



**SPECIAL FOCUS ON AMAZIGH LITERATURE: CRITICAL AND CLOSE  
READING APPROACHES**

## **The Amazigh Novel, Mythology of Origins, and Return of the Repressed: A Titrological Approach**

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### **Abstract**

Amazigh literature has undergone a veritable historic shift from oral to written form, following the constitutional and institutional recognition of this indigenous language in Morocco and Algeria. We intend to seize this historic moment by focusing on a titrological analysis which, in our view, would be able to highlight the pragmatic side of a stammering literature that would like to proclaim its rebirth and speak to the world. The titular discourse of these novels, still in an experimental phase, informs us about the semiospheres that nourish and irrigate this writing that defossilizes a buried memory, repressed and threatened by the inexorable desymbolization process that traditional cultures are undergoing. This body of work could never be reduced to a simple scription of a narrative folklore that provides it with its cultural semantics; it is driven by the desire to integrate the international literary heritage by dialoguing with it and drawing inspiration from it.

**Keywords:** Amazigh; novel; title; mythology; revival; repressed

Amazigh literature in the Maghreb, like emergent literatures throughout the world, is at a turning point. We are witnessing a veritable historical caesura, likely on the brink of a long transitional process that will lead this language/culture to reconnect, after centuries or even millennia of orality, with writing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Amazigh culture did in fact have a proto-symbolic writing tradition that was lost and forgotten. Libyan inscriptions, which are to be compared with their modern Tifinagh form, are part of



It should also be noted that this orality was never absolute; alongside the proto-symbolic rock and cave scriptural tradition and some ancient epigraphic documents, there was a legacy of medieval Amazigh manuscripts written in Arabic characters starting in the eleventh century. This manuscript heritage had strictly religious and hagiographic content and was intended for Berber-speaking populations, be whether in the Moroccan Souss (south-west), on the Ibadite islets, in the Algerian Mزاب, on the Tunisian island of Djerba, or in the Jebel Nefoussa in Libya.

The advent of a modern literature written in Amazigh dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century, essentially in Kabylia, with the teachers of the Section Indigène such as Saïd Boulifa, who wrote texts of an ethnographic nature in an attempt to contain oral material (a collection of Si Muhend's poems) in *Recueil de poésies kabyles* (1913). But it is with Belaid At-Ali's work in the 1940s that a modern written literature effectively began. And since then, there have been all the works by Fadma, Jean, and Taous Amrouche, Mouloud Ferraoun, and Mouloud Mammeri, who are in a way the precursors to this literary corpus. The Amazigh language was in fact written into French texts in the palimpsestic form, fueled their literary imagination. It could be argued that this region was pioneering in this by whereas in Morocco, modern literature took significantly longer to emerge. It wasn't until the 1970s that the first collections of poetry and short stories were published by Azaykou and Moustauoui. Most of the Moroccan novels of Amazigh expression were self-published or appeared fragmentedly in the pages of Amazigh community network. It is worth remembering that this modern literature of Amazigh literature has benefited from the recent constitutional and institutional recognition in Morocco and Algeria of Amazighity as a part of historical and national identity. This indicates the hypersensitivity of the Maghrebian cultural field, where literary and political spheres are inextricably and organically linked. This political openness to Amazighity has had an impact on the social foundations of this literature, which is witnessing an ever-increasing growth in readership. As such, the sub-field of Amazigh literature is slowly but surely becoming institutionalized (with the ensuing literary prizes, writers' associations, publishing companies, exhibitions, book market, patronage, translation, services etc.). Of course, this does not mean that the Amazigh novelist today lives off their writing, but the situation is a far cry from the deserted editorial landscape of the early 1990s, when only a radical, activist, and enthusiastic press would publish the creations of young poets and writers. Today sees a profusion of creativity and publishing that reflect a deep desire to

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the rupestral heritage of North Africa, with many of these prehistoric sites offering precious archaic evidence of the first forms of writing. The Libyan ideograms prove that this culture had a graphic tradition, though the signs and the symbolic code still need to be deciphered by epigraphists, all the more so because these are the first documents that attest to the beginnings of the intellectual adventure of humanity and its creative spirit. They are therefore some of the first abstract representations of reality, one of the first aesthetic concerns. This demonstrates the exceptional universal value of these archaeological sites from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological, and anthropological points of view. It is a gigantic collective palimpsest open to the air.

develop a modern literature and synthesize its drive toward the universal and old atavisms.

