Zahra whereby each storyteller claims to know the truth, the storyline in *La Nuit sacrée* takes a new turn. This time Zahra appears as the main storyteller who will reveal the hidden truth about her life. This revelation will not be an easy process; on the contrary, it will involve a constant struggle whereby Zahra needs to journey through “Des voyages, des routes, des lieux sans étoiles, des rivières en crue, des parquets de sable, des rencontres inutiles, des maisons froides, des visages humides, une longue marche” (NS: 19).

The key word “truth” is significantly used in the Preamble of *La Nuit sacrée* and it forms parts of the chain of signs that relate to the symbolism of the journey

through “darkness”. The opening sentence in *La Nuit sacrée* reads: “Ce qui importe c’est la vérité” (NS: 5). This “truth” that will be revealed to those addressed as “Les Amis du Bien” – “The Friends of Good” – by Zahra is synonymous with what has not been said and with a “mémoire remplie de silences” (NS: 5). This “truth” that matters involves a “marche difficile,” a passage through “épreuves” and “chemins” and more importantly a journey along a “route par une nuit d’hiver.” The “truth” that will unfold in Ben Jelloun’s novel is metaphorically linked to a road that Zahra will traverse on a dark winter night. The temporal link between the journey, the darkness of the “nuit” and the revelation of the “truth” is suggestive of the symbolic meaning of the night journey undertaken by the Prophet Muhammad, which inspired the works of Ibn Arabi’s entitled *Kitab Al Isra* (*The Night Journey*) and *Al-Futuhat Al-Makkiyah* (*Meccan Openings*).²⁰⁵

The “truth” announced by Zahra is therefore to be found following a number of hurdles, struggles and passages through “darkness”. Tracing back the word “truth”, it means “*haqiqa*” which can also be translated as reality. “*Haqiqa*” is noun and its verbal root is “*tahqiq*.” In the Sufi vocabulary, the spiritual journey is closely associated with the meaning of “truth” in the sense that the whole purpose of the seeker is to gain access to God who is also referred to as the “truth” or “*haqq*.”²⁰⁶ The Qur’an makes several references to God as “*haqq*” and “it means that God is reality in the highest and absolute sense of the term” (Leaman 2006: 247).²⁰⁷ The

²⁰⁵ For a definition of the Night Journey, see Chapter III of this thesis.

²⁰⁶ Al Hallaj speaks of God as the Truth in his poetry. In Al Hallaj’s words (Renard 2004: 102): “Between me and the Truth there remains neither/discursive explanation nor evidence nor proven signs/Here the rising sun of Truth, disclosed in brilliance.” See Renard (2004).

²⁰⁷ *Haqq*, which translates in English as “truth”, is repetitively used in the Qur’an. Amongst its meanings is the name of God, *al-Haqq*, the Truth. Sufis often use the name of *al-Haqq* when they speak about their journeys to God. As such, the Sufi wayfarer’s quest for God is synonymous with a quest for the Sacred Truth. According to Nasr (2007b: 46): “Sufism is at the highest level a path of knowledge [...], a knowledge that is illuminative and unitive, a knowledge whose highest object is the Truth.” For a definition and etymology of the term “*haqq*”, see Oliver Leaman (2006) and Nasr (2007b).

definition of the term “truth” is useful in this context since it clarifies the connection between Zahra’s search for “truth” and the Sacred. From this perspective, one can read Zahra’s journey as a path that leads to a Sacred “truth” that has been veiled and hidden.

Since the journey that Zahra undertakes leads towards a Sacred “truth” I will explore further the stages of symbolic “darkness” that Zahra encounters. Zahra confesses that “j’ai tenu à rétablir les faits et à vous livrer le secret gardé sous une pierre noire dans une maison aux murs hauts au fond d’une ruelle fermée par sept portes” (NS: 6). These sentences uttered by Zahra are charged with Sufi symbolism which convey the meaning of her journey through “darkness”. First of all, the word “secret” which is “hidden” under a “black stone” harks back to my analysis of the “hidden” in the previous chapter, more specifically in relation to the word “secret” in Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses*. I have previously analysed Gibreel’s journey towards the hidden” and demonstrated that it is predicated on the “secret” of abandoning the self or what is known in Sufism as “*fanā*” – annihilation of the self.²⁰⁸ Similarly, in Ben Jelloun’s text the journey of Zahra revolves around a “secret” which will later be uncovered as her own abandoning of her old and ambiguous “self” and her embracing of a new “self”.

Secondly, and in addition to the “secret” concealed under a stone, the word “maison” with “seven doors” refers in Sufism to the connection between the spiritual journey and the annihilation of the old self or “*fanā*”: “[Sufis] compared Man’s self to a house that had to be cleansed or even taken down and then rebuilt so that the true

²⁰⁸ Robert Frager differentiates between self and soul in Sufism. Frager (1999: 3) argues that in Sufism the self is divided into two levels: the “lowest level” and the “highest level.” In Frager’s view (1999: 3), the “lowest level” of the self “is a collection of all forces within us that lead us off the spiritual path.” On the contrary, the “highest level” of the self “is like a pure and perfect crystal that reflects God’s light” (Frager 1999: 3). The soul, however, is “located in the nonmaterial spiritual heart”, which, according to Frager, allows the Sufis to uncover their secret and inner creativity. For more on the definition of self and soul, see Frager (1999).

self might be manifested” (Stepaniants 1994: 40). Hence, in Sufi terminology the “house” refers to the “self” and it needs to be spiritually cleansed in order for inner illumination to be attained. In this sense, “The death of the phenomenal self opens the way to the essential knowledge in which there is no distinction of subject and object and the Truth of the Unity of Being is attained” (Stepaniants 1994: 40). As the Sufi seeker cleanses his or herself, a process which involves the annihilation of the former self, his or her journey away from “darkness” is marked by a renewed sense of “self”, which is reborn in the realm of the Sacred “truth.”

In the case of Zahra, the renewal of her sense of self will take place once she succeeds in passing through the “seven doors” of her inner “house”. She has therefore to go through a number of trials which will constitute her symbolic passage through “darkness”. The number “seven” in the text further reinforces the sacred aspect of Zahra’s journey, and it is not to be interpreted literally as an arbitrarily chosen number. In this sense:

Some Muslim mystics enumerate seven states of the soul’s purification, which correspond to repentance (*tauba*), turning toward God, asceticism, poverty, patience, *tawakkul* (complete trust in God, and submission to Him), and contentment. (Stepaniants 1994: 76)²⁰⁹

Although Zahra’s journey does not display exactly the same type of stages described above, I will show that these “seven” stages are played out in the text of Ben Jelloun.

The first stage of Zahra’s journey, which is closely linked to the symbolism of “darkness”, is exemplified in the second chapter of *La Nuit sacrée* entitled “La Nuit du Destin” and takes place at the death-bed of her father. The title of this chapter is a direct reference to the twenty-seventh night of Ramadan known as the Sacred Night or Night of Destiny. Before I explain further the first stage of Zahra’s

²⁰⁹ For more on the Sufi journey and the seven stages in the work of Attar, see Stepaniants (1994).

journey, I need to pause for a moment on the significance of this direct mention to the Sacred Night. Ibn Arabi indicates that the importance of the “Night of Power” lies on the one hand in the descent of the Qur’an and on the other in the Prophet’s inner reception of its sacred message:

God – He be magnified and glorified – said: *We have sent it down on the Night of Power* (Q. 97:1); and the entire *sūra*: We have sent it down in a Blessed Night (Q: 44:3) [...] The Most High’s saying: *We have sent it down* means the Noble Qur’an, *on the Night of Power* [...] Then it descended from there to the heart of Muhammad – God’s blessing and peace be upon him – in fragmented form. This voyage never ceases as long as tongue recite it, whether inwardly or aloud. (2015: 58)

According to Ibn Arabi, the Sacred Night is important because it marks the time when the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet. In addition, the Sacred Night is symbolic of a continuous journey in the sense that the sacred message will continue its “voyage” for as long as it is remembered.

In relation to Ben Jelloun’s text, the Sacred Night coincides with two major events. The first event is the death of Zahra’s father and the second event is the beginning of Zahra’s journey. The Sacred Night is therefore the time when the first stage of her journey began. On that very night, Zahra’s father approaches death and asks his daughter to forgive him for having imposed on her a male identity. Zahra’s father confesses to his daughter that he has committed a sin by on the one hand lying to everyone about Zahra’s identity and on the other for imposing on his daughter a male appearance. Zahra’s father admits that “à l’intérieur le mal ruinait ma santé morale et physique. Le sentiment du péché, puis la faute, puis la peur” (NS: 27). Zahra’s father says that he had to keep the secret hidden because he had to pretend that he had a male heir, thus living up to the expectations of his family: “Il n’était pas question de revenir en arrière et de tout dévoiler. Impossible de donner son dû à la vérité. La vérité, mon fils, ma fille personne ne la connaîtra. Ce n’est pas simple”

(NS: 27). Zahra's father is aware that the sin he has committed goes against "la volonté divine," nevertheless he could not bear to let his brother be the inheritor. Zahra has to face her past, listen to the lies of her father and has to struggle against a "sentiment of malaise et de peur" (NS: 29).

In the chapter "La Nuit du Destin," the symbolism of "darkness" is conveyed through the reiteration of the word "nuit." The word "night" appears in the title but it is also prevalent throughout the chapter. As death approaches Zahra's father, "la nuit avançait" (NS: 22). In one paragraph, where Zahra's father starts to confess and "reconnaître l'erreur, cette méchante illusion qui a fait régner la malédiction sur toute la famille," the word "night" is repeated five times (NS: 23). The reiteration of the word "night" stresses its symbolic connotation and demonstrates that its meaning is not to be simply equated with the period of time from sunset to sunrise.

In *La Nuit sacrée*, the word "night" symbolically refers to the nocturnal journey of Zahra which began on the Sacred Night that marked the descent of the Qur'an. It is on that same night that Zahra's father, who bequeathed the "malédiction", passes away. Zahra has to cross the "darkness" of the lies and illusions of her father that has imprisoned her within the confines of a fake male "self". It is because of that invented lie that Zahra feels that "Mon histoire était ma prison" (NS: 172). It is as if Zahra's "histoire, celle qui fit de moi un enfant de sable, et de vent, me poursuivait toute ma vie" (NS: 172). As a sequel to her father's lie, Zahra confesses that "J'étais alors soumise à une torpeur étouffante venant de loin, de tellement loin que je sentais mon âge traversé et mis à l'épreuve pour des siècles" (NS: 172).

In the first stage of Zahra's passage through "darkness", the "truth" begins to be unveiled since: "en cette nuit sacrée, la vérité se manifeste en nous" (NS: 24). The

confession of her father forms part of this unveiling of the “truth”, but it also entails an uncovering of a great deal of hatred that dwells in him and of the “darkness” of the physical as well as emotional violence that he inflicted on his daughter. In Zahra’s words: “En lui bouillonnant la haine, une haine violente et aveugle. Il devait haïr tout le monde, à commencer par lui-même” (NS: 51). Zahra’s father perceives himself to be the “seigneur régnant” who feels the need “d’exercer cette violence injuste sur les siens” (NS: 51). As a corollary to his lie, Zahra’s father led his daughter to live a life replete with “mensonges et de faux-semblants” (NS: 57). Zahra reminds the reader: “Rappelez-vous! J’ai été un enfant à l’identité trouble et vacillante. J’ai été une fille masquée par la volonté d’un père qui se sentait diminué, humilié parce qu’il n’avait pas eu de fils” (NS: 6). It is within the confines of this imposed lie that Zahra starts her arduous journey.

The second stage of Zahra’s journey through “darkness” takes place at the cemetery where her father was buried. Again, it is at night-time, “en cette nuit claire,” that Zahra visits the cemetery, taking along with her all the objects that act as a reminder of her past male “self”. Zahra disinters her father’s body and buries all these objects in her father’s tomb. Hence, Zahra finds herself “encore dans le lieu maudit où mon père était enterré. Je devenais une ombre malfaisante. Je le déterrais et le piétinais” (NS: 177). In addition, “Je vidai très vite le sac qui contenait presque tout ce que je possédais, une chemise d’homme, un pantalon, un extrait d’acte de naissance, une photo de la cérémonie de la circoncision, ma carte d’identité [...]” (NS: 56). The verbs used in the passage describing Zahra’s disinterment of her father connote strenuous physical and emotional actions, thus stressing the inner struggle that Zahra undergoes. Such verbs include, “je retirai“, “je serrai“, “Je me débarrassai“, “j’entassai” and “je piétinaï” (NS: 56). Facing the objects of her past

and having to bury them in her father's tomb are difficult actions taken by Zahra; however, they allow her to progress on her journey towards the next stage.

In the third stage of her journey, Zahra has a "vision" of her father. Following the death of her father, Zahra meets "Le Consul", who becomes her lover and his sister "L'Assise" who both welcome her in their house. In her first week at the Consul's house, Zahra starts to have strange visions. In one of these visions, Zahra's father appears in a "rue déserte et étroite" (NS: 76). Following this visionary encounter with her father, Zahra enters into the fourth stage of her journey through "darkness". This stage is marked by the unveiling of Zahra's silenced inner suffering. Hence, Zahra journeys through the memories of her past and the lies that she tried to suppress. Zahra remembers how she has been "enfermée dans une famille elle-même enfermée dans la maladie, la peur et la démence. Ma vie d'homme déguisé avait été plus qu'un péché, une négation, une erreur" (NS: 177). In the fifth stage of her journey through "darkness", Zahra commits the murder of her uncle, and is imprisoned in Chapter 16, entitled "Dans les ténèbres." Here, the title itself is indicative of the "darkness" of Zahra's passage through another stage of imprisonment. Nevertheless, the type of "darkness" that Zahra encounters in this chapter is opposed to the "darkness" of the lie in which she was kept captive. Zahra welcomes the "darkness" of her imprisonment and finds herself in a "territoire" that was "plongé dans une nuit noire, longue et profonde" (NS: 144). Within this realm of "obscurité" and "ténèbres" Zahra finds herself progressing in her path towards a sacred "light". Such verbs as "je préférais", "je marchais", "je m'introduisais" and "je vivais" all convey the positive aspect of the "darkness" that Zahra experiences during this stage of her journey.

In the sixth stage of her journey through “darkness”, Zahra experiences both physical and emotional suffering. After finding the truth about Zahra’s fake male identity, Zahra’s sisters decide to take their revenge. They visit Zahra and carry out the removal of her female genitals. Following this physical assault, Zahra experiences “douleurs atroces” and undergoes the pain of a mutilated body. Zahra emphasises here her passage through “darkness” as she writes a note to the Consul confessing: “Perdu vos traces. Suis dans le noir et ne vous vois plus. Malade. Malade. Le corps blessé. Vous êtes ma seule lumière” (NS: 160). Engulfed in “darkness”, Zahra feels “perdue, égarée, sans repères, folle, délirant la nuit, fiévreuse, au bord de tous les abîmes” (NS: 160).

The suffering that Zahra undergoes is not simply a result of her physical mutilation at the hands of her sisters. Zahra’s suffering constitutes another stage of her spiritual journey through “darkness” in the Sufi sense. Ibn Arabi (Morris 2012: 48) underlines the significance of suffering in the wayfarer’s spiritual journeying and compares it to a “secret mystery” that allows the seeker to experience “pain” and “atonement for things one has done.” Indeed, directly following her experience of suffering, Zahra hears a voice that promises to reveal “le secret de la vie” (NS: 161). The experience of suffering that Zahra undergoes allows her to advance in her journey through “darkness”. In Zahra’s words: “Blessée, sinistrée, je poursuivais mes errances nocturnes” (NS: 161). Zahra’s passage through suffering allows her to gain visions of a disembodied voice that promised to “me livrer un secret” (NS: 162). Owing to her suffering, Zahra experiences “l’aspect extraordinaire de mes visions” and realises that her “grande douleur me procure une lucidité au seuil de la voyance” (NS: 165).

Following Zahra's passage through suffering, the final stage of her journey through "darkness" is marked by her attainment of "light". In the penultimate chapter, Zahra is referred to as "la Sainte des sables, fille de lumière" (NS: 180). In this stage of her journey, Zahra becomes a source of "light" and a saint. Zahra is transformed into a venerated saint whose shrine is visited by other women who are described as journeying through the desert in search of the "source de toute lumière" (NS: 179).

To sum up, the textual analysis of the journey of Zahra and its symbolic connection with "darkness" demonstrated the Sacred aspect of Zahra's quest. Her journey begins with a search for a "truth" that entails Zahra's relinquishing of her old "self". As Zahra progresses on her journey she crosses seven stages of "darkness" that resemble the Sufis' passage through the stages of inner purification. In the next section, I will analyse the symbolic connection between Zahra's journey, "light" and the Sacred in *La Nuit sacrée*.

iv. Zahra's Journey towards Light in *La Nuit Sacrée*

In conjunction with the symbolic dimension of "darkness", the text of Ben Jelloun is permeated with a symbolism of "light" which also reinforces the sacred aspect of Zahra's journey. I have established that there is a hidden "truth" in *La Nuit sacrée* which unfolds itself progressively throughout the text. With Zahra's passage through "darkness", the "truth" can be revealed. As such, gaining access to the "truth" demands a journey where "au fur et à mesure que le secret deviendra moins obscure, jusqu'à la nudité invisible" (NS: 20). There is on the one hand a passage through "darkness" and on the other a quest for an invisible "light".

Amongst the key symbolic expressions in Ben Jelloun's text that have a Sufi dimension is the "veil." I have analysed in Chapter III how Ibn Arabi compares the Sufi journey towards the Sacred as a passage through the "veils" of "darkness" and as a process of unveiling that reveals the Sacred "light". In the Sufi sense, unveiling is synonymous with the spiritual attainment of the Sacred "light". As the Sufi seeker journeys towards the Sacred, his or her heart experiences unveiling.²¹⁰ As Ibn Arabi puts it (Chittick 1989: 196): "the light of the unseen things [...] are unveiled to the hearts." For Ibn Arabi, the knowledge of God and the attainment of the Sacred "light" is achieved through spiritual unveiling (Morris 2012: 39). Hence, Ibn Arabi (Morris 2012: 40) compares unveiling to the "opening" of the heart to receive the Sacred "light": "sound knowing is only (a light) that God casts in the heart of the knower." In this sense, Ibn Arabi equates "unveiling" with the "real knowing" of God which comes as a result of spiritual journeying (Morris 2012: 40).

Turning to Ben Jelloun's text, there are two instances in the novel where Zahra has her "visage voilé" (NS: 180) and is "enveloppée d'un voile blanc" (NS: 187). Interpreted literally, these two instances refer to the veiling of Zahra's face and body. Symbolically, the "veil" here is to be understood as what hides a sacred mystery which can be unveiled owing to the "light" of spiritual journeying.

In Ben Jelloun's text, Zahra has been veiled by the "darkness" of illusions and lies. Her quest lies in unveiling and revealing the sacred and hidden "light" of her true self. Undeniably, there is a hidden secret, an "énigme", as we were told in the opening pages of the novel (NS: 6). Only Zahra is capable of knowing the

²¹⁰ For Ibn Arabi, in Izutsu's view, "unveiling" is predicated on surpassing the limitations of the sensible world. As Izutsu puts it (1984: 12): "to see beyond the [sensible world] the ultimate ground of Being, that precisely is what is called by Ibn Arabi "unveiling."" In a similar vein, Chittick (1997: 403) indicates that Ibn Arabi considers "unveiling" a "supra-rational mode of knowledge" that enables the Sufi direct access to the Sacred. In this sense, "unveiling" is synonymous with "lifting the veils that separate the human soul from God" (Chittick 1997: 403).