The Amazigh novel and short story remain largely dependent on the oral tradition, which serves as a semiosphere and a source of living inspiration for them. It bears the historical experiences of the peoples of the region as well as their variegated and multidimensional humanity, which is registered in the diachrony of history as well as the humus of distinctive identities. However, several young novelists are making increasing efforts to free themselves from the weight of culturalist and self-referential determinisms so as to gain access to a modern literature in which the subject claims its individuality.

Therefore, the fundamental questions for this young literature today are: how to reach the universal while being rooted in the cultural humus of North Africa? How is it possible to avoid the shortcomings of reductive and restrictive provincialism by reconnecting this corpus with the world literary heritage while enriching it, drawing inspiration from it, and engaging it in dialogue? Shouldn't this corpus distance itself from the "militant" context in which it was born, given that even though it may have served as its institutional support and framework for survival, it still risks weighing it down by imposing its authority, or even of being stultifying by reducing this literature to a mere sounding board for a discourse that is extrinsic to it? What shortcomings and issues related to memory and imagination are involved in the transition from orality to writing? It is through the *problematicity* of these questions that we propose a reflection on the contribution that an examination of titles, or a "titrological" approach, can make in understanding the genesis of this literature and its horizon of expectation.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this extremely contemporary ("extrême-contemporain") literary corpus, despite its experimental and embryonic aspect, carries a militant message, a will to speak out, to come to the world and to impose its ethical and aesthetic legitimacy. This brings us back to the force of its pragmatic side and, consequently, to the methodological and theoretical relevance of the *titrological* approach.

In this regard, Amazigh culture and its living literary expressions constitute an inexhaustible source of symbols, motifs, mythemes, and imaginative schema that this literature is able to rejuvenate, rework, reappropriate, and update so as to increase the performative potential of its discourse. It is the anthropological matrix and the cultural and linguistic substratum on which the identity of Maghrebians rests and, in this respect, serves as the crucible for the values of autochthony and visceral and organic connection with the ancestral land. It should therefore be remembered that Amazighity, by offering the imaginativeness and weight of its culture to this corpus, must be grasped as a dynamic structure that transforms with its successive historical achievements rather than according to a fixist and substantialist model. An essential and fundamental dimension of Maghrebinity, has been enriched, as observed by Mouloud Mammeri,<sup>3</sup> by the Thalassocratic civilizations (Phoenicians,

<sup>2</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Tel" 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Mouloud Mammeri, 18 *Awal* (1998): 161.

Vandals, Greeks, Romans, etc.) and the successive desert civilizations in North Africa. The Maghrebian identity is fully realized and affirmed in the intermixing (*métissage*) and cross-fertilization between the autochthonous base and contributions from the Eastern and the Mediterranean. It is in this ancestral tuff, which serves as the point where the historical energies of the peoples converge, that the cultural, aesthetic, and imaginative foundations of the Amazigh novel are to be understood, so as not to uproot the latter from its cultural soil and reduce it to a simple conglomeration of devitalized and solidified writing techniques and procedures.