“vérité” that has been silenced and of revealing what has been “dissimulé” (NS: 5). The veiled “truth” is metaphorically compared to an “étoile” that fell from the sky and was kept hidden under water (NS: 5). Later in the novel, Zahra again makes another metaphorical reference to the “étoile”:

Il faut se dépouiller de tout et renoncer définitivement à la nostalgie. J’ai détruit mes papiers d’identité, et j’ai suivi l’étoile qui trace le chemin de mon destin. Cette étoile me suit partout. (NS: 105)

The “light” of the “star” is what guides Zahra on her quest for inner illumination.²¹¹ Embarking on such a quest for “light” is incumbent upon Zahra’s abandoning her past, and relinquishing her old self. The journey of Zahra is thus a quest for an inner “truth” that encapsulates the “source de toute lumière” (NS: 179).

Hence, unveiling the hidden “truth” constitutes one of the stages in Zahra’s journey towards “light” and it is symbolically interrelated with the meaning of death in a Sufi mystical sense. The unveiling of “truth” is foregrounded when Zahra’s old self dies and is reborn as a woman. When Zahra mentions “la mort” in the opening pages of the novel (NS: 6), the meaning of death has a Sufi connotation since it comes as a rescue, “pour me sauver,” in the sense of allowing Zahra to gain access to an inner “light”. In order for Zahra to attain “light” and become “l’enfant de la lumière”, she needs to embrace death.

From a Sufi perspective, unveiling and mystical death have synonymous meanings since “death facilitates the opening of the inner sight and the perception of

²¹¹ The star is a symbol that appears both in the Qur’an and in Ibn Arabi’s writing. In the Qur’an there is *sura An-Najm* which translates as *The Star*. This *sura* refers to the Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad. Ibn Arabi’s book *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries* is inspired by the Qur’an’s symbolic reference to the star and to its connection to the Prophet’s ascent. There are nineteen stars mentioned in the chapter-titles of *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries*, amongst which are the “Star of Direct vision”, “the Star of Affirmation” and the “Star of Unveiling”. Cecilia Twinch (2001: 2) explains that the “ascending journey” of Ibn Arabi in *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries* coincides with the “rising of each star” which “heralds a new revelation appearing in the heart of the contemplator.” See Twinch (2001).

the unseen” (Papan-Matin 2010: 81). Papan-Matin (2010: 73) defines mystical death as “the path to true consciousness of the One and of self-identity. This death brings the wayfarer in contact with a spectrum of light”. In this regard, the Sufi seeker journeys towards the Sacred, and simultaneously recovers a sense of self that has been hidden. When the seeker attains spiritual illumination, he or she uncovers his or her true “self”.

The death of the old self of Zahra takes place on the Sacred Night, which as I explained in Chapter III, is a significant night that marks the revelation of the Qur’an in Islam. On that Sacred Night, or “La Nuit de Destin” as the title of the novel’s chapter states, Zahra’s rebirth is marked by the appearance of a “lumière extraordinaire” (NS: 28). As he approaches death, Zahra’s father looks at his daughter and says:

Tu viens de naître, cette nuit, la vingt-septième... Tu es une femme... Laisse ta beauté te guider... Il n’y a plus rien à craindre. La Nuit du Destin te nomme Zahra, fleur des fleurs, enfant de l’éternité. (NS: 28)

On that Sacred Night, “cette nuit de l’Exceptionnel” (NS: 33), Zahra’s old self dies and is reborn as woman. Yet, this death comes as a result of a long process of wayfaring that enables Zahra to experience illumination. As such, alongside the death of the father there is the death of Zahra in a Sufi sense, for she experiences illumination.

The spiritual death of Zahra and her inner experience of illumination is symbolically reflected in the imagery of “light”. Following the death of her father and as a result of her own spiritual rebirth, Zahra experiences the reflection of “light” in the sensory world: “à partir de cette nuit de l’Exceptionnel, les jours ont pris de nouvelles couleurs, les murs ont capté des chants nouveaux” and even “les terrasses ont été envahies d’une lumière très vive” (NS: 33). In Chapter 2, the word “lumière”

is reiterated seven times. In Chapters 2 and 3, nouns such as “soleil”, “clarté”, “étoile”, and “jour” stress the symbolic dimension of “light” that Zahra seeks. In this regard, Zahra perceives “un rayon de soleil” that penetrated the darkness of the room where her father was lying dead (NS: 32). There is a “clarté” described as almost “surnaturelle qui inonda les êtres et les choses” (NS: 33). There is the “lever de soleil” which is accompanied by the “prière du jour” with “les prémices de la lumière” (NS: 26).

Furthermore, allusions to light in all its varieties are implicit in such words as “belle journée,” “les jours” and “les nouvelles couleurs” (NS: 33-34). The day when her father’s funeral procession took place, Zahra witnesses the “lumière vive,” “les couleurs des champs” and “une journée ensoleillée du printemps” (NS: 33-35). Zahra’s sense of liberation from her father’s lies is reflected in the cemetery setting that was enveloped in luminosity. In her own words, Zahra intimates that:

La plus belle image que je garde de cette *journée* est l’arrivée au cimetière. Un *soleil éclatant* avait installé un printemps éternel en ce lieu où les tombes étaient toutes recouvertes d’herbe sauvage et d’un vert vif, de coquelicots enchantés par cette *lumière*. (NS: 37; my emphasis.)

The Sacred Night and the episode at the cemetery constitute a new stage that Zahra passes through during her quest for “light”. Zahra begins to experience her renewed sense of self. “Redevenue femme,” Zahra begins to feel “libérée” for she can rediscover or “unveil” what was hidden under the masked and fake male identity.

As she progresses on her quest towards “light”, Zahra meets the Consul who later becomes her lover. Zahra’s encounter with the Consul is couched in a symbolic imagery of “light” which is illustrated in a note left by the latter:

Seule l’amitié, don total de l’âme, lumière absolue, lumière sur lumière, où le corps est à peine visible. L’amitié est une grâce; c’est une religion, notre territoire; seule l’amitié redonnera à votre corps son âme qui a été malmenée. Suivez votre cœur. Suivez l’émotion qui traverse votre sang. (NS: 173)

The relationship between Zahra and Consul which is referred to here as friendship is synonymous with a sacred “light” bestowed by “une grâce.” Such a “light” can be found within the heart that the Consul asks Zahra to follow. As such, the encounter between the Consul and Zahra helps the latter progress on her quest since their love bond becomes a source of inner “light”. The love between the Consul and Zahra enables the latter to escape her “errances dans les ténèbres,” seeking instead the “grande lumière” that emanates from “l’amour” (NS: 173).

In addition to the passage through spiritual death and the encounter with the Consul, the visions of Zahra constitute another stage in her journey towards “light”. When I examined *The Satanic Verses* in Chapter IV, I explained how Gibreel’s visions are connected to the Sacred in the sense that they constitute an “opening” into a hidden realm. Similarly, in this chapter I have analysed the connection between Aicha’s “vision” in *Loin de Médine* and the sacred “light”. In relation to Zahra in Ben Jelloun’s *La Nuit sacrée*, her visions also symbolise a spiritual “opening” that enables Zahra to gain access to an inner “light”. I recall here the way Ibn Arabi (Cass: 1996) equates the “opening” of the heart of the Sufi seeker to an “opening” of the “insight”: “And having closed their eyes to this world they did not pay attention to it / And opened their eyes to the Universe of the Unknowable and of Witnessing.” In this sense, gaining “vision” of the sacred “light” is compared to an opening of the “eyes”. However, here the “eyes” are the heart of the seeker that enable him or her to gain spiritual insight.²¹²

²¹² Renard (2004: 309) explains that Sufis establish a parallel between the heart and eye, for it is through the heart that visions of the Sacred are gained. Hence, the “knowledge that arises from that power in the heart functions much as does the perceptive power of sight in the sight” (Renard 2004: 309). In one of the Prophet’s sacred hadith, worshipping God is equated with vision: “To worship (or adore) God as if thou seest Him and if Thou seest Him not, then He seeth Thee” (Nasr 2007b: 19). For more on vision in Sufism, see Renard (2004) and Nasr (2007b).

In the text of Ben Jelloun, there is a recurrence of expressions conveying the symbolic meaning of visions and their interrelation with Zahra's journey towards "light". While in prison, Zahra enters a stage of "darkness", situated in "absence" and devoid of "lumière" (NS: 143). Zahra therefore covers her eyes and experiences physical blindness:

je m'introduisais petit à petit dans l'univers quotidien de ceux qui sont privés de la vue comme moi j'étais privée de liberté. Je vivais les yeux fermés. J'avoue avoir eu du mal à m'habituer. Je m'étais bandé les yeux. (NS: 144)

The physical blindness brings Zahra slowly to gain access to another world and see the unseen. Although her eyes are covered, Zahra begins to see Consul. Zahra describes how her blindness allowed her to get closer to the Consul owing to a "clairvoyance et une lucidité remarquables" (NS: 145). In addition to her "vision" of the Consul, Zahra also sees unknown creatures that appear "durant la lumière du jour" and who accompanied Zahra in her inner journeying. Closing her eyes to the outer world, Zahra enters a stage in her journey that allows her to gain an "insight" from within. The self-imposed blindness enables Zahra to progress in her quest for an inner "light" that makes her see the unseen.

Towards the end of the novel, the symbolism of "vision" is further emphasised as Zahra's quest for "light" reaches its end. Following her release from the prison, Zahra repeatedly uses the verb "voir." Zahra says that she is yearning to "voir la mer" and "d'en voir la couleur" (NS: 186). Moreover, Zahra admits that "je vis d'abord une brume" (NS: 186). When Zahra refers to "mes yeux," the eyes here are symbolic in the sense that they represent her inner "insight." As such Zahra feels that she is overwhelmed by an inner "light" as her "visage reprenait lentement vie. Il s'illuminait de l'intérieur" (NS: 187). In this final stage of her journey, Zahra gains an "insight" of:

une lumière forte, presque insoutenable, descendit du ciel. Ce fut tellement brutal que j'eus la vision d'un ballon suspendu, source de cette lumière [...] plus rien ne m'enveloppait ni me protégeait (NS: 188).

The celestial source of “light” that Zahra sees reinforces the sacred dimension of her visions. This “light” that emanates from a sacred realm is perceived not through the physical eyes, but through the insight of Zahra whose quest reaches its final stage. The secret that was announced in the opening pages is revealed; Zahra is no longer veiled behind the “darkness”, but on the contrary she is illuminated from within. Zahra is transformed into a saint whose shrine is visited by women. Her spiritual growth and transformation is also complemented with the transformation of the Consul who himself appears as saint. Zahra’s journey towards light” ends in a sacred union between herself and her beloved.

As shown above, the analysis of the structural relation between the symbols of the journey and “light” demonstrates that Zahra’s quest is very similar to a Sufi wayfarer’s search for the Sacred. In *La Nuit sacrée*, the references to the “veil”, to the imagery of light, to Zahra’s love for the Consul and to her visions, all make up the chain of signification that convey the Sufi dimension of Zahra’s journey towards light”. In Chapter VI of this thesis I will return to the significance of the symbolic meanings of the journey, “darkness” and “light” in Ben Jelloun’s *La Nuit sacrée* and will argue that these key expressions project an intermediate world that parallels the world of the *barzakh* as understood by Ibn Arabi.

v. India/Kashmira’s Journey through Darkness in *Shalimar the Clown*

In this section, the hermeneutic reading of *Shalimar the Clown* will demonstrate that India/Kashmira’s journey is a passage through “darkness” that is again akin to the

Sufi spiritual voyaging towards the Sacred. In Chapter I of this thesis, the readings of Pessô-Miquel (2007), Marinescu (2007) and Choudhuri (2011) drew attention to the postcolonial and postmodern aspects of *Shalimar the Clown*. I observed that Pessô-Miquel (2007: 154) stresses the way Rushdie's novel encapsulates postcolonial resistance through the remembering of the dead. Moreover, I established how Choudhuri (2011: 16) reads *Shalimar the Clown* as a novel that displays a postmodern sceptical stance towards historical linearity and thereby resists closure. I also indicated that Marinescu (2007: 90) reads Boonyi as a symbol of a "mother country" violated by Colonial violence. While Marinescu identifies Boonyi as symbol of a violated country in Rushdie's text, Singh (2012: 9) interprets India/Kashmira as a symbol of hope. In Singh's words:

[India/Kashmira] embodies the emergence of a new beginning from the chaos and turmoil of atrocities to the arrival of a bright new dawn, full of hope and regeneration. Her presence is an indication by the author that Kashmir will not be lost; it will emerge from the darkness into the light of true freedom and hope for its entire people, a new life. She symbolizes this new beginning in her realisation and acceptance of her true identity, in her love for Yuvraj, and ultimately in her emerging victorious by executing the hatred and violence of Shalimar. (2012: 9)

In Singh's view, India/Kashmira defies the loss of country to colonial power and encapsulates instead a new beginning. Taking as a point of departure Singh's observation that India/Kashmira symbolises liberation "from darkness" and revelation of "the light of true freedom," I will shift the discussion in this chapter from a postcolonial angle to a Sufi analysis of the symbolic aspect of India/Kashmira's journey in *Shalimar the Clown*. Hence, I argue that the common ground between Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*, Djébar's *Loin de Médine* and Ben Jelloun's *La Nuit sacrée* is this symbolic aspect of the journey through "darkness" whose signified is the Sacred. Nevertheless, the chain of signification that I explore in each text differs, thus stressing the way each text engages with the Sacred.

When analysing Djébar's *Loin de Médine*, I argued that the journey through "darkness" parallels *jihad* as a spiritual struggle that leads towards the sacred "light". While there are a myriad visions of women in the text of Djébar, I have focused attention on the Sacred in relation to Fatima. As analysed in the opening section of this chapter, Fatima is symbolically connected with the key expressions "night" and "suffering" which signify the female narrator's passage through "darkness". In Ben Jelloun's *La Nuit sacrée*, I have demonstrated that Zahra's journey is also akin to a spiritual struggle encapsulated in her passage through "darkness". The chain of signification that I analysed is focused on the key words "truth" and the "stages" of her quest.

The hermeneutic explanation of the journey through "darkness" in *Shalimar the Clown* bears a close resemblance to both Djébar's and Ben Jelloun's texts in the sense that the protagonist of the novel is faced with a hidden truth about her mother and leads a spiritual struggle which is akin to Sufi *jihad*. Therefore what I will examine in this section is the structural relation between the key words battle, visions and night, and I will show how they signify the journey through "darkness".

Prior to a hermeneutic explanation of the symbols of the Sacred in *Shalimar the Clown*, it is worth noting that there are explicit references to Sufism in Rushdie's text. For instance, both protagonists Boonyi and Shalimar the Clown, whose love-story has triggered a whirlpool of events in the novel, were born in the presence of a Sufi: "Two women gave snowbound birth behind the bushes, attended by a well-known local doctor and sufistic philosopher, Khwaja Abdul Hakim" (SC: 82). Additionally, I alluded in the introduction to the significance of Kashmira's name and to how it is connected in the text to the concept of *kashmiriyat*. *Kashmiriyat* denotes communal harmony and mutual feelings of brotherhood between Muslims

and Hindus (Geelani 2006: 34). It draws primarily from the Sufi concept of love. The two major proponents of *kashmiriyat* are Sheikh Noorani and Lal Ded.²¹³ The latter is directly referred to as Lalla Maj in *Shalimar the Clown*: “Kashmiris were fond of saints of all types. Some of these even had military associations, such as Bibi Lalla or Lalla Maj” (SC: 115). These direct references to Sufism in a Kashmiri context may be explained by the fact that the spiritual dimension of Islam is the most appealing to Rushdie. As Rushdie puts it:

I am not a religious person [...] However, I’ve been very affected by Islamic culture and very interested in it [...] for example in Kashmir there was a Sufistic form of Islam, actually rather similar to the kind of Islam that originally took root in Pakistan, until the present dictatorship attempted to stamp it out. I do find it attractive and sympathetic.” (Rushdie 2000: 85).

Taking as a point of departure the direct references to Sufism in *Shalimar the Clown*, I will explore how the journey of India/Kashmira symbolises a passage through “darkness”. On a literal level, the story of India/Kashmira is based on her search for her dead mother and her battle against, on the one hand the secrets of her father Max and, on the other, against the bloodthirsty murderer of both her mother and father, Shalimar the Clown. Interpreted symbolically and from a Sufi perspective, India/Kashmira’s battle is a spiritual *jihad* as she embarks on a passage through the “darkness” that both Max and Shalimar the Clown represent. In a sense, India/Kashmira’s symbolic *jihad* parallels the spiritual battle of the narrator in *Loin de Médine*.

I recall here the meaning of *jihad* which Sufis have equated with a spiritual battle. In his definition of *jihad*, Ashraf (2013: 128) speaks about the different stages involved in the spiritual battle and these include “the evil forces,” “repentance” and “remembrance of God and invocation (*dhikr* Allah).” As the wayfarer undertakes

²¹³ According to Kashmiri pandits Lal Ded was a Brahmin who later embraced Islam (Geelani 34: 2006). See also Syed Bismillah Geelani (2006) and Justice M.G Chitkara (2002).

spiritual *jihad*, he or she seeks to purify himself or herself in order to control the forces of evil (Ashraf 2013: 129). In a similar vein, Koylu (2003: 54) argues that the Sufis' "main idea concerning inner *jihad* is to purify the self, to control the evil forces, and to keep a watch over the frontiers of the soul."²¹⁴

The Sacred aspect of India/Kashmira's journey is symbolised by three stages. The first stage is her spiritual battle, the second stage is her visions of her father, and the third stage is marked by the connection between the night and Shalimar the Clown. Hence, the structural relation in Rushdie's text between battle, visions, and night is what emphasises the sacred dimension of India/Kashmira's journey. In its first stage, the journey of India/Kashmira is motivated by her struggle against the "dark forces" (SC: 363) as she is cognisant that she "had a battle to fight" (SC: 369). Contrary to Djébar's *Loin de Médine* where *jihad* is directly linked to the journey, in Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* the meaning of *jihad* is implied in the reference to India/Kashmira's "combat skills" and in the reiteration of the verb "to fight" (SC: 332-333). Moreover, India/Kashmira begins to have "visions of battle and victory" since she was a little girl, thus foreshadowing her later spiritual struggle (SC: 17). Seeking the "light" of her mother, India/Kashmira leads a battle which is situated inside her, it is a "war" that was "lodged within her" (SC: 17). This emphasis on the inner aspect of the journey points to its connection to a Sufi understanding of *jihad* as an inner struggle. In this regard, the journey of India/Kashmira is far from being simply a physical battle; on the contrary, it involves the process of "travelling the secret routes of the invisible world" (SC: 275).

²¹⁴ Nasr indicates that the Sufi journey is a difficult undertaking for it demands an inner striving that leads to the attainment of the Sacred. Sufis in this sense are "those who have walked with determination upon the Sufi path and performed that crucial spiritual battle against their negative tendencies, or what is called the greater *jihad*" (Nasr 2007b: 40). In Sufism, the inner struggle against evil entails the remembrance of God and inner purification of the soul. Thus, evil in a Sufi sense is coterminous with the "layer of forgetfulness and imperfection" and "veils" that, according to Nasr (2007b: 40), separate the seeker from the Sacred. See Nasr (2007b).

India/Kashmira's journey through "darkness" begins with her struggle to find the truth about her mother, striving "to find answers of her own" (SC: 211). In the opening pages of *Shalimar the Clown*, the reader is exposed to the "dreamless exhaustion" overwhelming the "nights" of India/Kashmira (SC: 5). The beginning of India/Kashmira's journey is marked by her battle against the "absence, a negative space in the darkness. She had no mother" (SC: 3-4). India/Kashmira's inner battle accompanied by her "mother's absence," resembles the "void sentinel shape in the dark" (SC: 4). The difficulty of India/Kashmira's inner battle is stressed in the trouble in finding sleep, as though her body was "trying to break free of dreadful invisible manacles" (SC: 3). This first stage of India/Kashmira's battle is akin to Sufi *jihad*, for she is fighting against some uncanny forces whose "death's-head ugliness" left her "sweating and panting" (SC: 3-4).

In the second stage of her journey through "darkness", India/Kashmira experiences visions of her dead father and starts to uncover the "darkness" that veils his secrets. Following the murder of her father, India/Kashmira runs to her apartment and shuts herself from the world. In her retreat, India/Kashmira "closed her eyes", and that is when she began seeing visions. Like a spiritual wayfarer, India/Kashmira, in her retreat, gains access to the hidden truth about her father. The revelation of truth is intuitively received, for "After he died she went on seeing him" (SC: 15). Here, India/Kashmira's "eyesight" is not literal; it is rather an "insight", which is akin to the Sufi spiritual opening. What India/Kashmira "sees" is that "For the greater part of his life [Max] had been a burrower, a man of secrets, whose job it was to uncover the mysteries of others while protecting his own" (SC: 21). Before the death of her father, India/Kashmira was "blinded" and was left unaware of the "shadow of the unknown" that encapsulates her father's "darkness" (SC: 15). India/Kashmira could

neither see the “hideousness” and “monstrosity” nor the “dark thoughts and wild emotions” that her father has concealed (SC: 205). However, the death of Max constitutes a seminal stage in India/Kashmira’s journey as she uncovers an:

Invisible Max, on whose invisible hands there might very well be, there almost certainly was, there had to be, didn’t there, a quantity of the world’s visible and invisible blood. (SC: 335)

The death of her father allows India/Kashmira to journey through her inner “heart needs” (SC: 333) and to receive visions of the “darkness measuring” Max in his tomb (SC: 33).

The visions of India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown* can be paralleled to Zahra’s visions in *La Nuit sacrée*, for they both passed through a stage where they had to battle with illusions and lies. In the case of India/Kashmira, her battle is a passage through the hidden secrets of her father and through his lies about her lost mother. With Zahra, her battle is synonymous with a crossing of “darkness” emblematised by her father’s lies. Hence, the journeys” of both India/Kashmira and Zahra are symbolically intersected with a quest for the Sacred and revolve around seeking what lies behind illusionary appearances or what Ibn Arabi also calls “images.” According to Ibn Arabi (2001: 3), “the one who stays with the image is lost, and the one who rises from the image to the reality is rightly guided.”²¹⁵ In the same way that the hidden secrets of the Sacred, as Ibn Arabi (2001: 42) puts it, “show themselves clearly to the people of visions,” Zahra and India/Kashmira symbolically pass through the “darkness” stage that veils what has been hidden. With India/Kashmira, her journey through “the secret routes” is as though “you were

²¹⁵ Images as illusions distract the Sufi seeker from his spiritual path. According to Vaughan-Lee (1995b: 6), the difficulty of the Sufi journey lies in embracing the death of the self and in abandoning “the world with its illusions” so that a “painful, lonely quest” can be carried out. See Vaughan-Lee (1995b).

flying, as if the illusory world in which most people lived was vanishing and you were flying across the sky” (*SC*: 275).

As India/Kashmira progresses on her journey, she passes through another stage marked by the “darkness” encapsulated by Shalimar the Clown. Inhabited by a “devil inside” (*SC*: 256), Shalimar the Clown confesses in a prison note that he is “made of darkness” and that a “dark passage opened” since he found out about his wife’s betrayal (*SC*: 60). India/Kashmira’s journey through “darkness” thus entails her battle against Shalimar the Clown’s “evil demon” (*SC*: 249).

What signifies the “darkness” that Shalimar the Clown represents is the recurrence of the word night. Shalimar is born at night, and his desire for killing his wife takes place at night time. Shalimar the Clown is named after the Muslim Kashmiri garden where he was born at night time. Before giving birth to Shalimar the Clown, Firdaus – his mother – foretold and feared the “darkness” that her son would emblemise. Although she “had no rational explanation” for her fears, Firdaus was overwhelmed by “the greatest secret of her life”, which will later be revealed in Shalimar’s double murder of his wife and “her lover Max” (*SC*: 72). As she was about to give birth, Firdaus “saw that her hair had begun to darken she spoke clouded words about fearing her unborn son, who would be born later that night upon those numinous lawns” (*SC*: 75). The birth of Shalimar the Clown on “a night after which nothing in the world would continue down its expected path” symbolises the moment when “all certainty was lost, and the darkening began” (*SC*: 81-82).

With the birth of Shalimar, two events associated with “darkness” took place. The first event is the disappearance of the Shalimar garden as it “vanished from sight” and “[p]itch blackness descended” (*SC*: 88). The second event is the invasion of Kashmir by Pakistan: “The whole city and region of Srinagar was plunged into

complete darkness” (SC: 88). Shalimar the Clown’s father, Abdullah Noman, realises that “this blind, inky night” which coincides with the birth of his son is a bearer of dark forces that would topple the ground beneath the “world he knew” (SC: 262).

It was in the darkness of the night that Shalimar the Clown’s presence was felt by Boonyi while she was living in isolation in the hut. Boonyi sensed on a “summer night” that “Shalimar the Clown prowled in the trees around the hut. On those nights she deliberately went outdoors and took off all her clothes, challenging him to love her or kill her” (SC: 241). “[D]reaming of death,” Shalimar the Clown’s feeling of hatred is exacerbated on a “moonless night” as he “was wearing dark clothes” (SC: 247-248). Shalimar’s decision to kill Max and his wife are juxtaposed to the “dark phirans [which] flapped in the night wind like shrouds” (SC: 248). Through the darkness of the night, Shalimar the Clown is “awakened to rage and ready for extreme measures, prepared himself to threaten, slash and burn” (SC: 254). It is “every night” that he appeared in Boonyi’s visions (SC: 258). Despite “the sacred vows of matrimony” and “the divine injunction against cold-blooded murder” Shalimar is resolved to kill both his wife and her lover Max (SC: 258). Boonyi sees Shalimar with “her eyes closed” whereby “At night in his appointed city garret,” he “prowled through the night and found her” (SC: 258). Through “the darkness” of the “nights” Shalimar is heard “murmuring,” speaking to Boonyi, albeit physically absent, and “confessing his secrets to her before she took them to her grave” (SC: 259). It is “in the murderous night” that the “murderous rage of Shalimar the Clown, his possession by the devil, burned fiercely in him” (SC: 259).

Thus far, I have argued that the Sacred aspect of India/Kashmira’s journey is revealed in her passage through three stages of “darkness”. By establishing the structural relations between the battle, visions, and night, I have shown that these are

signs interrelated with the meaning of the journey whose signified is the Sacred. I explained that India/Kashmira's battle or *jihad* against "evil forces" reflect her passage through the "darkness" that both Max and Shalimar the Clown epitomised. The link between India/Kashmira's visions of Max and between Shalimar the Clown and the night reinforce the inward dimension of the protagonist's journey and demonstrate its symbolic connection to the Sacred. In the ensuing section, I will explore how the journey of India/Kashmira symbolically intersects with "light", which contrasts with the meaning of "darkness".

vi. India/Kashmira's Journey towards Light in *Shalimar the Clown*

In this section, I will explain how India/Kashmira's quest for her lost mother is a journey towards "light". Literally, Boonyi represents the lost mother of India/Kashmira who was doubly murdered, first by the silence of her lover Max and second by her ex-husband Shalimar the Clown. From a Sufi angle, I propose to interpret Boonyi as a symbol of a sacred "light" that was kept hidden view and that can be accessed through the journey undertaken by India/Kashmira. Indeed, India/Kashmira refers to Boonyi as a "saint" who belongs to the "sacred beings" and whose "sainted echoes would never fade" (SC: 18-19). Boonyi is a source of "light" which is metaphorically likened to "gold," hidden inside a "treasure cave" which "glistened and gleamed" (SC: 360). As she embarks on her journey towards finding her mother Boonyi, India/Kashmira wants to see through the "blinding brightness" and "the hymen of the brightness" where the dead mother can be found (SC: 12). Therefore, how can India/Kashmira gain access to the sacred "memory of brightness" that was long hidden from view (SC: 78)?

Like the heart of the Sufi seeker that enables him or her to gain access to the sacred “light”, it is the heart of India/Kashmira that will enable her to achieve illumination. This recalls the symbolic reference to Isma’s heart in *Vaste est la prison* which I examined in Chapter IV. The key expressions linked to the heart in Djébar’s text were the “hidden” Beloved and the experience of “opening”. In Rushdie’s text, the symbolic meaning of the heart is structurally interrelated with India/Kashmira’s inner journey towards “light”. The word heart in *Shalimar the Clown* has a Sufi dimension in the sense that it enables India/Kashmira to reach the Sacred “light” that he mother symbolises.

When examining the structure of the text *Shalimar the Clown*, one notices that in the first chapter, the word heart is repeated three times and in the last chapter it is repeated six times. Such repetition draws attention to its symbolic significance in relation to India/Kashmira. In the first chapter, India/Kashmira feels as though her “heart leapt” when seeing Shalimar the Clown (SC: 11). Then, Max refers to India/Kashmira’s “heart’s desire” (SC: 17). The third reference to the heart is particularly significant since it emphasises its inward aspect. The heart is here becomes a site where an insight of the dead mother takes place. When India/Kashmira remembers her mother Boonyi, the latter, albeit dead, becomes alive in “a single human heart” (SC: 18). Hence, in Rushdie’s text, the word heart is not to be interpreted in its ordinary sense as a physical part of the body. Like the heart in Djébar’s *Vaste est la prison* that enabled Isma to achieve a spiritual “opening,” the heart of India/Kashmira is where it becomes possible for inner illumination to take place.

Hence, the repetition of the word heart displays its importance in the journey undertaken by India/Kashmira. Finding the heart is synonymous with the attainment

of inner illumination. From this perspective, the journey towards “light” embodies India/Kashmira’s journey towards finding her inner heart. Here the meaning of heart in Rushdie’s text is likened and linked to two key expressions which are the paradise and the garden”.²¹⁶ Such a linkage stresses the spiritual journey of India/Kashmira towards the Sacred “light”.

At the inception of her journey, India/Kashmira is aware that she is seeking her lost mother and she compares her to “paradise”: “[her mother] was lost to her, like paradise, like Kashmir” (SC: 4). Finding her mother is equated with finding a “paradise”. As India/Kashmira progresses on her journey and her search for “paradise” continues, the Sufi meaning of “paradise” unfolds when the reader learns that: “Then the magic of the garden began to take hold. Paradise too was a garden” (SC: 79). Knowing that the heart in Sufism is also synonymous with the meanings of “paradise” and “garden” it becomes clear that India/Kashmira’s quest for her mother is symbolically a journey towards finding an inner heart, and hence a quest for the Sacred. Finding her heart therefore would enable India/Kashmira to gain access to spiritual illumination.

Throughout the text the references both to “paradise” and “garden” recur. For example, the mother is symbolically referred to as a “paradise” that was lost, “like Kashmir” which was lost between the war that broke between India and Pakistan (SC: 4). In addition, the meaning of “garden” is likened to the gardens of Kashmir

²¹⁶ The word *firdaws* in Arabic means both paradise and garden. In the Qur’an, paradise constantly referred to as garden. For example *sura Aal Imran* reads: “Shall I inform you of something better than that? For the pious, with their Lord, are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, and pure companions, and contentment from God. God is the Seer of His bondmen, those who say: Our Lord! Lo! We believe. So forgive us our sins and guard us from the punishment of Fire; the patient, and the truthful, and the obedient, those who spend (and hoard not), and those who pray for (God’s) pardon in the watches of the night” (3:15-17). Nasr argues that Sufis have drawn from the Qur’anic symbolism of the garden and paradise. According to Nasr (2007b: 15), Sufis refer to the “Garden of Truth” which constitutes a “reality wherein all the spiritual realities are gathered.” Hence, for Sufis the garden is closely connected to the reality of God. For a detailed study of the garden and paradise in relation to Sufism, see Nasr (2007b).

which are identified as “earthly paradise” (SC: 79). When the “gardens” of Kashmir are mentioned, India/Kashmira thinks of the “abode of joy” which also means “paradise” (SC: 14).

In addition to the key expressions of heart, “garden” and “paradise” that highlight the Sacred dimension of India/Kashmira’s quest for “light”, “love” is another key expression. What motivates the journey of India/Kashmira is her “love” for her mother. I cited earlier Ibn Arabi’s words:

Wonder,
A garden among the flames!
My heart can take on any form:
A meadow for gazelles,
A cloister for monks,
For the idols, sacred ground,
Ka’bah for the circling pilgrim,
The tables of Torah,
The scrolls of the Quran.
My creed is love;
Wherever its caravan turns along the way,
That is my belief,
My faith. (Nasr 2007a: 95)

Here the heart of the seeker follows the movement of “love” for the Sacred.²¹⁷ In a similar way, the heart of India/Kashmira seeks the “light” of a sacred “love”. When she travels by aeroplane in the hope of encountering her mother, India/Kashmira:

felt as if she had passed through a magic portal, and all at once the pain intensified, it clutched at her heart and squeezed hard, and she wondered in sudden terror whether she had come to Kashmir to be reborn or die (SC: 357).

As India/Kashmira progresses on her journey, the text unravels a dimension of “love” that has been swamped under the brutality of “aggression,” and “terror” brought about as a result of the war (SC: 119). India/Kashmira’s journey towards light” unveils the presence of a “paradise” where one can hear:

²¹⁷ For a discussion of Ibn Arabi’s love poetry, see Ian Netton (2008).

love songs, songs of love of the gods for men, and of men for God, songs of the love between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, songs of love requited and unrequited, courtly and passionate, sacred and profane. (SC: 113)

Thus, the spiritual “force” that incites the movement of India/Kashmira’s quest is the search for a hidden presence of “love” that can be found in what India/Kashmira imagined as the inner “abode of joy” (SC: 14).

The mystical meaning of “love” is highlighted in the prevalence of the spirit *kashmiriyat* in Rushdie’s text.²¹⁸ Amongst the strong believers in the concept *kashmiriyat* is Shalimar the Clown for whom:

The words *Hindu* and *Muslim* had no place in their story, he told himself, in the valley these words were merely descriptions, not divisions. The frontiers between the words, their hard edges, had grown smudged and blurred. This was how things had to be. This was Kashmir. When he told himself these things he believed them with all his heart. (SC: 57; emphasis in original.)

Kashmiriyat brings together two religious worldviews; despite their differences, the Hindus and Muslims are united in “love”.

In the last chapter of *Shalimar the Clown*, India/Kashmira experiences an inner illumination when she arrives in Kashmir, the “place of light” (SC: 361). In the two pages where India/Kashmira describes her visit to her mother’s grave, the words “light” is repeated three times and is accompanied by the verb “glowed” which conveys the meaning of shining with light (SC: 367: 368). The word heart appears again in these two pages, which testifies that the “light” perceived by India/Kashmira is an inner “light” that penetrates her from inside. India/Kashmira is overwhelmed by the “force” of something that “had no name” (SC: 366). It is a “force” which traverses India/Kashmira from inside and which temporally takes place during the “light” of the day (SC: 366). This unknown “force” will later make India/Kashmira

²¹⁸ I have clarified the meaning of “*kashmiriyat*” in the Introduction of this thesis. See Section iv on the choice of corpus.

“see” what “needed to be seen” (SC: 367). India/Kashmira gains insight of the places that her mother visited, “her sites of love and death” (SC: 368). From a Sufi perspective, this “force” that overtakes India/Kashmira is the “force” of “love” that pushes the seeker towards finding the Sacred. Indeed, India/Kashmira’s spiritual quest for the symbolically hidden heart is emblematised in this stage of inner illumination as: “the thing that got inside her chest, the thing that made her capable of whatever was necessary, of doing what had to be done” (SC: 368).

To conclude this section, I have demonstrated that in *Shalimar the Clown* India/Kashmira embarks on a journey towards “light” which parallels a Sufi wayfarer’s search for the sacred light. I showed that Boonyi symbolises the sacred “light” that India/Kashmira seeks. Moreover, I have explained that the quest of India/Kashmira is predicated on her search for an inner heart. The repetition of the word heart and its intersection with the meanings of “paradise,” “garden” and “love” reinforce its Sufi connotation. Examining the ensemble of these keywords in the text of Rushdie, and tracing their meanings to Sufi symbolism, has helped clarify the sacred aspect of India/Kashmira’s journey, which is far from being simply a literal search for a dead mother.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed three key symbols: the journey, “darkness” and “light” in Djébar’s *Loin de Médine*, Ben Jelloun’s *La Nuit sacrée* and Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown*. Although the associations between the journey, “darkness” and “light” form a common ground between the three authors’ selected texts, the chain of signification associated with each key symbol differs from one text to another.

In Djebbar's *Loin de Médine*, I closely examined the structural links between "darkness", "*jihad*", and the sacred figure of Fatima. I argued that the journey of the female narrator is akin to a Sufi passage through "darkness" which involves an inner battle or *jihad* and an encounter with the suffering of Fatima. Furthermore, I explored the symbolic dimension of "light" and I have demonstrated that the vision and remembering of Aicha encapsulate the journey towards "light" in *Loin de Médine*. What this analysis has shown is that the journey in *Loin de Médine* is closely interlinked with the Sacred.

Similarly, in Ben Jelloun's *La Nuit sacrée* the two contrasting symbolisms of "darkness" and "light" permeate the text and are also structurally connected to the journey of Zahra. I argued that Zahra is striving to find a "truth" like a Sufi seeker who seeks the sacred truth. I demonstrated that Zahra crosses seven stages through "darkness" which reinforce the sacred aspect of her journey. I have also looked at the key expressions of veil, love and visions, and noted that they are intersected with the imagery of "light", thus underscoring the journey of Zahra towards "light". The structural relations between the journey, "darkness" and "light" in *La Nuit sacrée* again showed the creative engagement between Ben Jelloun's text and the Sacred.

Finally, I examined Rushdie's text *Shalimar the Clown* and I have focused on the journey of the protagonist India/Kashmira. I compared India/Kashmira's *jihad* to that of the female narrator in *Loin de Médine* and observed that the journey of India/Kashmira involves a passage through three stages of "darkness". Additionally, I have interpreted India/Kashmira's quest for her mother symbolically by showing that her search parallels a Sufi seeker's quest for the sacred "light". The expressions that I have explored in relation to "light" were the heart, the "garden" and "paradise". The structural relations between the journey of India/Kashmira, her passage through

“darkness” and her quest for “light” demonstrate that *Shalimar the Clown*, like *Loin de Médine* and *La Nuit sacrée*, engage with the Sacred through the use of Sufi symbolic expressions. What I explored thus far in this chapter and the previous one are the contrasting symbols of the “hidden” and the “openings” and the “darkness” and “light” in relation to the journey. Bearing in mind these symbolic opposites, the next chapter will endeavour to discuss the ontological dimension of the Sacred. I will therefore move to the second stage of my reading, which entails a hermeneutic understanding of the worlds that are projected by the texts. My point of departure will be the symbols that I explored and my aim is to demonstrate that they refer to “worlds” that are similar to the intermediate world of the *barzakh*.

Chapter VI: The Sacred, the *Barzakh* and the Intermediate Worlds

Introduction: A Hermeneutic Understanding of the Worlds of the Sacred in *Vaste est la prison*, *L'Enfant de sable*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit Sacrée* and *Shalimar the Clown*.

In the two preceding chapters, I carried out a hermeneutic explanation of symbols of the Sacred in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected novels. The focus was mainly on providing a close textual and structural reading of the Sufi symbols of the journey, the "hidden", "the openings", "light" and "darkness". The choice of these symbols, as stated in the introduction to this thesis, is motivated by their close connection with the sacred journey of the Prophet Muhammad and with the names of God: The Hidden, The Manifest and The Light. The first stage of the hermeneutic explanation of these symbols of the Sacred in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's selected novels has demonstrated that their texts creatively engage with the Sufi Islamic heritage.