Therefore, what is especially interesting here is the cultural marking of titles and how they can imply a kind of cultural collusion with the reader? The titles of novels are, in fact, always indicative of a shared ethos and this increases their potential for seduction and guidance, giving them precedence over all other literacy forms. The abundance of literary works published in recent decades clearly forbids any claim to exhaustiveness, and the fact that the subject is increasingly vast and diverse makes it difficult to fully address within the limits of this article. These circumstances have forced us to make an effort to provide an overview, and we have chosen to adhere to a titrological approach that remains at the external borders of the fictional universes and that, beyond the vagaries of the novelistic diegesis of each work, confines itself to the fundamental themes that demarcate this expanding sub-field of the Amazighophone novel. This methodological choice was dictated by the requirements of a synoptic approach and an interest in providing a broad and panoramic view. The works included are exemplary and representative in terms of the question addressed in this article. This corpus is analyzed according to a logic that highlights its historicity and its multiple legitimacies since it belongs to a culture that has always been the site of a continuous palingenesis. The aim of this article is therefore to reflect on the status, function, and communicative intentionality of titles for some novels of Amazigh expression published in Morocco beginning in the early 1990s. This will be done in terms of a very significant socio-cultural and historical outside-text (*hors-texte*) that is marked by linguistic and cultural claims and by what some call an awakening of the Berber identity consciousness. This outside-text will be consistently summoned while avoiding the shortcomings of an extensive and unmanageable *contextualism*. Our essential objective will also be to identify the challenging and even *praxis-oriented* scope of these titles in particular and of this Amazighophone literary microcosm in general.

Identifying the cultural semantics and ethos underlying the Moroccan novel of Amazigh expression through the culturally marked *titular* discourse is essentially driven by its pragmatic and performative scope and in view of its illocutionary and perlocutionary potential.<sup>4</sup> The title is the essential mediation between the work and its context, and it determines the dynamics of reception, especially in an emergent, conflictual, and highly sensitive literary field where literary pragmatics carry enormous weight. Therefore, this attempt to present this nascent literature, endeavors to decipher some mythological and

<sup>4</sup> Leo H. Hoek, *La marque du titre, dispositifsémiotique* (Paris: Mouton, 1981).

imaginative components at work in certain contemporary texts by focusing the analysis on titles. The latter constitute a segment marked by a double codification that is both literary and social.<sup>5</sup> According to Claude Duchet, it results “from the joining of a novelistic statement with an advertising statement, with literarity and sociality always intersecting: it speaks of the work in terms of social discourse, but social discourse in terms of the novel.”<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the persuasive, conative, incitative, and appellative aims of the title – Genette even speaks of a veritable theoretical vulgate regarding the functions of the title<sup>7</sup> – serve to spark curiosity and arouse the attention of the addressee, who here is essentially the Amazighophone reader and possibly the international public. The title consecrates the imbrication and interpenetration of pragmatic and identity-related elements and may sometimes highlight the subversive ambitions of this writing in response to the instincts of cultural conformity. It is an essential element because it contributes to the development of the relationship between the novel and its successive addressees while participating in the potential of meaning immanent to the text and that is actualized in accordance with historical periods. Serge Bokobza explains this in the following terms:

To change the lighting is to change the depth and shape of the relief. From this point of view, the title that accompanies a literary utterance should be analyzed not just in terms of the relationship it has to the content of the work itself (author), but also in terms of its position in relation to the public (reader).<sup>8</sup>

In addition, this is also liable to highlight the novel’s increasing visibility in the cultural and literary landscape. The title is often the only part of the novel that the public remembers, and it represents an anchor for the novel’s discourse, if not an entire discourse unto itself that reveals the writing’s subconscious. In the novel of Amazigh expression, the title’s mnemonic function and connotative force, combined with the rhetorical procedures of address that it uses as a performative tool, appear to refer to a desire for an outpouring, emergence, and even revitalization of this literature.

### Aesthetics of Disgust and Surprise

The first novel of Amazigh expression to be published in Morocco was *Askkif n Inzaden* by Ali Ikken (1992), which was awarded the Mouloud Mammeri creative writing prize in 1995. It was printed in 2004 by the printing company Elmàarif Aljadida – Rabat. The title, which literally means “*Hairy Soup*,” evokes the aversion and repulsion, both anthropological and universal, that we feel towards a certain kind of hairiness. This nausea-inducing image expresses the novelist’s

<sup>5</sup> Claude Duchet, “Une Ecriture de la socialité,” *Poétique*, 10 (1973).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes* (Paris: Seuil, coll. “Poétique” 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Serge Bokobza, *Contribution à la titrologieromanesque: variation sur le titre “Le Rouge et le Noir”* (Geneva: Librairie Droz coll. “Stendhalienne,” 1986), 16.