In the first stage of my hermeneutic reading, I examined the symbols of the Sacred within the internal structure of the texts. Hence, I explored the internal relations between, on the one hand, the journey, the "hidden" and the "openings", and on the other, the journey, "darkness" and "light". My aim in this chapter is to show that the symbolic engagement with the Sacred does not merely fulfil an expressive function, but it rather encourages reflection on how the Sacred is experienced. Thus, I put forward my ontological position in the aim of exploring further the concept of the Sacred, while trying to capture what lies beyond its symbolic connotations. From a methodological point of view, this chapter marks the transition from the first stage to the second stage of the hermeneutic interpretation adopted in this thesis and this entails a movement from an explanation of the

symbolic expressions of the Sacred within the texts to an ontological understanding of the worlds projected by the texts.

The hermeneutic reading in this thesis takes as its point of departure the close textual explanation of the symbols of the Sacred so that an ontological interpretation of the concept of the Sacred can further be explored.²¹⁹ Thus, the methodological model of this thesis is conveyed initially through a textual interpretation of the plurality of meanings yielded by the symbols of the Sacred followed by a thinking about what lies beyond the textual parameters of Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's novels. It is the contention of this thesis that there is an ontological connection between the symbolic expressions of the journey, the "hidden", the "openings", "light" and "darkness" and the "worlds" projected by the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie.

I recall here Ricœur's definition of hermeneutic interpretation. According to Ricœur (1967: 348) "the symbol gives; but what it gives is occasion for thought, something to think about." In his reading of Ricœur's hermeneutics, Bourgeois highlights this intersection between the symbolic and the philosophical, stating that:

For Ricœur philosophy does not begin anything from nothing [...] The symbol, however, is the gift of language to thought and gives rise to the duty to think, to begin philosophical discourse from what already goes before it. Thus the symbol demands reflection. The symbol frames an appeal not only to interpretation, but also to philosophical reflection. (1975: 83)

In a similar line of thought, I am undertaking a transition from the symbolic expressions of the Sacred that I interpreted in the preceding two chapters to an ontological reflection on the "worlds" that they project in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's, and Rushdie's texts. In this light, the symbolic expressions of the Sacred that have

²¹⁹ Ricœur stresses the commonality between a linguistic approach to texts and a hermeneutic reading, a point that I have addressed and clarified in Chapter II. Ricœur, however, emphasises the philosophical dimension of hermeneutics and argues that it is the key feature that differentiates between the linguistic method and the hermeneutic reading of texts. See for example Ricœur (1974).

been examined previously “give something to think about” and this “something” is the “worlds” of the Sacred that, as I argue, are projected by the texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. As such, the symbolic expressions of the Sacred act as a mediator thus allowing the reader to interpret the ontological realities that lie beyond the parameters of the internal structure of the selected texts.

Even though the symbols of the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, “light” and “darkness” find their anchoring in the Sufi Islamic tradition, they acquire new meanings and project possible “worlds” in the texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. Here lies the crux of the creative dimension of the encounter between the texts of the three authors and the concept of the Sacred. What the hermeneutic interpretation has tried to achieve so far in this thesis is, to echo Ricœur’s words (Kearney 1984: 134), to consider “the unexplored resources of the to-be-said on the basis of the already-said.” The symbols that I have explored in previous chapters are drawn from the Sufi Islamic heritage so they are in a sense part of an “already-said” heritage. However, the three authors’ texts do not simply refer to these symbols, they enter in a creative dialogue with them and engage with them. The Sufi symbols that I explored in this thesis hence belong to what Ricœur (Kearney 1984: 137; emphasis in original) calls “a shared *imaginaire*, a common symbolic heritage.” Here, the Sufi heritage is the “common symbolic heritage” from which the texts of the three authors draw. Engaging with symbols from the Sufi heritage demonstrates a significantly creative element in the three authors’ selected works.

The symbols of the Sacred that I explored project, as this chapter will demonstrate, an ontological reality that brings together opposed meanings and worlds. In this regard, the proposed hermeneutic interpretation of the concept of the Sacred involves “a creative interpretation of meaning” and is guided by “the gift of

meaning from the symbol” (Ricœur 1976: 348). What the symbols of the Sacred “give” in the context of Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s writing is “something” of an ontological level which is “unfolded” in front of the texts (Ricœur 1995: 43). Here, the key hermeneutic concept that will allow me to examine this ontological dimension of the Sacred is Ricœur’s understanding.

Therefore, I propose a hermeneutic understanding of the “worlds” projected by the three authors’ texts in order to grasp these “worlds” in their ontological possibilities. Understanding in an ontological sense is not synonymous with revealing a pre-established reality hidden in the inner structure of a given text which the reader seeks to uncover. Understanding the projected worlds, from a hermeneutic perspective, in Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts, translates an endeavour to interpret the experience of the Sacred. Understanding is here coterminous with searching for a world that is “unfolded in front of the text” and not concealed therein (Ricœur 1974: 80).

Here lies what I pointed to earlier as the creative aspect of Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s writing. Their texts do not describe a world to us as readers; on the contrary, they propose “worlds” that are a projection of “possibilities of being-in-the-world” (Ricœur 1974: 80). A hermeneutic interpretation of the “modality of possibility,” according to Ricœur (1974: 80), displays the power of a literary work to offer modes of redescribing or looking at life from a different angle. The meeting between the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie and the reader triggers in this sense a dynamic process whereby the literary work “projects” onto the reader a “possible” way of interpreting the concept of the Sacred. Such is the role of literature through which, in Ricœur’s words (1974: 80), “everyday reality is metamorphosed

by means of what we call the imaginative variations that literature works on the real.”

If I were to describe what the “worlds” are in the three authors’ texts then I would have to rely on a phenomenological interpretation, that is, interpreting the “worlds” of the Sacred as a phenomenon and the Sacred as an object of study. However, the aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding of the Sacred, to answer the question of how the Sacred is expressed and experienced rather than what the Sacred is. Understanding as previously explained in Chapter II is built around possibility. Hence, the “worlds” explored in this chapter are possible worlds that are characterised by their intermediate dimension. They are possible worlds because they are projected by the variegated journeys of Isma in *Vaste est la prison*, of the myriad narrators in *L’Enfant de sable*, of Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses*, of the female narrator in *Loin de Médine*, of Zahra in *La Nuit sacrée*, and of India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown*. Their possibility is identified in this chapter within the intermediate “worlds” that bring together opposites such as the “hidden” and the “openings”, “darkness” and “light”.

In order to explore the intermediate aspect of the projected worlds in Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts, I will draw on Ibn Arabi’s concept of the *barzakh*. This concept will allow me to examine the ontological aspect of the Sacred in the three authors’ selected texts and to reach an understanding of its creative possibilities.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I noted that the *barzakh* is a complex concept that inspired Muslim theologians to undertake discussions on matters pertaining to eschatology. This is due to the fact that in the Qur’an the meaning of the *barzakh* is associated with an intermediate world situated between life and

resurrection. Ibn Arabi's use of the concept has been expanded beyond its eschatological meaning, for he stressed the connection between the *barzakh*, Sufi knowledge and the experience of the Sacred. Ibn Arabi attributes both an epistemological²²⁰ and an ontological dimension to the meaning of the *barzakh*. My reading in this chapter primarily adopts the ontological meaning of the *barzakh* that Ibn Arabi asserts in relation to the Sacred, since I consider that the texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie seek to ask questions about how the Sacred is experienced rather how it is known. To clarify further the meaning of the *barzakh* that I defined earlier in this thesis, I will refer here to Ibn Arabi's metaphorical comparison with the "Tie":

So there is nothing but intertying and intertwining [...] When the two are intertied, there must be something that brings them together. This is the Tie. It is nothing other than what is required by the two things through their very essence [...] The Tie must be one of them or both. It is impossible for one of them to possess this property [of intertying] in separation from the other [...] since it is through both that it becomes manifest, not through one of them in separation from the other. Despite this intertying, the two things are not likenesses, due to the uniqueness of each thing. Hence, they must be distinguished through something else that is not one of them [alone] but through which both things are signified. (Bashier 2004: 131)

In this sense, the *barzakh* is like a "Tie" that "interties" two opposite things together. The *barzakh* is neither one nor the other but it is created out of the combination between the two. It is an experience that can be attained through a journey but this does not mean that it can be fully comprehended. For the Sufi, as Al-Jīlāni writes:

Your attainment of the goal you wish for is not like a material thing's arriving at a material place, neither is it like knowledge leading one thing to a thing that becomes known, nor like reason obtaining that which is rational, [...] This attainment is a becoming. There is no distance, nor closeness nor farness, nor reaching, nor measure, nor direction, nor dimension. (1992: 56)

A Sufi journey into the Sacred in this sense is a continuous process of seeking a world that seems closely remote, that can be accessed through a *barzakh*,

²²⁰ For a detailed study of the epistemological aspect of the *barzakh*, see Salman H. Bashier (2004).

experienced but can be hardly expressed. That is how I will interpret the intermediate aspect of the experience of the Sacred in the three authors' texts. Such an experience of the Sacred, as this chapter will demonstrate, is projected by the myriad journeys in Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's texts, where opposites such as the "hidden", the "openings", "darkness" and "light" meet and creatively co-exist. This bringing together of opposites signifies an experience of the Sacred that cannot be defined in essentialist terms, but rather comprehended in the very possibility of its experience.

i. At the "Heart" of an Intermediate World in *Vaste est la prison*

In Chapter IV, I have demonstrated that Djébar's text *Vaste est la prison* creatively engages with the Sacred from a Sufi angle. The hermeneutic explanation of the symbols of the "hidden" and the "openings" that was carried out in Chapter IV has shown how they are structurally linked to the journey in Djébar's text. Hence, I clarified how the journey of Isma involves an "opening" of her heart (VP: 20-23) in the same way that the Sufi seeker's heart opens to receive revelations of the Sacred. I also examined how Isma's passage through the "opening" of her heart eventually leads to the "hidden" presence of her Beloved (VP: 26).

This section will carry out the second stage of the hermeneutic interpretation by providing an ontological understanding of the intermediate world projected by Djébar's *Vaste est la prison*. Bearing in mind the first hermeneutic stage of my structural analysis of the symbolic dimension of the Sacred, this section will argue that the symbolism of the journey ontologically projects an intermediate world, akin to the *barzakh*. Later in this chapter, I will also show how Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* share with Djébar's text the projection of a reality that is also posited between the "hidden" and the "openings". However, the

difference between Djébar's *Vaste est la prison*, Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* lies in the use of different expressions that convey the intermediate characters of the projected "worlds". With Djébar's *Vaste est la prison*, it is Isma's heart that opens up an intermediate world. With Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* it is the doors that encapsulate an entrance into a world akin to the *barzakh*. And with Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the visions of Gibreel open up a world where opposites meet.

Before I begin the interpretation of the intermediate world in Djébar's *Vaste est la prison*, I will recall at this juncture the definition of the *barzakh* to which reference was made in Chapter III:

It is the place where the spirituality of the "unseen" is integrated into the corporeality of the "seen" to create the subtlety of imagination. It is the ontological level at which spirits manifest in sensible matrices, and abstract meanings take on their bodily forms. (Akkach 1997: 102)²²¹

The world of the *barzakh* that the Sufi seeker experiences is neither physical nor spiritual, but it ontologically brings separate worlds together. On the one hand there is the corporeal world to which the Sufi seeker belongs. On the other, there is the world of the Sacred which is "hidden" and incorporeal. In this sense, the spiritual journey of the Sufi wayfarer entails entering into an intermediate realm where these two opposite worlds are conjoined.

The hermeneutic explanation of the inner structure of *Vaste est la prison* demonstrated that there are two contrasting symbols: that of the "openings" and that of the "hidden". These two contrasting symbols are interlinked with the symbol of the journey as previously demonstrated in Chapter IV. Through the journey of Isma, I argue, the text of Djébar projects two separate yet conjoined worlds. On the one

²²¹ For a discussion of the relation between the "unseen" and the self-manifestation of God in Ibn Arabi's philosophy, see Izutsu (1984).

hand there is the visible world of Isma and on the other the unseen world of the “hidden”. The Beloved inhabits a “hidden” world which transcends Isma’s ordinary world. Temporally, the Beloved belongs to the past and spatially he inhabits an unseen world. Therefore, how is it possible for Isma to access that “hidden” world?

Vaste est la prison “projects” an intermediate world which brings together two opposite worlds and which enables Isma to see the unseen. It is a world that is neither “réelle” nor “irréelle”, yet it is a world where “l’Aimé existait” (VP: 68). Isma’s journey hence allows the “corporeality of the seen” to meet with the “spirituality of the seen” (Akkach 1997: 102). Hence, the journey of Isma is not only an expression that symbolises the Sacred but it is also an experience of the Sacred, posited within an ontological reality that resembles that of the *barzakh*. In the same way as the Sufi seeker experiences a spiritual union with the Sacred Beloved within the realm of the *barzakh*, Isma also achieves union with her Beloved.²²² The fact that Isma parallels her journey towards the “hidden” Beloved to Ibn Arabi’s “route – éclairée de passion” reinforces the sacred dimension of her experience (VP: 72).

In this intermediate world, what would have been perceived as an impossible union between Isma and the Beloved becomes possible. Here it is important to recall the significance of understanding this world in terms of possibility rather than actuality,²²³ since my reading, as Chapter II of this thesis stressed, draws attention to the ways the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie project possible experiences of the Sacred rather than defining what the Sacred actually is.

²²² Izutsu (1984) indicates that Ibn Arabi perceives this union as the achievement of the highest rank of sainthood. In Ibn Arabi’s words (Izutsu 1984: 261): (And from this he obtains the real knowledge about the Absolute, for) his own self is nothing other than the He-ness of the Absolute.” Here the self of the seeker is no longer ontologically separate from the Sacred. The self of the seeker unites with the “He-ness” of God.

²²³ For a detailed discussion of the link between understanding, possibility and ontological projection, see Taminiaux (1991).

In order to gain access to the intermediate world of the Sacred, Isma's heart experiences visions. In relation to the Sacred, the heart for Sufis is "the source of inner revelation" (Nasr 1989: 133). Analysing the Sufi experience of the Sacred through Ibn Arabi's philosophy, Corbin explains that "the visionary capacity" of the wayfarer is synonymous with:

a presence of the heart in the intermediate world where immaterial beings take on their apparitional bodies and where material things are dematerialized to become subtle bodies, an intermediate world which is the encounter [...] of the spiritual and the physical. (1969: 234)²²⁴

In this sense, the site of the Sufi wayfarer's experience of the Sacred is the heart which gives the seeker access to a realm that is ontologically located between the spiritual world of the Sacred and the phenomenal world. The heart of the seeker therefore receives visions of the "immaterial" realm through bodily appearance while what belongs to the spiritual world manifests itself in bodily form.

The journey of Isma is likewise a visionary encounter where her heart can see the Beloved. The journey of Isma which results in the opening of Isma's heart reveals a "monde" that moves like an "être invisible" (VP: 21). The visions within this world also enable Isma to experience an inner "changement" and a "brusque reviviscence" (VP: 20-21). The "Beloved," who belongs to the spiritual world, appears in a sense-perceptible and corporeal form to Isma's heart. Isma thus can hear the Beloved speaking to her: "il me parlait et qu'en même temps il revivait" (VP: 86). Isma can see his face, feel his presence, and hear his voice. The "opening" of

²²⁴ In his readings of the Sufi works of Ibn Arabi and Shahāb ad-Dīn Yahya ibn Habash Suhrawardi, Corbin uses the concept of "imaginal world" which translates this idea of an intermediate reality. Corbin (1998: 125) argues that the "imaginal world", from a Sufi angle, is not to be confused with "the unreality of the imaginary." According to Corbin (1998: 125) the "imaginal world" has "nothing whatsoever of fantasies projected"; on the contrary, it designates "the world of 'subtle bodies' and spiritual perception." Christopher Bramford (1998: xx) observes that Corbin's understanding of concept of the "imaginal" reflects a Sufi world situated "between God's descent toward the creature and the creature's ascent toward God." For a detailed discussion of the "imaginal world" in Ibn Arabi's works, see Corbin (1969). See also Christopher Bramford (1998).

Isma's heart makes it therefore possible for the physical to meet the spiritual. In this regard, the verbs used in the text convey the material apparition of the Beloved. Isma uses the verb "surgissait" to depict how the Beloved arose from a "hidden" realm, and describes "le visage de l'Aimé qui bavardait, qui écoutait, qui s'absentait" (VP: 26). The Beloved is no longer concealed; on the contrary, Isma's heart is directly exposed to the "présence de l'Aimé" (VP: 28).

The journey of Isma, like the Sufi seeker's entrance into the realm of the *barzakh*, epitomises a meeting-point between the spiritual and the physical worlds that are separate yet conjoined. The journey of Isma is a passage through an intermediate world that is neither "hidden" nor "open" but it has the attributes of both. Such is Ibn Arabi's (Bashier 2004: 89) definition of the *barzakh*: "Things are both real and not real, and in this paradoxical notion is to be found their very reality." As she experiences the "opening of her heart," Isma enters a reality where her unseen Beloved becomes seen and where she discovers the "richesses invisibles" (VP: 97) of another world, a richness of an intermediate world enshrined in an "entre-deux" (VP: 113). Isma's heart perceives "l'image de l'Aimé" (VP: 26) through its "regard intérieur" (VP: 202). Simultaneously, as Isma gains access to that world, she departs from the physical world that she inhabits and crosses its limits: "N'était-ce pas plutôt moi qui me retrouvais déplacée dans une autre réalité?" (VP: 67). In this sense, Isma experiences a different order of physical presence, which does not resemble her "vraie vie" (VP: 67). With the "opening" of her heart, Isma enters a realm where she can see what is "hidden," as though another world reveals itself to her inner "sight":

moi la marcheuse, dont les yeux ne retenaient que les nuages, l'architecture suspendue au-devant du ciel, il me semblait longer une autre humanité parallèle à la mienne, si étrangère (VP: 67).

With the opening of her heart, Isma's sight perceives an unseen reality, what she called "une autre humanité parallèle." Within this intermediate world that the heart of Isma gains access to, "le visage de l'Aimé" appears in its "pureté" and "s'illuminait" (VP: 26-28). Isma could clearly describe with precision the contours of his face and hear his conversations (VP: 26). The Beloved who in the real and physical world that Isma inhabits is absent, manifests himself in Isma's "vision" and his image anchors itself in her "cœur" (VP: 28).

The journey of Isma thus entails an opening of her heart's sight to an intermediate realm described in visual terms. As Isma journeys into the intermediate world that her heart ushers her into, the encounter with the Beloved is described with a plethora of verbs that denote vision. Nevertheless, such verbs as "voir", "regarder", "éclairer", "se ranimer", "contempler" and "percevoir" (VP: 26-28) symbolically reflect the inner vision that Isma acquires of her Beloved. These verbs emphasise the idea that even though the Beloved is an immaterial being, he manifests himself in a corporeal form that Isma can see. The journey of Isma and her experience of an intermediate world very much resembles that of Gibreel, who as I will argue later in this chapter, has visions of a world that can be paralleled to the ontological reality of the *barzakh*.