disgust with the political repression that characterized what is known in Morocco as the Years of Lead. Indeed, the historical background of this novel is made up of the attempts to establish guerrilla centers in the Moroccan Atlas by the Blanquist wing of the National Union of Popular Forces (Union Nationale des Forces Populaires, UNFP), a leftist Moroccan political party opposed to the monarchy, and the reprisals of the Moroccan regime following the failure of these attempts. In this regard, it could be argued that this novel contains irrefutable testimonial and cathartic value, as does all Moroccan prison literature that has attempted to present a testimony of this painful period marked by violent political repression. This title generates a negative emotion, a sensation of the unexpected, the repulsive, the disgusting, the taboo, and the unthinkable by employing an idiomatic expression from Berber culture. The feeling of incongruity and strangeness produced by this title is similar to the one that is created, for example, by the work (a surrealist sculpture of a coffee cup covered with fur) of the Swiss painter and visual artist Meret Oppenheim, *Breakfast in Fur* (1936). We find ourselves presented with a discourse of political denunciation, deployed through the title and conveyed in an anti-intellectualist manner, that is worthy of Jungian depth psychology since it awakens a buried collective unconscious while privileging the random, the fortuitous, and the gustatory at the expense of the rational, the positive, the conceptual. We find the same register of the repulsive and vile in the posthumous novel by the Libyan writer and poet Said Sifaw entitled “*Arsd*,” which means “*Pus*” or “*Abscess*.” This 128-page allegorical story, translated from the Arabic by Salah Agram, was published in 2010 by the Association Imal (Marrakesh) in Latin and Tifinagh characters. In a similar way, it depicts a context of oppression and political violence with derision, nonchalance, and even insolence. This register of pestilence, putrescence, stench, repulsiveness, and offensiveness, which appears in a place as significant as the novel’s title, is striking insofar as it is unusual, if not unthinkable. It seems that there is an irreverent spirit emitting a discourse of political denunciation objecting to highly authoritarian regimes, particularly since Sifaw was one of the leading figures of Amazighity in Libya and was severely injured when the Gaddafi regime made an attempt on his life.

Therefore, in addition to this paradoxical propensity for disgust and for a physiological imaginary of the repulsive, it is worth noting that there is also what could be called a “surrealist” vein within this corpus of novels in Amazigh that appear at the very thresholds of the text. Most of the titles of Amazigh novels, with their disconcerting, provocative, and sometimes strange aspects, bear a resemblance to the automatic writing of the Surrealists. This is because they are often comprised of words that do not work well together semantically, that are startling because of their logical syntax, their desire for incongruity, and their pronounced appetite for the curious.<sup>9</sup> This is the case for the almost Éluardian title *Tatbirt tawraghte* (“*The Yellow Dove*”) as well

<sup>9</sup> On this subject, see Yi-Pei Lee’s excellent thesis on Guillaume Apollinaire entitled: “*La poétique du “bizarre” et de “la surprise” dans la prose d’imagination de Guillaume Apollinaire*,” Diss., Sorbonne Paris Cité, 2016: <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01539432>.

as *Aghrum n'ihaaqqaren* ("The Bread of Crows"), *Adil n'iserdan* ("The Grapes of the Mules"), *Asekkif n'inzaden* ("Hairy Soup"), *Iguedad n'Wihran* ("The Birds of Oran"), *Tamurt n'ilfawn* ("The Country of the Wild Boars"), *Ijdiggen ntidi* ("The Flowers of Sweat") *Imetccha n'tirggin* ("The Eaters of Embers"), *Iri w burz* ("Iri of pride"), *Memmi s n ifesti d awal* ("Son of Silence and Speech") *aduku n w adar azlmad n hmad aweragh* ("Hmad the yellow's left foot shoe") and *Tayri n Tayri* ("The Love of Love"). The list goes on, providing examples of the Amazigh novelists' predilection for these kinds of disconcerting, enigmatic titles that are the distillation of a dreamlike atmosphere that, it seems, makes it possible to consider the Maghreb and its relationship to humankind through a mythology of origins. These titles are all too reminiscent of the forms of semiotic experimentation produced in Europe by the literary avant-garde during the first three decades of the twentieth century, particularly surrealist and Dadaist aesthetics (synesthetic associations, antithetical structures, oxymoronic images, exquisite corpses, etc.) These titles evoke a kind of spontaneity and even a naive spirit. They provoke what the surrealists referred to as objective chance (*hasard objectif*), or all the fortuitous associations that allow for the expression of the depths or the self beyond all censorship, making use of a concept that is simultaneously Freudian and Nietzschean. Tearing this culture out from its age-old silence, shaking off its lethargy, and presenting its literature to the world are all factors that explain the use of this kind of provocative title, which establishes a desire to surprise and to challenge.

It is therefore arguable that this type of title consecrates a kind of proximity to the primary sources of artistic inspiration. These novelists often opt for the organic sincerity, the suggestive power, and the semantic and affective transparency of the physiological and vegetal imaginary. These are titles that consecrate intuition and spontaneity and reinstate the senses, which are typically scorned by modern rationality (and prior to that, the monotheistic legacy) because they are considered to be the vestiges of prehistoric times or a return to animality, as with taste and smell. Characteristic of this writing are the confusion and crossing of perceptions and the upending of the hierarchy of senses. Sensory combinations, which appear frequently in Amazigh novel titles and texts, cross and mix auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile sensations and perceptions. In their novelistic worlds, writers tend to supplant the precedence and primacy that modernity has traditionally accorded to the visual. The often synesthetic writing that emanates from the essence of being reclaims senses that have been asphyxiated and suffocated by modernity, making it possible to express the cultural components of our identity that remain repressed and obscured by graphical reason and the logocentric vision of the world inherent to it. Tapping into this primary soil of the human spirit, which constitutes the fertile ground and raw material for poetic inspiration, is part of a critique of the various estrangements and other uprootings caused by modernity. The aesthetic importance and creative function of this poetics lie in the fact that it reveals the insufficiencies, the omissions, or even the repression of the positivist, intellectualist, and rationalist civilization that is becoming hegemonic. It also makes it possible to keep sources of inspiration

from drying out by capturing what Paul Zumthor) calls “primordial vocalizations.”<sup>10</sup> Mohamed Khair-Eddine states:

It is in such a context that the Third World, which has been so repressed and so violently deconstructed, will change. Only its writers and thinkers will know how to protect the old values in order to give rise to thinking that is truly new. They will be eager to re-examine the collective unconscious, if not the popular memory itself, from which they will draw the energy essential to the creation and implementation of the founding ideas of a new culture.<sup>11</sup>

This subversive and iconoclastic spirit is also expressed quite literally in the title of one of the first Moroccan novels of Amazigh expression to be published in the Netherlands, a work by one of the pioneers of the Amazigh novel, Mohamed Chacha, released in 1997 by the Izuran association and entitled *Rez tabou ad d teffegh tfukt*, which literally means “*Break the Taboo So That the Sun May Appear*.” This novel provides a social protest and denounces the displacement involved in the immigrant condition among members the Moroccan diaspora.<sup>12</sup> This title, with its exhortative, instigating, and mobilizing reach, shouts out to the reader with a kind of vehemence. It is surprising in terms of its length, its lexicometry, and its commanding character. It advocates for an awareness that is capable of shaking off the dogmatic slumber of a society that is lethargic and at a standstill.

### **Beneath the Strata of the Title, the Memory of an Original Myth**

As intellectuals exploring the most archaic Maghrebian heritage, the new Amazighophone novelists attempt to reconnect the text with buried<sup>13</sup> folkloric material (characters, stories, motifs, fairies, animal metamorphosis, etc.), which stirs up deep resonances and echoes from the old depths. Indeed, beneath the strata of the Amazigh novel text lies the diminished echo of original cosmogonic content. By way of example, in looking at two novels that appeared successively as *The Marriage of the Jackals* (*Tameghra n'ouchan*), which was written by the Moroccan writer Brahim Lasri (published by the Tamaynut Dcheira association, Agadir 2017) and *The Marriage of the Jackal* (*Tameghra n'ouchen*) by Algerian writer Yahya Ait Yahiatene (Edition El Amel, Tizi Ouzou, 2018), it is noteworthy that these titles allude to mythical material buried deep in the North African collective unconscious that they exhume and bring up to date. This myth, which appears in no less a strategic place than the

<sup>10</sup> Paul Zumthor, *Introduction à la poésie orale* (Paris: Seuil Coll. Poétique 1983), 57.