What reinforces the sacred aspect of the intermediate world that Isma gains access to is its secretive nature, its "palpitation secrète" (VP: 23). The intermediate reality that Isma ontologically experiences is marked by its secrecy in the same way that the experience of the Sacred presents itself as a "secret" to the Sufi seeker.²²⁵ The world of the Sacred cannot be easily accessed. In this regard, I recall here Ibn Arabi's recurrent reference to the sacred Prophetic saying: "I was a Treasure but was

²²⁵ Khan (2008) indicates that the references to *sirr* (secret) in the Qur'an intersect with references to revelation. See Khan (2008).

not known, so I loved to be known; I created the creatures and made Myself known to them, so they came to Know me.” The meaning of treasure, which I explored in Chapter IV in connection to Ben Jelloun’s symbolic expressions of the Sacred, implies the secret nature of the Sacred. It is a world that demands from the Sufis spiritual journeying into the depths of its hidden mysteries. The secret nature of the Sacred is primarily expressed by Sufis in the concepts of love and the Beloved. I also dwelt on this question in Chapter IV and I have shown how the reference to the Beloved in *Vaste est la prison* strongly resonates with the Sufi concept of love. The Sufi journey motivated by the seeker’s love in search of the Beloved encompasses “the secret of a spirituality whose paradoxical expressions formulate for us the dialogical relations which are its experience” (Corbin 1969: 124). The experience of the Sacred, in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi thought, revolves around a constant quest whereby “love exists eternally as an exchange, a permutation between God and its creature” (Corbin 1969: 147). As such, the ontological reality that presents itself to the heart of the lover is a reality built around a union between the seen and the unseen, a secret meeting-point that can only be unravelled to those who seek the Sacred Beloved.

What is of interest here, as far *Vaste est la prison* is concerned, is the intermediate aspect of the encounter between Isma and the Beloved which resembles the secret encounter between the Sufi lover and the Sacred Beloved. In the intermediate world that Isma experiences, the encounter takes place in a “hidden” and secret reality. In this sense, the Beloved “portait au-devant de moi son secret. Me le proposait. Seule, je le déchiffrerais” (VP: 27). The journey of Isma towards her Beloved is lived as an “aventure intérieure” that can only be seen by her heart’s inner visions (VP: 82). In this intermediate and secret world, Isma is united with her Beloved; however, the passion that brings them together remains unsaid (VP: 37) and

its “signes” reveal themselves solely to Isma’s heart (VP: 28). Entering that intermediate “world, where Isma’s heart can see the Beloved, is like a passage through “un chemin secret” where the Beloved can manifest himself in a corporeal form (VP: 172). The journey of Isma is a continuous experience of visionary “opening” that provides her with a constant feeling of joy: “[...] joie de l’espace à chaque fois qu’il s’ouvre” (VP: 294).

Thus, the world projected by the text is located in a secret realm akin to the reality of the *barzakh* that allows the Sufi seeker access to the Sacred. I also stressed its intermediate character that lies in the union between two separate worlds: that of the “hidden” and that of the “opening”. This union is made possible owing to the visions that Isma has of her Beloved. Furthermore, the intermediate aspect of the world projected in *Vaste est la prison* is emphasised in the conjunction between the world of Isma and that of the Beloved. In the intermediate world that Isma’s heart opens to, an impossible union becomes possible. At the start of the novel, it is clear that the physical world that Isma inhabits is predicated on separation. There is a line separating Isma from the Beloved, herself from the other, and the corporeal from the spiritual. As such, the Beloved “vivait sur un bord” and “moi sur un autre” (VP: 67). Isma even undergoes suffering as she grapples with the “brouillard insidieux” that veils the image of the Beloved. Additionally, Isma perceives the physical world as limited, like a “prison”, and finite, for she cannot see her Beloved.

As Isma’s journey progresses and as her heart begins its “opening,” Isma is reunited with the Beloved whose world was initially separate from the physical world she inhabits. The encounter with the Beloved thus takes place in a space where the world of Isma touches that of the Beloved to the point where Isma’s self is merged with its other: “ce moi étranger et autre, devenait pour la première fois moi à

cet instant même” (VP: 116). The meeting between Isma and the Beloved brings together the world of the “moi” and the world of “l’autre”. This meeting-point encapsulates the ontological reality akin to the *barzakh* in the sense that this world is neither that of Isma nor of the Beloved, yet it is the coexistence of both worlds, neither seen nor unseen, but a union of both, where “tout le mystère” resides (VP: 35).

The text of Djébar projects a world that cannot be defined nor described in binary terms, but like a *barzakh*, it is experienced as an intermediate reality that exists within a “ligne d’horizon inépuisable” (VP: 347). It is a world that brings dual worlds together and crosses the borders between the seen and the unseen. This crossing brings a feeling of liberation to Isma. As Isma’s heart undergoes “opening”, Isma feels liberated from her limiting and limited physical world:

Comme si le sommeil était une navigation. Comme si, à travers les muscles des membres détendus – corps reposant, nerveux et arc-bouté, sursautant ou se crispant sous l’effet de quelque rêve, ou corps étale et respirant à peine, quasiment cadavre chaud –, comme si les fibres et les nerfs de l’organisme entier étaient hantés par une mémoire inversée (VP: 25).

As she navigates within this intermediate world, Isma crosses the corporeal as well as the temporal frontiers. Hence, her “corps de dormeuse” feels now “livré et libéré” (VP: 25). Isma not only transcends “les blessures de mon corps” but can also transcend the limits of the physical world.

Thus far, I have shown that the journey of Isma projects an intermediate world that brings together the seen and the unseen. With the “opening” of her heart, Isma travels into a world where she gains sight of the unseen Beloved and where the impossible union between herself and the other takes place. Isma’s journey that enables her to access an intermediate world parallels the ontological experience of

the Sacred, since like a Sufi, Isma enters a *barzakh*. In this *barzakh* a union between opposite realms takes place.

The symbols that I have explored in Chapter IV have helped identify a creative interplay between the text of Djébar and the Sacred. This section has reinforced this engagement between *Vaste est la prison* and the Sacred by trying to “understand” the creative projection of an intermediate world that parallels Ibn Arabi’s concept of the *barzakh*. This creative dimension stems from the fact that Djébar’s text does not describe, for us readers, a pre-established world; on the contrary, it unfolds an intermediate reality. The symbols of the “hidden” and the “openings” are therefore a stepping-stone for a philosophical reflection on the possibility of the Sacred experience, an experience marked by a journey that does not have a fixed point of reference.

ii. An Intermediate World in Constant Movement in *L’Enfant de sable*

In regard to *Vaste est la prison*, I provided a hermeneutic understanding of the intermediate world projected by the text. This understanding highlighted the creative engagement between Djébar’s text and the Sacred. I demonstrated that the journey of Isma discloses a world that is neither hidden nor seen, but has the attributes of both. I will now turn to a hermeneutic understanding of Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable* and will explore how it also creatively unfolds a world that corresponds to the Sufi experience of the Sacred. This section shows that the intermediate world in *L’Enfant de sable* is similar to the intermediate worlds projected in Djébar’s *Vaste est la prison* and in Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. The main difference lies in the expressions used to translate the ontological experience of the Sacred. In Djébar’s *Vaste est la prison*, the intermediate world is located in Isma’s heart, which allows

her to have visions of the Beloved and to reach union him. In *The Satanic Verses*, the intermediate nature of the projected world can be detected in the visions of Gibreel. In *L'Enfant de sable*, as this section will demonstrate, there are secret doors that give access to an intermediate world. That intermediate world is characterised by a constant movement, a movement that follows the journey between the “hidden” and the “openings”.

In *L'Enfant de sable*, the world projected by the text is ontologically akin to the reality of the *barzakh*. In Chapter IV, the hermeneutic reading of the symbols of the Sacred has identified the narrative journey through the “opening” of doors and towards the “hidden” treasure. The symbolism of the Sacred therefore lies within a set of contrasts: the “openings” and the “hidden”. From an ontological perspective, these opposed symbols refer to two opposed worlds, that of the spiritual and “hidden” world of Ahmed/Zahra and that of the visible and phenomenal world of the narrators. Hence understanding the journey as both a journey through “openings” or as a journey towards the “hidden” involves an interpretation of the possible ontological experience that Ben Jelloun’s text projects. This possibility in *L'Enfant de sable* is situated at the junction between the “hidden” and the “openings”, two opposed worlds yet intertwined like the reality of the *barzakh*.

In Chapter III of this thesis and earlier in this chapter, I defined the concept of the *barzakh* and I have explained how it is a domain that brings together two separate realities. Hence, the *barzakh* is ontologically posited between a phenomenal world and a spiritual world. Examining Ibn Arabi’s philosophy, Corbin (1969: 217) observes that the Sufi spiritual seeker through his or her visionary wayfaring comes into contact with a realm which epitomises “the intermediate between the world of pure spiritual realities, the world of Mystery, and the visible, sensible world.” In this

sense, the spiritual wayfarer enters a world which is “at once in the sensible and the spiritual, in the senses and in the intellect” (Corbin 1969: 218). The Sufi journey in search of the Sacred is therefore a journey into a realm that is neither physical, corporeal world, nor the spiritual or unseen world, but has the attributes of both.

In *L’Enfant de sable*, the journey projects a world similar to the *barzakh* since it reflects a reality that is neither “hidden” nor revealed but has the attributes of both. It is a world that cannot be easily described, for it has “Quelque chose d’indéfinissable” (ES: 9). It is in this world where the “hidden” secret of Ahmed/Zahra lies. In that world, the “hidden treasure,” and the “unique secret” that Ahmed/Zahra emblematises can be found (ES: 9). Ahmed/Zahra is invisible and his/her story is kept secret in a journal which represents “le livre du secret” (ES: 13). However, the truth pertaining to this secret “ne peut être dite, mais vécue” (ES: 43). Hence, the journey of those hearing or reading the journal of Ahmed/Zahra parallels the experience of the Sufi seeker who in his or her quest for the Sacred enters a secret domain of the unseen. This domain cannot be described in words but it can rather be experienced by those who embark on a journey guided by the journal of Ahmed/Zahra.

The journey undertaken primarily by the narrators in the Ben Jelloun’s text entails a passage through a mysterious secret “dans ces pages, tissé par des syllabes et des images” (ES: 12). The world of the “hidden” is where the sacred secret of Ahmed/Zahra, the “mystère pesant” is shrouded in “l’ombre et l’invisible” (ES: 106) and covered beneath “Portes et fenêtres” (ES: 93). Like the intermediate world where the Beloved in *Vaste est la prison* can be secretly encountered, the intermediate world in *L’Enfant de sable* is a sacred and secret realm.²²⁶ This intermediate world is

²²⁶ Secrecy and the Sacred, as demonstrated in Chapter IV, are closely interlinked. At the heart of Sufism, Nasr (2007b: 280) argues, lies the seeker’s “ability to guard the secrets of God as well as to

compared to a secret garden that cannot be accessed by an ordinary person. It is a “secret, son chemin est secret, son existence n’est connue que de très rares personnes, celles qui sont familiarisées avec l’éternité” (ES: 167). If this world is to be accessed, one needs to embark on a spiritual journey, seeking hidden “openings”, knocking on concealed doors, reading the pages of a journal that presents itself as an “énigme” (ES: 173) and listening faithfully to various storytellers. In the central narrator’s words, “Ce livre, mes amis, ne peut circuler ni se donner. [...] La lumière qui en émane éblouit et aveugle les yeux qui s’y posent par mégarde” (ES: 12). He further adds that “Vous ne pouvez y accéder” without embarking on a journey through seven doors (ES: 13). Within this intermediate world that Ben Jelloun’s text projects unto the reader, the Sacred treasure of Ahmed/Zahra can be glimpsed. However, it can only be divulged to those who have “plus d’imagination que les autres,” as announced by Ahmed/Zahra’s niece in the concluding pages of the novel (ES: 208).

This world of the “hidden” ontologically meets the world of the seen where “openings” take place. Hence, despite the “hidden” nature of Ahmed/Zahra’s secret, the journey in *L’Enfant de sable* gives access to this secret through the “opening” of doors. The doors are grafted into the narrative and reveal themselves as the narrative progresses and as the spiritual wayfaring unfolds in the text. In Chapter IV, I examined the symbolic dimension of “openings” and I have shown that they are found in the seven chapters’ doors and in the multiple narrators’ stories. This symbolic aspect brings to the fore the ontological dimension of a world that has access points and entrances allowing the revelation of the unseen.²²⁷ As such, reading

divulge what needs to be divulged to those ready to receive it.”

²²⁷ This is referred to in Sufism as *tajalli*, which translates as manifestation or revelation. *Tajalli*, according to Fethullah Gülen, means that “Divine mysteries have become apparent in the heart of the seeker by means of the light of knowledge.” For a detailed definition of *tajalli*, see Gülen (2004).

the journal of Ahmed/Zahra is akin to a passage through doors that enable access to a world that is neither completely “hidden” nor completely revealed. It is a world compared to “une maison où chaque fenêtre est un quartier, chaque porte une ville, chaque page est une rue” (*ES*: 108).

What emerges from the above discussion is that the text of Ben Jelloun projects a world akin to a *barzakh* in the sense that it is situated between the “hidden” and the “openings”, has the attributes of both but cannot be defined solely as one or the other. This intermediate character is what makes the journey in Ben Jelloun’s text comparable to the experience of the Sacred. While one can affirm that the secret of Ahmed/Zahra remains “hidden”, one can also negate its secrecy and claim that it is revealed through doors. Such a bringing together of opposites recalls the ontological reality of the *barzakh* where, as Salman H. Bashier writes (2004: 8), things can be said to be “both existent and nonexistent” or “are neither existent nor nonexistent [...] one can neither affirm nor negate their existence.”²²⁸

What also reinforces the comparison between this intermediate world and the *barzakh* is the character of movement. The intermediate world in *L’Enfant de sable* is a result of the movement of the journey itself. In this regard, Ibn Arabi stresses the relation between the Sufi seeker’s journey and movement:

Since the principle of existence is movement there can be no stillness in existence because were it to be still, it would return to its root, which is nonexistence. So the voyage in both the higher and lower world never ceases, and the divine realities also do not cease voyaging back and forth. (2015: 42)

What makes the Sufi journey ontologically real is this movement that “never ceases.” Consequently, a world that exists is a result of this constant movement. Thus, the journey is what creates a possible world. It is in this sense that the intermediate world

²²⁸ The concept of existence, in Arabic *wujud*, occupies a central position in Ibn Arabi’s Sufi philosophy. See Chittick (1989) and Peter Coates (2002).

of *L'Enfant de sable* comes into existence. It is not a world that has already been established, instead it is a world created by the constant journeying through “openings” and towards the “hidden”. It is a world in the making: “Nos pas inventent le chemin au fur et à mesure que nous avançons” (ES: 15).

The world of the *barzakh* projected in Ben Jelloun's text forms an invisible thread interwoven between the world of the seen and the visible and the world of the “hidden” and the concealed. While one can say that there are two separate opposite worlds, one can also say that there is a meeting-point that brings the two opposed worlds together, it is therefore “l'une et l'autre” (ES: 16). This meeting-point is not fixed, it is dictated by a perpetual motion, thus “nous regarderons toujours en avant et nous ferons confiance à nos pieds” (ES: 16). The comparison between the “voyage” undertaken in *L'Enfant de sable* and the nouns “navire” and “désert” emphasise the correlation between the journey and movement. The central narrator says that: “Amis du Bien, sachez que nous sommes réunis par le secret du verbe dans une rue circulaire, peut-être sur un navire et pour une traverse dont je ne connais pas l'itinéraire” (ES: 15). Furthermore, the central narrator affirms that “Cette histoire est aussi un désert. Il va falloir marcher pieds nus sur le sable brûlant, marcher et se taire, croire à l'oasis qui se dessine à l'horizon et qui ne cesse d'avancer vers le ciel” (ES: 15). The character of constant movement shows that the journey in *L'Enfant de sable* projects a world through the very uncertain and unpredictable routes that it follows. It is a possible world without a pre-established itinerary as suggested by the noun “navire” and without pre-defined limits as illustrated by the noun “désert”.

What the text projects is a world that constantly moves between the “hidden” and the “openings”. Hence, the intermediate world projected by the text of *L'Enfant de sable* brings together “la force du monde réel et imaginaire, visible et caché” (ES:

181). Such a world follows the movement of constant journeying which does not have a fixed place but “basculer de l’un à l’autre selon la vie que nous dansons sur un fil invisible” (*ES*: 27). The invisible thread illustrates the point of connection, like a *barzakh*, where the “hidden” and the “openings” meet. Indeed, the narrator speaks of a multiplicity of threads that brings opposites together: “De moi à vous, de chacun d’entre vous à moi, partent des fils. Ils sont encore fragiles. Ils nous lient cependant comme dans un pacte” (*ES*: 29). Hence, the journey through “openings” and towards “the hidden” gives access to an invisible passageway that links separate worlds like a “passerelle reliant deux rêves” (*ES*: 173). However, this meeting-point changes depending on the movement dictated by the journey. This aspect of mobility will also be addressed later in relation to Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, particularly in relation to Gibreel’s journey.

Like the spiritual journey of the Sufi seeker, the journey towards the “hidden” and through “openings” in *L’Enfant de sable* is not limited to the physical and visible world. From Ibn Arabi’s perspective, while the Sufi seeker is aware of the world as a material phenomenon, he or she explores what lies beyond its material veneer in order to achieve spiritual realisation. The experience of the Sacred makes it necessary to look “at things in the sensible world and not to stop there, but to see beyond them the ultimate ground of all Being” (Izutsu 1984: 12). Similarly, the journey in Ben Jelloun’s text is posited between the seen and the unseen as though it were an “énigme qui oscille entre les ténèbres et l’excès de lumière” (*ES*: 85).

Thus far, the intermediate dimension of the world projected by Ben Jelloun’s text is underscored in the movement of the journey, a movement that triggers the “opening” of doors which give access, albeit not fully, to the sacred secret of Ahmed/Zahra. The ambiguity of the secret of Ahmed/Zahra is also another feature of

the intermediate world in *L'Enfant de sable*. Hence, Ahmed/Zahra is a secret that cannot be easily grasped nor fully comprehended because it is emblematic of a union between opposites, between a male appearance and a female body, yet he/she is neither one nor the other: “une énigme, deux visages d'un même être complètement embourbé dans une histoire inachevée, une histoire sur l'ambiguïté et la fuite” (ES: 178). Ahmed/Zahra is a meeting-point between two separate entities for he/she is “porteur de deux vies” (ES: 170). In Ahmed/Zahra's words: “je suis moi-même l'ombre et la lumière [...] le regard qui se cherche et le miroir, je suis et je ne suis pas cette voix” (ES: 44-45). Ahmed/Zahra, who “tolérerai l'ambiguïté jusqu'au bout,” is neither a woman nor a man but is the site where can be found: “Deux vies avec deux perceptions et deux visages, mais les mêmes rêves, la même et profonde solitude” (ES: 155). Rather than revealing what the secret is, the text of Ben Jelloun presents itself as an experience of a journey towards a secret that cannot be fully revealed nor fully kept hidden. Hence the reader is invited to follow the projected world of a journey that cannot be defined nor ascertained beforehand: “Vous ne savez pas où je vous emmène. N'ayez crainte, moi non plus je ne le sais pas” (ES: 21).

Hence, gaining access to the secret of Ahmed/Zahra is therefore a journey into a world that is neither visible nor invisible, like the character himself/herself who is neither man nor woman, yet combines the attributes of both. With Isma, in *Vaste est la prison*, her intermediate world is a secret encounter with her Beloved who does not exist in the physical world she belongs to, yet appears in corporeal form to her heart. With the narrative journey in *L'Enfant de sable* the secret of its intermediate world lies in the bringing together between opposites, between “moi et un autre, moi et une autre” (ES: 46).²²⁹

²²⁹ It is relevant here to allude to the definition of the “self” in relation to the concept of imagination in Islamic philosophy. Sachiko Murata and Chittick explain how the “self”, which is synonymous with

In Chapter IV, I explained how the androgynous character battles with a divergent sense of self. As the journey progresses in the text, that divergence is revealed also as a union between Ahmed and Zahra. Many storytellers that claim to know the truth about Ahmed/Zahra's story could not comprehend the union between opposites that characterises Ahmed/Zahra. At the Thursday and Friday gates, the doors open into the male name Ahmed that was imposed upon a child born female. As a child, adolescent and young male Ahmed seeks ways to cope with the false male appearance to the point where he tends to perform the role of a patriarch. When the Saturday gate "opens," the protagonist begins to doubt his male self and to question this "masque le plus fin" (ES: 45). In his/her notebook, Ahmed/Zahra confesses that he/she has been "enfermé dans une image" (ES: 54). This image is that of a false male appearance that Ahmed/Zahra started to question when he/she was overwhelmed by the urge to answer the question "Qui suis-je?" (ES: 55). The answer to the question is not straightforward in the text for it can only be sought within the "silence du cœur" (ES: 56). As Ahmed/Zahra strives to find who he/she really is, the movement of the journey in Ben Jelloun's text further advances. The closed doors of the illusionary male appearance "open" into a more ambiguous sense of self. Gradually, the secret of Ahmed/Zahra reveals itself in an intermediate world where neither Ahmed nor Zahra can be dissociated from each other, a world where "l'une et l'autre" co-exist (ES: 59).

In conclusion, I have examined how the text of *L'Enfant de sable* projects an intermediate world that brings into contact the "hidden" and the visible, which

the definition of the "soul", is inscribed in liminality whenever Muslim thinkers approach the question of imagination: "Our souls are ambiguous and ever-changing, like fire or dream images. The attributes of our souls are neither those of our bodies nor those of spirits; alternatively, they are a combination of the attributes of the two sides" (1994: 103). The "self" or "soul" is therefore not defined in fixed terms, since it is made up of what constitutes the corporeal attributes of the body and the disembodied attributes of the spirit. See Murata and Chittick (1994).

follows the movement of the secret of Ahmed/Zahra and which brings opposites together like a *barzakh*. In the ensuing section I will turn to Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and will explore how Gibreel's journey through "openings" and towards the "hidden" refers to an intermediate world that resembles that of Djébar's *Vaste est la prison* and Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable*.

iii. The Intermediate World of Visions in *The Satanic Verses*

As demonstrated in Chapter IV, the journey of Gibreel revolves around visionary encounters. Rekha, Mahound, and Ayesha amongst others appear to Gibreel in a tangible form. These visions are symbolic "openings" that are structurally linked to the symbol of the "hidden". Having explained the symbolic connotations of the Sacred in Chapter IV, this section moves into the hermeneutic stage of understanding how these symbols of the Sacred project an intermediate world. In the same way that I have employed Ibn Arabi's concept of the *barzakh* in order to "understand" the worlds projected in Djébar's and Ben Jelloun's texts, I will adopt this concept once again in this section. The concept of the *barzakh* will allow me to identify the intermediate aspect of the world projected by Rushdie's text. In this sense, I will argue that the visionary journey of Gibreel is ontologically situated between a physical world and a spiritual world that calls to mind the intermediate aspect of the *barzakh*.

The intermediate world projected by *The Satanic Verses* is located in Gibreel's visions which are compared to dreams in Rushdie's text, as demonstrated in Chapter IV of this thesis. The dream quality that characterises the visionary journey of Gibreel reflects a world that is neither real nor unreal, neither physical nor spiritual, but has the attributes of both like the reality of the *barzakh*. Ibn Arabi

compares the *barzakh* to dreams because it is where “material objects acquire spiritual meanings and spiritual meanings acquire material forms” (Dobie 2010: 43). In Ibn Arabi’s view, the world of dreams²³⁰ best represents the world of the *barzakh* owing to its mediating function between two separate worlds:

Ibn Arabi’s concern is in what mediates between the sensible world and the intelligible worlds, the boundary or *barzakh* that at once separates and unites spiritual and material into symbolic forms that are not unlike what we witness in dreams. (Dobie 2010: 46)

The *barzakh*, like dreams, in this sense, brings together spiritual meanings that do not belong to the real world and gives them a tangible form.

The *barzakh*, then, is a world where the Sufi wayfarer encounters spiritual meanings in tangible forms. However, it is not a fixed world, for amongst its main characteristics is transformation and change.²³¹ In Sachiko Murata’s and Chittick’s words:

One of the important characteristics of imaginal existence is constant change. Imagination does not stay the same for two successive moments. Nothing in the world of intermediacy is fixed. Every dream image is constantly in the process of being transformed into other images. (1994: 101)

Here, the Sufi wayfarer’s experience of the Sacred entails a journey that brings together spiritual meanings and the corporeal forms, but it is also an experience that resists fixity.²³² Bashier (2004: 68) comments on how Ibn Arabi perceives the *barzakh* that presents itself to the Sufi seeker as a world: “About it one says ‘both this and that’, or ‘neither this nor that.’” Bashier (2004: 68) further adds that this “synthesis of opposites, a creative synthesis” is not defined by fixity “since it

²³⁰ For a detailed study of dreams and “visions” in Sufism, see Alexander Knysh and Ozgen Felek (2012) and Sirriyeh (2015).

²³¹ For a detailed study on the concept of transformation in Sufism, see Vaughan-Lee (1995b).

²³² Izutsu discusses Ibn Arabi’s understanding of the process of constant change in relation to the concept of creation. According to Izutsu (1984: 205), Ibn Arabi considers the Sufi experience as a form of “perpetual creation” in the sense that the seeker does not experience the same world twice. As Izutsu (1984: 205) puts it: “This ontological process repeats itself indefinitely and endlessly.”

constantly undergoes transmutation.” In addition to movement, the journey into the realm of the *barzakh* entails an experience of images and meanings that constantly change and are in a state of transmutation.

In a similar way, Gibreel experiences a world, like a *barzakh*, which has a dream-like quality, in which his journey involves constant movement and transformation. That is how the intermediate world in *The Satanic Verses* is projected. Owing to his visionary dreams, Gibreel enters a realm where the spiritual world is materialised, a world that one cannot ascertain “What is within?” but one is invited to follow its “moving towards possibilities” (SV: 291). The intermediate world projected in *The Satanic Verses* is “Halfway into sleep, or halfway back to wakefulness” (SV: 111). As such, Gibreel’s “dream-worlds of his archangelic other self begin to seem as tangible as the shifting realities he inhabits while he’s awake” (SV: 205). In the phenomenal world that Gibreel inhabits, Rekha, Mahound, and Ayesha do not exist in a tangible manner. However, Gibreel’s journey through his visionary “openings” constitutes an encounter with disembodied and spiritual entities that appear in corporeal forms. Thus, Gibreel’s “world of dreams was leaking into that of the waking hours,” “the seals dividing the two were breaking,” and “at any moment the two firmaments could be joined” (SV: 304). Instead of a clear-cut frontier that separates the real from the spiritual, the visions of Gibreel establish a bridge between two separate worlds, that are neither real nor spiritual, but have the attributes of both.

The intermediate world opened up by Gibreel’s visions, like a *barzakh*, cannot be defined as a fixed entity. It is a world characterised by constant movement whereby Gibreel moves from one dream to another and experiences the

transformation of his “secret self.” This echoes Ibn Arabi’s understanding of the Sufi journey as a continuous movement:

In reality, we never cease voyaging from the moment we and our roots are originated, *ad infinitum*. Whenever a waystation appears to you, and you say that it is the goal, another road opens up before you [...] Whatever waystation you come upon, you may say: ‘This is my goal.’ But when you reach it, it is not long before you set out once more travelling. (2015: 43)

The journey in this sense is a continuous passage through stages. Similarly, the journey of Gibreel is predicated on a ceaseless movement from one dream to another, from one spiritual encounter to another and from one transformation to another. The movement of Gibreel’s journey creates a world with a possible “entrance” into the hidden and a “universal beginning” rather than a fixed ending (SV: 3-4). The intermediate world in *The Satanic Verses* can be understood as “the place of movement,” a “twilight zone” (SV: 190) which is the site “of transitory zones” and where “anything becomes possible” (SV: 5). The world projected in *The Satanic Verses*, like a *barzakh*, presents itself as a “transit lounge” that is neither real nor unreal but has the attributes of both (SV: 132). The world that the text of Rushdie projects asks the question “what do you imagine yourselves to be doing here?” thus linking the act of imagination to the creation of an ontological reality that has not been preconceived or pre-established.

The intermediate world that Gibreel’s visions encapsulate refuses delimitation by a definition that answers to the schism of either/or. On the contrary, the intermediate world of *The Satanic Verses*, akin to a *barzakh*, brings together opposites and contradictory elements for “It was so, it was not” (SV: 143). Within the intermediate world of Gibreel’s visions, dreams are changing and everything seems to be “moving towards possibilities” (SV: 291). Beginning with the fall, the journey of Gibreel is a passage through angelic transformation, a meeting with the dead

Rekha who “materialized out of the clouds,” (SV: 26), an encounter with Mahound, a battle with satanic voices, dreams about the mystic Ayesha and a multiplicity of other dreams that embody the “myriad and contradictory possibilities of life” (SV: 302). With Gibreel’s fall, his journey ontologically projects an entrance into an intermediate world “between two realities, this world and another was also right there, visible but unseen” (SV: 351).

Within the intermediate world opened up by Gibreel’s visions the transformation of the “secret self,” that was symbolically analysed previously in this thesis in relation to the “hidden”, takes place. Within the world projected by *The Satanic Verses* the transformation of Gibreel becomes possible, thus emblematising the secrecy of the self which is prone to change and transmutation. The question posed regularly in *The Satanic Verses*: “Who am I?” (SV: 10), solicits the reader to think beyond the limitations of an essentialist definition of a “self” and to follow instead the constant movement of a “secret self” that defies a fixed interpretation. The secrecy of this self has been explained in Chapter IV in relation to Ibn Arabi’s Sufi concept of *fanā* (annihilation of the self) and I have shown how Gibreel cannot be defined as either human or angel for he has become the epitome of both attributes. Hence, the journey of Gibreel is ontologically situated in a possible world where dreams are constantly changing, but at the same time his sense of self undergoes transformation: “The dreams had begun that very night. In these visions he was always present, not as himself but as his namesake” (SV: 83). As he moves from one dream to another, Gibreel travels between the world of humans and the world of angels, between the world of visionary “openings” and the world of the “hidden”. His journey also brings about his transformation, his human “self” dies and what is

born instead is neither human nor angelic, but “a being that crossed the frontier” (SV: 288), embracing its “ever-varying forms” (SV: 277).

As he progresses on his journey, Gibreel’s old self dies: hence he experiences *fanā*. This transformation of the self which takes place within an intermediate world is the mystery itself that is “hidden” yet also revealed. As he embarks on his journey, Gibreel realises that the “secret of the self” is neither purely angelic nor purely human. The world projected by *The Satanic Verses* allows for an impossible transformation to become possible. Commenting on the meaning of Ibn Arabi’s *barzakh*, Salman H. Bashier (2004: 91) states that: “One who knows the reality of the barzakh knows how impossible things are made possible.” In the intermediate world unfolded in front of *The Satanic Verses*, the impossible human-angelic transformation of Gibreel becomes possible. As such, Gibreel is ushered into a realm where he “felt his old self drop from him” (SV: 320). The human Gibreel is transformed into an angel, and this “really was incredible. Here appeared a celestial being, all radiance, effulgence and goodness” (SV: 337). However, this does not mean that Gibreel was fully transformed into an angel. Neither human nor angelic, yet having the attributes of both, Gibreel enters into a world where he acquires “the gift of flight” and becomes “ethereal, woven of illuminated air” (SV: 336). As contradictory as this may sound, it is this union between opposites that the world of *The Satanic Verses* projects. It is where Gibreel in the final stage of his journey can say “I am the angel” and the “human” (SV: 544), affirm both his humanity and his angelic nature, yet negating both. Understanding this paradoxical statement leads to accepting the “incompatibility of life’s elements” that *The Satanic Verses* presents to its readers (SV: 296).

As a result of Gibreel's transformation, miraculous visions take place.²³³ In the intermediate world that Gibreel journeys into, his mysterious transformation from within brings about a transformation from without, thus "making action possible" (SV: 329). One of these miracles is encapsulated by Gibreel's vision of Ayesha the mystic girl. In this vision, the impossible parting of the Red Sea becomes possible. Despite the doubts of Mirza Saeed who from the beginning questioned the legitimacy of Ayesha's "mystical experience," Ayesha alongside the pilgrims cross the open sea (SV: 239). In his vision of Ayesha, Gibreel hears the latter confessing to the pilgrims her belief that Gibreel will open the sea for them in order to migrate to Mecca: "Gibreel says the sea is like our souls. When we open them, we can move through into wisdom. If we can open our hearts, we can open the sea" (SV: 501). Thus, Gibreel appears as an Archangel and performs the parting of the Red Sea:

Mirza Saeed clearly observed the great glowing cloud fly out over the sea; pause; hover; and form itself into the shape of a colossal being, a radiant giant constructed wholly of tiny beating wings, stretching from horizon to horizon, filling the sky. (SV: 502)

Within the intermediate world of Gibreel's visions, the human world meets the angelic world, the human meets the spiritual, and reality meets dreams. What seems impossible becomes possible for "great things were still possible in this life" (SV: 235).

To sum up, I showed that the intermediate character of the world that *The Satanic Verses* projects is found in the dream-like quality of Gibreel's visions, in the constant movement of his journey and in the transformation of Gibreel's self. Owing to the dream-like aspect of Gibreel's visions, the corporeal meets the spiritual. With this in mind, the journey of Gibreel gives access to a reality that is neither corporeal

²³³ For a discussion on the meaning of miracles in Islam, see David L. Weddle (2010).

nor spiritual but brings together the attributes of both. Additionally, this intermediate world is not a fixed realm; it is rather identified by its changing nature that follows the movement of Gibreel's journey through variegated visions. Accordingly, the movement that guides Gibreel's journey results in the transformation of Gibreel.

iv. An Intermediate World of Remembering and Unveiling in *Loin de Médine*

In Chapter V, I explored the Sufi symbolic connection between the journey, “darkness” and “light” and the Sacred in Djébar's *Loin de Médine*. I applied the first stage of Ricœur's hermeneutic study in order to show how both “darkness” and “light” are structurally linked to the journey of the female narrator. I explained that the female narrator's journey is a passage through “darkness” which parallels the meaning “*jihad*”, which translates the idea of spiritual struggle in the Sufi sense. As her journey progresses, the female narrator enters the “ombre opaque” of male heritage which eclipsed the voices and presence of women in the early years of Islam. Furthermore, I clarified that the journey of the female narrator through “darkness” entails a passage through the dark nights of the mystical and sacred daughter Fatima as well as through her suffering. In contrast to the symbolism of “darkness”, there is also a symbolism of “light” associated with the journey of the female narrator. Thus, I explored how through the sacred figure Aicha, the female narrator embarks on a journey of visions and *dhikr* or remembering.

In this section, my reading makes a transition from the first stage of the hermeneutic and structural interpretation of the symbols of the journey, “darkness” and “light” as expressions of the Sacred, to a hermeneutic understanding of these symbols that entails a reflection on their ontological dimension. Hence, I argue that

the symbolic expression of the journey projects an intermediate world that brings together “darkness” and “light”. In the previous section, I have shown that the intermediate worlds projected by Djébar’s *Vaste est la prison*, Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable*, and Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* are akin to the *barzakh* and are situated in a zone between the “hidden” and the “openings”. Similarly, I will discuss in this section how Djébar’s *Loin de Médine*, Ben Jelloun’s *La Nuit sacrée* and Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* also project intermediate worlds that are analogous to the *barzakh*, but with a different focus on another set of contrasting symbols: “darkness” and “light”.

The journey of the female narrator encapsulated in *Loin de Médine* ontologically brings together two opposite worlds, that of “darkness” and that of “light”. Thus there are two separate worlds that meet in an intermediate realm. This is similar to the way Ibn Arabi interprets the experience of the Sacred as a site where both “darkness” and “light” meet.²³⁴ In his *Contemplation of the Holy Mysteries and the Rising of the Divine Lights*, Ibn Arabi speaks about his own spiritual experience and indicates that he hears the voice of God saying:

Do you see how excellent this darkness is, how intense its brightness and how clear its light! This darkness is the place from which the lights rise, the source from which the fountains of secrets spring forth [...] From this darkness I have brought you into being. (2001: 33)

Despite the opposition between “darkness” and “light”, the spiritual seeker in this sense experiences the union between both.

In *Loin de Médine*, there is a world of “darkness”, which is dominated by an “héritage noirci”, by divisions, by “leur silence” and “par leur effacement” (*LM*: 342-343). In this world of “darkness”, “les oublieux”, those who incite oblivion, seek to

²³⁴ For a discussion on the meanings of “darkness” and “light” in relation to Ibn Arabi’s concept of *wujud* (existence) and non-existence, see Shah-Kazemi (2006).

“occulter toute présence féminine” (*LM*: 5). The female narrator’s passage through this “darkness” involves an encounter with those who have been buried under silence, like Fatima, whose voice of the “révolution féministe de l’Islam” has been veiled. In the world of “darkness”, the female presence and voice of Fatima as well as other women in the early years of Islam is drawn into “un mouvement spontané de retrait, de rêve obscur, de silence” (*LM*: 65). Even Fatima’s body was buried in the darkness of night. The journey through “darkness” is therefore an encounter with non-existence. Fatima and other women are absent and buried under silence. In contrast to the world of “darkness” is the world of “light” projected through Aïcha. It is a world where the female narrator gains an inner vision. It is through the “eye” of Aïcha that an unseen realm becomes seen and where the non-existent past manifests itself. Through Aïcha’s vision and remembering, what has been veiled by “darkness” is unveiled.

Ontologically speaking, the journey of the female narrator corresponds to a Sufi seeker’s experience of the Sacred in the realm of the *barzakh*. It is a journey that can be seen both as a journey through “darkness” and as a journey towards “light”, that has the attributes of both opposite worlds, yet is neither one of them. What allows the meeting between “darkness” and “light” in *Loin de Médine* is the experience of remembering or *dhikr* in the Sufi sense.²³⁵ I have explained this point in Chapter V and what I would like to emphasise here is the resemblance between the female narrator’s journey of remembering and the Sufi seeker’s access to the sacred realm through *dhikr*.

I recall here that *dhikr*, according to Ibn Arabi, enables the seeker to gain spiritual insight and to access an unseen world. As Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1989: 36) puts

²³⁵ In addition to tracing the roots of *dhikr* to the Qur’an and to the Prophet’s *hadith*, Geoffroy (2010) describes *dhikr* as a ritual in Sufism. See Geoffroy (2010).

it: “Occupy yourself with *dhikr*, until [...] the world of abstract meanings free of matter is revealed to you.” In a similar vein, the Sufi scholar Al-Jīlani (1992: 41) explains how the seeker in his journey towards the Sacred relies on *dhikr* which gives him or her access to an inner realm: “As the memory of Him becomes constant, remembrance sinks to the heart and becomes inward.” Remembering allows the heart of the seeker to perceive “forms and shapes from the hidden unseen realm” (Al-Jīlani 1992: 42). *Dhikr* or remembering the Sacred is therefore not an end in itself; it is part and parcel of a constant spiritual journeying. Remembering the Sacred is a “becoming,” according to Al-Jīlani (1992: 56), for it opens up a realm where there is “no distance, nor closeness nor farness, nor reaching, nor measure, nor direction, dimension.”

I have shown that remembering in *Loin de Médine* is symbolised by Aicha. Expanding on this idea, I argue that in *Loin de Médine*, the whole journey which reposes on remembering in the Sufi sense, allows the female narrator to enter a world where veiled female bodies are unveiled and silenced female voices are heard. Remembering is also consonant with the opening up of an intermediate world where a constant journey towards the sacred “light” of those who have been forgotten is akin to the Sufi seeker’s *dhikr* of God, The Light. Aicha is a symbol of remembering, and through her the female narrator is projected into another dimension where “la vie” manifests itself in its full “rayonnement” (*LM*: 337-338). Aicha’s “parole vive” and the “imagination de sa piété confidante et inébranlable” reveals to the narrator a world where death is shunned (*LM*: 331).

In addition to remembering, which enables the female narrator to journey into an intermediate world, the latter experiences unveiling in the Sufi sense of the term. The experience of unveiling reinforces the intermediate dimension of the world

projected by *Loin de Médine*. It is important to recall here the Sufi meaning of unveiling as that which enables the seeker to access the unseen, and to gain illuminative knowledge of the Sacred. The Sufi wayfarer, through his or her inner struggle and passage through “darkness”, encounters several veils that hide the presence of the Sacred “light”. Unveiling for Sufis is the:

principal mode of access to the supra-sensible world [...] it permits the raising of the veils that the world of the senses (*mulk*) throws over man, thus allowing him to reach the world of the spirit (*malakut*). (Geoffroy 2007: 7)

Unveiling is therefore coterminous with gaining access to the realm of the Sacred, and attaining spiritual realisation.²³⁶ This attainment is located in an intermediate reality that is neither completely physical nor fully spiritual. When the Sufi seeker spiritually attains the Sacred, the veils of darkness are replaced with “the illumination of the heart and [...] of knowledge of an immediate and direct nature which is tasted and experienced” (Nasr: 1989: 119).

In a similar vein, the journey of the female narrator in *Loin de Médine* is an unveiling in the sense that while she constantly encounters veils of “darkness”, she experiences moments of illumination. Hence her journey can be said to be an experience both of a veiled world and of an unveiled world, of “darkness” and of “light”. In the text there is an ensemble of verbs which when interpreted together convey a chain of signification relevant to the meaning of “unveiling” in the Sufi sense of the word. Such verbs are “J’imagine” (*LM*: 66), “Rêver” (*LM*: 63), “animer” (*LM*: 63), “éclaircir” (*LM*: 62), and “évoquer” (*LM*: 92). Throughout her journey, the female narrator enters a realm where she imagines the “Bonheur de Fatima” and the

²³⁶ Vaughan-Lee (1996) stresses the dual nature of the veils, for they both hide and reveal the Sacred. Vaughn-Lee explains that the Sufi seeker encounters “veils” that separate him or her from the Sacred, yet it is these very “veils” that enable him or her to achieve spiritual union. As Vaughan-Lee (1996: 94) puts it: “the veils of separation become the veils of revelation.”

“souvenir” of Aicha that “trace, dans l’espace de notre foi interrogative, la courbe parfait d’un météore entrevu dans le noir” (*LM*: 66). The journey of the female narrator is also consonant with “Rêver,” for she has a vision of Fatima, witnessing her suffering in the darkness of the night and bringing her into life (*LM*: 63). The verbs “éclaircir” and “évoquer” are used in the sense of shedding light on the life of Fatima and extracting her “ombre revendicatrice” from a world of non-existence (*LM*: 62). All these active verbs convey the meaning of “unveiling” which comes to uncover the symbolic “voiles grises” that veil the presence of Fatima in particular and of women in general (*LM*: 68).

In conclusion, the text of *Loin de Médine* ontologically projects an intermediate world that is neither confined to “darkness” nor to “light”. It is a world like a *barzakh* that brings a union between the “darkness” of hidden female presence like that of Fatima, and the “light” of remembering as symbolised by Aicha and experienced by the female narrator. What highlights the intermediate dimension of the world projected in *Loin de Médine* is the constant remembering of what has been forgotten and an unveiling of the veils of darkness.

v. The Intermediate World of Visions in *La Nuit Sacrée*

In Chapter V, the close structural analysis of the contrasting symbols of “darkness” and “light” in Ben Jelloun’s *La Nuit Sacrée* allowed me to demonstrate that the journey of Zahra is closely interlinked with the Sacred. I examined the symbolic aspect of “darkness” from a Sufi perspective, and I have established that Zahra’s journey involves a passage through seven stages. Furthermore, I clarified the link between the symbolic meaning of “light” and such expressions as the “veil”, “love”

and visions. With this in mind, I argued that Zahra's journey is a quest for a Sacred "light" that parallels a Sufi's search for spiritual illumination.

My aim in this section is to explore further the creative engagement between Ben Jelloun's *La Nuit sacrée* and the Sacred by reflecting on the ontological dimension projected by the symbolic expressions of the Sacred. From a hermeneutic angle, I will seek to understand the intermediate aspect of the world projected by the text. Once again I adopt Ibn Arabi's concept of the *barzakh* which will help identify this intermediate dimension. Having established that there are two contrasting symbolisms of "darkness" and "light", I argue that these symbols project two opposed worlds. On the one hand, there is the world of "darkness" which comprises a secret that was "gardé sous une pierre noire" (NS: 8). In this world dwells "la douleur", "une mémoire remplie de silences", "tout ce qui n'a pas été dit" and "les traces et les épreuves de vérité" (NS: 5-6). In the world of "darkness", the truth remains "invisible" and veiled (NS: 11). Zahra's secret has been veiled behind a lie and subsumed under oblivion, as her father confesses on the night that marked the descent of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (NS: 23).

On the other hand, there is the world of "light" in which the secret that has been veiled is illuminated. In the world of "light", Zahra experiences "death" in the mystical sense for her old "self" dies and she is reborn as an "enfant de la lumière" (NS: 28). I referred to this Sufi idea of *fanā* when I examined Gibreel's death of his "self" in *The Satanic Verses*. I recall here the meaning of *fanā* in Sufism:

Death does not mean here death as a biological event. It means a spiritual event consisting in man's throwing off the shackles of the sense and reason, stepping over the confines of the phenomenal, and seeing through the web of phenomenal things [to] [w]hat lies beyond. (Izutsu: 1984: 8)²³⁷

²³⁷ Citing Al-Hallaj, Vaughan-Lee (1996: xx) argues that Sufis consider the spiritual journey towards the Sacred Beloved as "the sacrifice of the self." In Al-Hallaj's words: "Kill me, O my trustworthy friends, for in my being killed is my life" (Vaughan-Lee 1996: xx). Here the death of the "self" is

Fanā, from a Sufi perspective, constitutes a spiritual passage from the phenomenal to the spiritual world of the Sacred. This “death” enables Zahra to gain spiritual illumination, for her old “self” dies in spiritual terms. Hence, her journey signals Zahra’s movement towards her “nouvelle naissance” (NS: 53). Like Gibreel, whose “secret” is encompassed in the annihilation of his “self,” Zahra experiences a spiritual “death”, akin to *fanā*, as she crosses the stages of “darkness” and progresses towards “light”.

It is therefore clear that there are two opposed worlds that Ben Jelloun’s text projects and what Zahra’s journey achieves is the bringing together of these opposed realms. The journey of Zahra is the catalyst for an experience of an intermediate world that ontologically parallels the *barzakh*. It is a world that brings opposites together, made up of both “darkness” and “light”, yet it cannot be defined as one or the other. This recalls Ibn Arabi’s definition (Morris 1995: 106) of the *barzakh* as a realm that “is neither (entirely) existent nor nonexistent, neither (entirely) known nor unknowable, neither entirely affirmed nor denied.” Oscillating between “darkness” and “light”, the journey of Zahra is in constant transit. There is not a particular place that can be assigned to Zahra’s journey, nor can one definitely say whether Zahra exists or does not exist. Thus, Zahra herself is both existent and non-existent, known at times, unknown at others.

Within the intermediate world projected by Ben Jelloun’s text, Zahra is emblematic of the *barzakh* par excellence as she stands for two separate yet conjoined lives. Her journey is that of “darkness” and “light”, which epitomises the secret of “une conjonction qui nous dépasse tous” (NS: 169). Here one can interpret

synonymous with “life”. For a discussion of the theme of death and life in Sufis, see Vaughan-Lee (1996).

“conjonction” as the bringing together of opposites which cannot easily be comprehended, but which can be discerned in the intermediate dimension of Zahra’s journey.

What reinforces the intermediate aspect of the world projected by Ben Jelloun’s text are the visions of both Zahra and of her lover the Consul. Such words as doors, “garden” and “imaginary countries” populate the visionary encounters in the novel. Zahra meets an unknown woman and imagines that the latter has access to her secret through secret doors: “Je l’imagine bien ouvrant une à une les portes de mon histoire et gardant pour elle l’ultime secret” (*NS*: 19). On the one hand, these doors give access, through the darkness of the night, to “des voyages, des routes, des cieux sans étoiles” and to the silence of the “âmes déchues” (*NS*: 19). On the other hand, these doors enable access, through the light of the day, to the naked “âme qui pénètre dans cette maison,” and to the truth (*NS*: 19). Zahra’s vision of doors translates the intermediate character of the world projected by the text, in the sense that the doors give to access to a realm that is neither concealed nor visible but has the attributes of both.

Similarly, amongst Zahra’s visions is her dream of a hidden “garden”.²³⁸ Zahra imagines herself entering “Le Jardin Parfumé” transported by an unknown man who was sent by “les anges” of the Sacred Night (*NS*: 40). Zahra’s vision of the “garden” is compared to an entrance into an intermediate realm that brings opposites together: “entre une image et son reflet, entre un corps et son ombre, entre un rêve qui occupait mes nuits de solitude et une histoire que je vivais avec une curiosité

²³⁸ According to Nasr, Sufis differentiate between the “garden” and the “desert”. In Nasr’s words (2007b: 302): “The Sufi path leads from the desert of outwardness, forgetfulness, selfishness, and falsehood to the Garden of Truth, wherein alone we can realize our true identity.” While the “garden” symbolises for Sufis an inner domain that gives access to the Sacred, the “desert” symbolises an outward space where the seeker undertakes his or her journey. See Nasr (2007b).

heureuse” (NS: 42). In this vision of the “garden,” opposite terms such as “body” and “shadow,” “dream” and “reality” are semantically brought together.

From an ontological angle, the “garden” constitutes an intermediate world that can be accessed through Zahra’s visions. It is a secret place that: “Personne ne [...] connait” (NS: 42). Zahra’s visionary journey into this “garden” galvanises her “imagination” whereby she no longer knows the “différence entre les rêves et les visions” nor distinguishes between “le réel et l’imaginaire” (NS: 43-44). Despite the fact that the “garden” appears as a vision, Zahra admits: “je ne l’ai pas rêvé, je l’ai vécu” (NS: 48). To assert that this vision of the “garden” is neither real nor imagined is correct. But it is also correct to assert that it is both real and imagined, for, like a *barzakh*, it separates opposite attributes, yet brings both together in conjunction.

The Consul, Zahra’s lover, also has visions of an intermediate world that resembles “un pays fabuleux” (NS: 99). The Consul refers to this “fabulous country” as a “pays imaginaire” that has both attributes of “darkness” and “light”. In the Consul’s words, this world is:

Un pays éclairé par les lumières de mes nuits d’insomnie. Quand je le quitte, je deviens triste. Il me manque à chaque fois que j’ouvre mes yeux sur les ténèbres éternelles. (NS: 99)

The Consul’s vision of this world is neither made of darkness nor of light but of both. It is made of “les lumières de mes nuits,” thus encapsulating the intermediate aspect of the world that appears to him. The Consul wonders whether Zahra belongs to this world, for he can sense that Zahra’s “unique être” emanates from it: “Peut-être êtes-vous native de ce pays?” (NS: 99).

The visions of Zahra as well those of the Consul enable access to an intermediate world that cannot be defined in fixed terms. It is a world governed by a constant state of change, like a “territoire mouvant” (NS: 99). Change and movement

are an aspect that characterises the spiritual experience of the Sufi seeker, as noted previously in relation to Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. When the heart of the seeker experiences the realm of the Sacred, images constantly change and are not fixed. In Ibn Arabi's words:

God discloses Himself perpetually, since changes (*taghayyurāt*) are witnessed perpetually in the manifest things and the nonmanifest things, the unseen and the visible, the sensory and the intelligible. His task is self-disclosure, and the task of the existent things is change and passage from one state to another state. (Chittick 1989: 103)

The experience of the Sacred, in this regard, is disclosure of both what is "visible" and "unseen" in the reality of the *barzakh*. This disclosure is not definite nor fixed in time and space, but rather keeps changing as with each journey there are myriad images that appear to the heart of the seeker.

In a similar vein, the intermediate world projected by Ben Jelloun's text is constantly changing and follows the movement of Zahra's continuous journey. The journey of Zahra follows indeterminate "chemins," "voyages" and "routes" made up of unexpected "rencontres" (NS: 19). Her journey follows "les mouvements de l'âme de l'être" (NS: 92). The world projected by Ben Jelloun's text is comparable to a "navire" which "vogue sur des eaux tumultueuses" and that does not attach itself to a "terre ferme" (NS: 43).

To sum up, I have established that the contrasting symbols pertaining to the journey of Zahra, those of "darkness" and "light", project an intermediate world that brings opposed attributes together. I argued that it is an ontological realm whose intermediate aspect parallels the world of the *barzakh* in which a Sufi seeker experiences the Sacred. I have identified this intermediate dimension by focusing on the visions of both Zahra and the Consul. As the journey of Zahra progresses, she experiences visions that enable her to gain access both to "darkness" and "light".

vi. The Intermediate World of Love in *Shalimar the Clown*

In Chapter V, I provided a hermeneutic explanation of two contrasting symbolisms in Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*: that of "darkness" and that of "light". I have shown that both "darkness" and "light" are structurally linked to the journey of India/Kashmira. What this first stage of my hermeneutic reading helped achieve is to demonstrate the creative engagement between the journey, "darkness" and "light" and the Sacred. This section now marks the transition of my reading to the second stage of the hermeneutic interpretation I am adopting in this thesis. What this final section of this chapter will show is that the journey of India/Kashmira projects a world akin to the *barzakh* whereby she gains access to visions that have the attributes of both "darkness" and "light". Additionally, I will show that the intermediate world of India/Kashmira is predicated on a constant movement motivated by the mystical force of love.

I have shown in Chapter V that, in relation to "darkness", India/Kashmira crosses three stages. The first stage of her journey is encapsulated in the inner "battle" that India/Kashmira leads in her search for her hidden mother. In the second stage of her journey, India/Kashmira has visions of her dead father Max, and in the third stage the "darkness" of the "night" associated with Shalimar the Clown is manifested to India/Kashmira. As such, I argued that the spiritual struggle against "evil forces" that both Max and Shalimar the Clown represent is what reinforces the Sufi dimension of India/Kashmira's passage through "darkness" and underscore its connection to the Sacred.

In opposition to the symbolism of "darkness", I have analysed the symbolic aspect of "light". I have explained that India/Kashmira seeks an inner heart which,

like a “garden” or “paradise” in the Sufi sense, is the site of Sacred illumination. What propels the movement of India/Kashmira’s quest for “light” is “love”. This, in my view, mirrors the journey of the Sufi seeker who searches to attain union with the Sacred.²³⁹

I have therefore established that there are two contrasting symbolisms that are structurally associated with the meaning of the journey. My ontological argument now consists in understanding the worlds projected both by the symbolism of “darkness” and of “light”. The projection of this intermediate world is made possible owing to the visions that India/Kashmira sees throughout her journey. These visions enable India/Kashmira to enter an intermediate world akin to the world of the *barzakh*.

Like the world of the *barzakh*, the visions of India/Kashmira are where opposites meet, for she sees the unseen “darkness” of her father, she encounters the nocturnal “darkness” of Shalimar the Clown and battles against his demonic forces, and she perceives the “light” of her dead mother. The Sufi seeker’s experience of the Sacred and his or her access to the world of the *barzakh* entails a passage into:

[...] the intermediate world where immaterial beings take on their “apparitional” bodies and where material things are dematerialised to become “subtle bodies,” an intermediate world which is the encounter [...] of the spiritual and the physical. (Corbin 1969: 234)

From a Sufi angle, the *barzakh* brings together what is real and physical with what is spiritual and imperceptible. Regarding the *barzakh*, Ibn Arabi indicates that it is similar to:

²³⁹ Waugh defines union as the “doctrine of unity” in Sufism. This doctrine, Waugh (2005: 26) writes, “implies both a higher state of consciousness – that is an immediate vision of divine reality in which the division between man and God is abolished –, and also a transformation of Human personality.” In this sense, the “doctrine of unity” is not only coterminous with the manifestation of God to the heart of the seeker but also with an inner transformation.

the world of dreams where everything is real yet, like a phantom, untouchable and unreachable. Imaginable forms, like dreams, have an apparitional or phantasmal quality: they are perceivable, meaningful forms yet without physical presence. (Akkach 1997: 102)

Within the intermediate realm of the *barzakh*, the Sufi's experience of the Sacred is where the spiritual and the physical are conjoined, as in the state of a dream. Opposite realities are therefore brought together within the intermediate world of the *barzakh* which shares the attributes of both but is neither one nor the other; therefore "we need to affirm both its identity with other things and its difference from them" (Chittick 1994: 25).

Bearing the definition of the *barzakh* in mind, the visionary journey of India/Kashmira opens up a world where her dead parents are materialised and where the absent Shalimar the Clown is present. As India/Kashmira progresses on her journey, she experiences visions of her mother and of Shalimar the Clown. The reality projected in these visions is like a *barzakh* because it is situated between the "darkness" of Shalimar the Clown and the "light" of Boonyi. The visionary experience of India/Kashmira parallels in this sense the Sufi experience of the Sacred as she enters a world where opposites meet, for it is neither "dark" nor "light", real nor unreal, physical nor spiritual, but it has the attributes of these contrasting realities. Within the intermediate world of *Shalimar the Clown*, India/Kashmira journeys into a realm where she can see her mother Boonyi as though she was real, hence gaining "unknown dimensions of sad memory" (SC: 13). Amidst "darkness" and "light", India/Kashmira searches below the veneer of the non-existence of her mother, knowing that a "girl's mother is her mother even if she existed without actually existing, in the noncorporeal form of a dream" (SC: 51). Boonyi therefore is not existent, yet she exists within the visionary realm projected by the visions of India/Kashmira.

In the Sufi sense, the journey of India/Kashmira is a visionary encounter with an unseen world. According to Ibn Arabi (2015: 42), the Sufi's quest for the Sacred involves "the voyage of the eyes among the visible objects, while awake or asleep, and their passage from one world to another through crossing over." Amongst the instances when India/Kashmira has a vision of her mother is when she strips all her clothes and looks at herself in the mirror, thus gradually gaining a vision of "her mother's face" (SC: 340). The reiteration of the verb "to see" and the noun "eyes" in the text reveal the way India/Kashmira gains not an ordinary eyesight of her mother but rather an inner sight (SC: 340). India/Kashmira tries to look beyond what is visible, through "her mind's eye," hoping to "find the woman she has never been able to see" (SC: 340).

In addition to her visions of her mother, India/Kashmira experiences visions of Shalimar the Clown. The latter is unseen; however, India/Kashmira perceives his presence and speaks to him. Owing to her visionary capacity, India/Kashmira gains access to an intermediate space where she sees Shalimar manifesting himself and she begins to "hear his voice inside her head" (SC: 340). Sitting in her own bedroom, she can hear his speech as though it were "a disembodied nonverbal transmission" (SC: 340). Her vision of Shalimar allows her to ask questions about her absent mother, hoping to know "the impossible truth" (SC: 339). In the same way that Gibreel's journey in *The Satanic Verses* is marked by his visionary encounters, Isma's journey in *Vaste est la prison* is linked to her visions of her Beloved, and Zahra's journey in *La Nuit sacrée* is intersected with her visionary encounters, India/Kashmira's visions enable her to access a world akin to the *barzakh*, in which Shalimar the Clown appears like an image.

Hence, the intermediate world which is neither “dark” nor “light” but brings opposites together and which is projected by India/Kashmira’s journey, is not a fixed space. Instead it is a world marked by the constant movement of India/Kashmira’s journey. What characterises the sacred element of this movement is India/Kashmira’s quest for “love” in its Sufi sense. In his discussions of the Sufi experience of “love” in Ibn Arabi, Addas (2002: 4) states that:

Love is, essentially, a dynamic force: in fact it possesses the property of compelling the *muhibb* to move. It makes him strive towards the object of desire which, under the effect of the magnetic attraction of love, is in return irresistibly drawn towards the one who desires. The whole universe is literally moved in this way by love. “If it had not been for love,” Ibn Arabi declares, “nothing would have been desired and [consequently] nothing would exist: this is the secret contained in [His saying], ‘I loved to be known’.” Love is the generating force of existence because it simply has to fill in an absence or, more exactly, it wants to make present the loved object which is necessarily absent (*gha’ib*) or missing (*ma’dum*) since it is true that one only desires what one does not have. (2002: 4)

The experience of the Sacred which is here understood as a journey undertaken by the Sufi lover in search of union with the Sacred Beloved is not by any means a static experience. The journey is therefore a process of continuous movement that drives the seeker to search for the hidden absence of the Sacred and to gain access to His visible Presence. In a similar vein, Aaron Cass indicates that:

[the] journey on which Ibn Arabi and all who follow him are embarked is both to union and in union. The Heart that is capable of every form is the Heart that knows whose love it is that moves the ‘mounts.’ To say ‘whichever way’ is far from an abandonment of direction; rather it is the renunciation of the separate will and the submission to movement of Love Itself. (1996: 25)

Cass capitalises the key words heart and love in order to stress their importance in relation to the spiritual journey and how they underlie its movement towards the Sacred. “Love” is therefore what allows the seeker to open his or her heart to the Sacred, but also allows the constant movement of the journey, without which the seeker cannot achieve spiritual growth. The power of “love” in the Sufi sense lies in

enabling the wayfarer to move towards the Sacred.²⁴⁰ Hence, Addas explains, Ibn Arabi puts a great deal of emphasis on the the journey of the heart which allows the seeker to achieve union with God.

The intermediate world that India/Kashmira experiences through her visionary journey is not a fixed reality; on the contrary, it is guided by the movement of India/Kashmira's search for "light". India/Kashmira's love for her mother equals the Sufi love for the sacred "light" as she follows its "dynamic force," and seeking her mother's "sainted echoes" (SC: 19). Here, a parallel can be established between the spiritual journey of Isma in *Vaste est la prison*, whereby Isma's heart follows the movement of her heart's opening towards the Beloved, and the movement of India/Kashmira's journey towards the "light" of her mother. Boonyi is non-existent; however, her existence can be perceived once India/Kashmira undertakes a passage through "darkness". Like a Sufi wayfarer, India/Kashmira journeys through the "darkness", waging an inner battle, and moves towards the "unknown dimensions of sad memory" (SC: 13). India/Kashmira's quest for the sacred "light" of her mother incites her to undertake a journey to the East. Hence, her journey is impelled by the force of "love" whose "gravitational pull" and "tidal fluctuation" underlie "its effects of moral illumination" (SC: 46). In this respect, the intermediate world of India/Kashmira's journey reposes on the force of "love" that brings not only union between opposites but also traces a connecting line between existence and non-existence.

Thus far, I have shown that the symbolic expressions of "light" and "darkness", which are closely intersected to India/Kashmira's journey in *Shalimar the Clown*, project an intermediate world, akin to the *barzakh*. What characterises the

²⁴⁰ Burckhardt (2008: 80) discusses at length how the spiritual movement brings about changes that he describes as the "alchemy of the soul." See Burckhardt (2008).

intermediate aspect of this world are the visions of India/Kashmira. The visions of India/Kashmira bring together opposed realms: there is the “darkness” of Shalimar the Clown that India/Kashmira battles against, and there is the “light” of the mother that India/Kashmira seeks. Moreover, what reinforces the Sacred dimension of this intermediate world is the movement of “love” which motivates the journey of India/Kashmira towards the sacred “light” of her lost mother.

Conclusion

The hermeneutic explanation of the symbolic expressions of the Sacred in Chapters IV and V demonstrated that there is a creative engagement between Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts and the Sufi religious heritage. The symbols that I have explored in that respect are the journey, the “hidden”, the “openings”, “darkness” and “light”. This constituted the first stage of the hermeneutic interpretation proposed in this thesis. This chapter moved to a reading the selected corpus by applying the second stage of my hermeneutic analysis, thus seeking to “understand” how Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s texts continue to engage with the concept of the Sacred. Besides the symbolic interplay between the texts of the three authors and the Sacred I showed that there is an ontological aspect of such interplay.

In this chapter, I presented a hermeneutic understanding of the intermediate worlds projected by the texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. Reading the ontological aspect of these “worlds” through Ibn Arabi’s concept of the *barzakh* allowed me to clarify the intermediate dimension of such worlds, and to show their relation to the experience of the Sacred. What is projected by these texts is therefore not a pre-established definition of what constitutes the experience of the Sacred. On the contrary, the variety of the intermediate “worlds” that the texts of Djébar, Ben

Jelloun and Rushdie project leads to a philosophical reflection on how the Sacred is experienced rather than to defining what it is. In conclusion, rather than assigning a limited and limiting way of interpreting the Sacred, the texts of the three authors first mediate the experiences of the Sacred through its symbolic expressions, and then they creatively unfold possible ways of understanding the Sacred, along the lines of a flexible interpretation that follows the unfolding movement of the symbolic expressions and of its projective ontological directions.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I stated that the main aims of this thesis were to demonstrate that the selected texts of the three authors creatively engage with the Sufi Islamic heritage through the use of symbolic expressions of the Sacred, and to argue that the symbols of the Sacred in the three authors' works ontologically project what I termed intermediate worlds of the Sacred. Bearing in mind pressing contemporary issues pertaining to religion, I contextulised my study of the Sacred and my particular choice of Sufism.

To achieve the aims of this thesis, I undertook a hermeneutic analysis of the symbols of the Sacred with a particular emphasis on the expressions of the journey, the "hidden", the "openings", "light" and "darkness". The choice of Ricœur's hermeneutic model of interpretation allowed me to explain the symbolic expressions of the Sacred within the texts and to achieve an ontological understanding of the experience of the Sacred in the texts of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. Additionally, locating my reading within the Sufi framework of Ibn Arabi provided a conceptual and philosophical platform for a detailed analysis of the Sufi symbolic expressions and of the *barzakh* that epitomises the ontological experience of the Sacred.

The first chapter of this thesis focused attention on the main lines of interpretation and key concepts that previous critics have employed in their readings of Djebbar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie's works. The overview of the critical studies carried out in Chapter I demonstrates that the concept of the Sacred has not attracted a detailed study in relation to the works of the three authors. Bearing in mind the prevalent postcolonial, postmodern and feminist approaches to Djebbar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's texts, I indicated that the contribution of this thesis to the

current state of knowledge consists in providing a detailed analysis of the concept of the Sacred in the study of these individual authors and, more especially, in a comparative study that encompasses their works.

In relation to Djébar, critics have focused attention on such themes as the author's subversion of patriarchal and colonial discourses, the blending of autobiographical and historical genres, her feminist project, the problem of female silences and her strategic re-reading of male-dominated historical chronicles. In relation to Ben Jelloun, critics have highlighted the oppression of women in Moroccan society, the author's defiance of patriarchal norms, his transgression of gender lines and his revelation of sexual taboos. With regard to Rushdie, critics have stressed the author's transgression of religious discourse, and themes such as cultural hybridity and identity, along with political issues pertaining to terrorism and globalisation. Arguably, these previous readings centred around the cultural, linguistic, sexual, and political dimensions in the three authors' texts and focused essentially on the three authors' resistance to such dominant discourses as the colonial, the religious, the patriarchal and the nationalist.

Despite the fact that it is clear that the three authors have drawn on their Islamic heritage, critics largely overlook the creative interplay between their texts and this religious dimension. What my hermeneutic reading in this thesis brought to the fore is that the three authors' engagement with symbols of the Sacred constitutes a first creative element. The second creative element resides in what I termed the "intermediate worlds" which came into being through this engagement. In the concluding chapter of thesis, I argued that the texts of the three authors ontologically project "intermediate worlds" of the Sacred which parallel Ibn Arabi's Sufi concept of the *barzakh*. In contrast to previous critics who explored the "intermediate" aspect

of the three authors' texts from cultural, spatial, linguistic and historical angles, I proposed to shift the focus of attention to the ontological dimension of their texts. Hence, I examined the symbolic opposites of the "openings" and the "hidden", "darkness" and "light", and demonstrated that all four symbols not only intersect with the variegated forms of journeys in all the selected texts, but they also project "intermediate worlds" like the *barzakh*. As such, the journeys of Isma in *Vaste est la prison*, the narrators in *L'Enfant de sable*, Gibreel in *The Satanic Verses*, the female narrator in *Loin de Médine*, Zahra in *La Nuit sacrée* and India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown* project "worlds" that are separate yet conjoined, different but the same, unique but similar to each other, akin to the experience of the Sacred.

The second chapter outlined the methodological approach that informed this thesis and proposed to interpret the Sacred by adopting the hermeneutic interpretation of Ricœur. Therefore, I discussed the meanings of explanation, symbols, understanding and world and clarified how they offered useful interpretative tools for the study of and a reflection on the concept of the Sacred. In terms of the methodological approach applied in this thesis, the hermeneutic reading has given me the opportunity to divide the study of the Sacred into two stages.

The first stage consisted in explaining the internal relations between the journey, the "openings", the "hidden", "darkness" and "light" within the inner structure of the selected texts. This stage also revealed the creative engagement between Djébar's, Ben Jelloun's and Rushdie's texts and symbols that can be traced back to Ibn Arabi and the Sufi Islamic heritage. As a corollary to the first stage, the second stage of the hermeneutic reading allowed me to explore the ontological dimension of the Sacred. Using the concept of an "intermediate world" paved the way for reaching an understanding of the concept of the Sacred and its possible

experiences that unfold in front of the reader and beyond the textual boundaries of the selected corpus.

Chapters IV and V examined in depth the structural relations between the journey, the “openings”, the “hidden”, “darkness” and “light” in the selected corpus. Bearing in mind the close textual attention paid to the symbols of the Sacred in these two chapters, Chapter VI moved on to arguing that the “worlds” projected by the texts and mediated by symbols were akin to the ontological experience of the *barzakh*.

While the texts of *Vaste est la prison*, *L’Enfant de sable* and *The Satanic Verses* project intermediate worlds where the opposites “hidden” and “openings” meet, the texts *Loin de Médine*, *La Nuit sacrée* and *Shalimar the Clown* project intermediate worlds where the contraries “darkness” and “light” are brought together. Hence, I showed that in *Vaste est la prison*, the journey of Isma projects an intermediate world akin to the *barzakh* in which the “hidden” Beloved and the “openings” of Isma’s heart meet. In the same way that Isma’s journey creates a meeting-point between separate worlds, the text of *L’Enfant de sable* unfolds a journey towards a “hidden” treasure, a journey located in a constant movement between the “opening” of doors and the secret that remains “hidden”. Like a *barzakh*, the world projected by *L’Enfant de sable* brings opposites together. Similarly, in *The Satanic Verses*, the visions of Gibreel project an intermediate world where the attributes of his human self and his angelic self are combined. This intermediate world is not fixed but, on the contrary, it has a changing nature that follows the movement of Gibreel’s variegated visions.

In *Loin de Médine*, I demonstrated that the journey of the female narrator projects a world where the “darkness” of those who have been forgotten is

illuminated through remembering and unveiling. In *La Nuit sacrée*, I argued that the visions of Zahra and the Consul project an ontological realm whereby the “darkness” of an invisible world meets inner spiritual illumination. Finally, in *Shalimar the Clown* I showed that the visions of India/Kashmira are like a *barzakh* where the “darkness” of Shalimar the Clown and Max meets the “light” of Boonyi.

The hermeneutic interpretation of the intermediate character of the “worlds” projected by Djébar’s, Ben Jelloun’s and Rushdie’s works aimed to stress the idea that all three authors’ texts propose a renewed and creative way of thinking about the experience, or rather experiences, of the Sacred. The contribution of this thesis further resides in showing that the bringing together of opposites signifies an experience of the Sacred that cannot be defined in essentialist terms, but rather comprehended in the very possibility of its experience. There are no definite words that can define what the concept of the Sacred *is*. Instead there are symbols with rich meanings that invite readers to explore their structural connection, their double-intentionality as well as their ontological realities.

As such, the symbols were interpreted in this thesis as signs whose structural relations within the texts were first explained in connection to their signified, the Sacred. I then developed the reading of their double-intentional aspect by exploring the experiences of the Sacred that they project beyond the parameters of the texts. The final chapter of this thesis argued that there are no definite “worlds” that can embody the experience of the Sacred. On the contrary there are myriad worlds whose intermediate character obliges the reader to embrace a more flexible understanding of the Sacred.

What this thesis has shown is that the Sacred is a meaningful concept which is mediated through the symbolic meanings yielded by the texts. Therefore, the

Sacred is not presented as a definite and defined system of thought. It is instead projected, and, if I may borrow Ricœur's words (Kearney 2004: 132), it is an "open, creative and living" concept. Through that projection, a hermeneutic understanding of the Sacred was made possible. My reading therefore started from the symbolic expressions in the three authors' texts and explored philosophically the "worlds" they projected. The texts of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie present the reader with a plethora of Sufi symbols that allow for a multitude of possible interpretations of the Sacred. This thesis aimed to offer one of these possibilities in order to capture the rich depth of the symbolic expressions and "worlds" in the three authors' texts.

In this final part of the conclusion I will consider some of the limitations of my thesis and will propose some further questions that can be addressed in future research. One of the necessary limitations of this thesis is that it could not examine a more extensive literary corpus pertaining to Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie. However, I hold that my hermeneutic reading of the Sacred in the three authors' texts can be applied to other texts by the three authors which can contribute to a broader understanding of the creative interplay between their works and the Sufi Islamic heritage. I will briefly give an example from each author.

The first example is Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), the first volume of the Algerian Quartet. Analysing *L'Amour, la fantasia* from a Sufi perspective can open up a new, unexplored insight. The journey of the female narrator and its connection to love occupies a central place in *L'Amour, la fantasia*. This recalls the symbolic aspect of Isma's love encounter with the Beloved in *Vaste est la prison*. The key word "amour" deserves special attention since it is not only explicitly referred to in the title, but it is also reiterated throughout *L'Amour, la fantasia*. More particularly, in Part II of the novel, the female narrator speaks about the love letters

she received as an adolescent from “l’aimé” (1985: 76). In the narrator’s words (1985: 75), “écrire devant l’amour,” is an act of unveiling: “Dévoiler et simultanément tenir secret ce qui doit le rester.” The link between “l’amour”, “l’aimé”, the secret and unveiling is here very suggestive of the symbolic dimension of the “hidden” Beloved which I analysed in this thesis, and can be explored further from a Sufi angle.

The second example is Ben Jelloun’s *La Prière de l’absent* (1981), which tells the story of a journey undertaken by three main characters Yamna, Sindibad and Bobby. There is strong textual evidence that suggests a link between the journey of the three characters and the Sacred. As in *L’Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*, the Sufi Al-Hallaj is directly mentioned during the journey in *La Prière de l’absent*. In Chapter Fifteen of *La Prière de l’absent*, entitled “...et dans le cage thoracique, le ‘Dîwân’ d’Al-Hallaj,” one of the main characters, Sindibad, cites some of the poems of Al-Hallaj. In Sindibad’s words: “Tuez-moi, ô mes amis/Ma vie est dans ma mort” (1981: 194). Here, the verses from Al-Hallaj’s poem cited in *La Prière de l’absent* refer to the concept of *fanā* (self-annihilation) which I explored in relation to Zahra’s journey in *La Nuit sacrée*. The symbolic aspect of *fanā* in relation to the journey can therefore be explored further in *La Prière de l’absent* in order to identify how this text creatively engages with the Sacred.

The final example is Rushdie’s *Grimus* (1975). Here again the novel revolves around a journey undertaken by the main character, Flapping Eagle, who is in search of his lost sister Bird-Dog. The third epigraph²⁴¹ to the novel is a direct citation from the Sufi poem of Attar *The Conference of the Birds*.²⁴² The journey of Flapping

²⁴¹ It reads as follows: “Come, you lost atoms, to your Centre Draw/And be the Eternal Mirror that you saw/Rays that have wandered into darkness wide/Return, and back into your sun subside.” See Rushdie (1996).

²⁴² As noted in chapter I, Attar is a 12th century Persian Sufi poet. See Attar (1984).

Eagle parallels the quest of the thirty birds that symbolise a spiritual journey as represented in Attar's poem. Hence, this direct and explicit link between the journey in Rushdie's novel and Sufism can provide a possible reading of the Sacred in this text. Additionally, the repetitive references to death towards the end of the novel can be interpreted in light of the Sufi concept of *fanā* to which I paid particular attention when I examined Gibreel's journey in *The Satanic Verses* (1996: 231-232). Described as "annihilation of self", death in *Grimus* can be examined further from a Sufi angle and interpreted in its connection to the journey and the Sacred.

One further way of opening out the approach to the creative engagement of literature with the Sacred, applied here to a necessarily limited corpus, is new consideration of other aspects of the Sacred. In my hermeneutic approach to the literary works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie, I mainly focused attention on the creative encounter between the three authors' writing and the Sufi symbolic and ontological aspects of the Sacred. Bearing in mind that the spiritual journeys that I explored in this thesis are journeys predominantly undertaken by female characters and that the female presence of such mystical figures as Fatima in *Loin de Médine* or Ayesha in *The Satanic Verses* can hardly be overlooked, there are new questions that demand future research. Amongst these questions that can be addressed is the relation between the Sacred and the question of gender. How can a reading of the Sacred in the three authors' works engage with the question of gender? Can the literary works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie provide an understanding of gender from within the Sufi Islamic tradition? Could such a reading have implications on larger issues pertaining to women and agency within Islam?

A starting research point for these questions would be Sa'diyya Shaikh's *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn Arabi, Gender and Sexuality* (2012). Shaikh provides a

reading of gender in the Sufi philosophy of Ibn Arabi arguing that this aspect is the least studied. Shaikh (2012: 203) points to “the substantial limitations of the prevalent traditionalist interpretations of [Ibn Arabi’s] work, which effectively reinforce patriarchy.” According to Shaikh, Ibn Arabi’s Sufi thought offers an intellectual springboard for exploring questions pertaining to women, spirituality and agency. In Shaikh’s (2012: 215) words: “Ibn Arabi explicitly connects and integrates [the spiritual and the social] dimension of human life, presenting fairly radical understanding on the nature of women’s agency in the social realm.”

Another relevant reading is Jamal J. Elias’ article “Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism” (2008). Elias underscores the central position that women occupy in Sufism whether as active participants or as symbols of the creative feminine. Elias (2008: 298) states that “[w]omen have participated in Sufi life as mystics from the earliest times to the present, and the idealized woman has played a major role in the development of Sufi theosophy.” The ramifications of such a central position of women in Sufism, according to Elias, consist in creating a space for agency which is limited or even denied in other aspects of Islam. For example, Elias (2008: 310) notes that women’s “involvement in mystical orders” and “Sufi rituals” constitute a “means for women to become involved in the communal Islamic existence which, within the realm of orthodox Islam, is solely the domain of men.” Hence, exploring further this connection between the Sacred and gender may open up new venues to interpret the works of Djébar, Ben Jelloun and Rushdie and to investigate further the relation between Sufism and female agency, again extending predominant critical approaches as this thesis sought to do.

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