<sup>11</sup> Mohamed Khair-Eddine, *La littérature francophone et l'universalité du Maghreb, actes du congrès mondial des littératures de langue française* (Padua: University Publication, 1983), 384-85.

<sup>12</sup> Daniela Merolla, *De l'art de la narration tamazight (berbère): 200 ans d'études : état des lieux et perspectives* (Paris: Peeters, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> It is important to remember that the concept of folklore is used here in the true sense of the word, which refers to the living cultural and artistic expressions of a people. It is thus clearly different from the notions of folklorization or folklorism, which signify the commodification or even the commodification of a culture reduced to a tourist curiosity from the past.



titles of the two novels, consecrates the resurgence of a mytho-religious framework for which the storyline was first established by the mythograms created by our ancestors in pre- or proto-history. Rock carvings in the Acacus, the Tassili N'Ajjer in Algeria (Tin Lalan), or in the Messak Plateau in Libya, which are rupestrian sites classified by UNESCO as being a part of the universal heritage of humanity, present erotic scenes where an ithyphallic and anthropomorphic jackal mates with a richly adorned woman. According to Gabriel Camps,<sup>14</sup> these scenes of coitus associate the jackal, as a theriomorphic symbol that is very predominant in Amazigh agro-pastoral culture and in its animal tales, with notions of fecundity, fertility, and propitiatory rituals.<sup>15</sup> They are part of a local iconic base that has survived through ethnic arts (tribal tattoos, property markings, pottery, weavings, mosaics, etc.). We could consider these original cosmogonic signs as the semiological components of a figurative unconscious that several contemporary plastic and pictorial movements have attempted to rehabilitate, drawing inspiration from them and updating their forms. In this regard, it is worth recalling that with their symbolic representations, these signs and these figurative practices also participate in the materiality of titles in the sense that the covers of most Amazigh novels incorporate the pictorial, photographic, or calligraphic works of young North African artists (Yechou, Mohand Saidi Amezian, Mellal, Hmu Kemmus, Monera Alhaj). Understanding the title in its materiality with its forms, its signs, and its chromatism from a visual semiology thus participates in the semiotic functioning of the title. This iconophilia should be considered in conjunction with the written and the literary in terms of a symbiosis and a trans-semiotic harmony, for these two components reveal a specific cosmology. The effective symbiosis between the iconographic and literary syntagms increases the power of the title's impact, which contributes to the conditioning and programming of reception. It is worth recalling the predominance in most of the cover illustrations of a figurative or non-figurative iconographic repertoire, which draws its signs and motifs from the rupestrian heritage as well as arts and crafts and Tifinagh calligraphy.

At the risk of committing the worst of anachronisms, is it thus possible to speak here of a kind of transtextuality between a proto-writing, which remains enigmatic because it is still undeciphered, and contemporary literary writing? It is indisputable that this kind of title connects a very distant past with the present, but according to which regimes of historicity? And through what postures? Presentism or historicism contesting the unity of the past? These are

<sup>14</sup> Yves Gauthier, *Le lycan, le chacal et l'éléphant : symboles et mythe de Messak Mellet et du Messak Settafet* (Fezzan, Libya; Rome: BCSP 29, 1996), 90.

<sup>15</sup> The myth of the "jackal's marriage" has not survived just as a folk tale but also through a propitiatory rite of invoking and calling for the rain in times of drought. This is the rite of "taghenja" demonstrated throughout the Maghreb, where a wooden ladle dressed as a bride is carried in honor of a fertility goddess. This heterodox cult still persists today but has been stripped of its magical and irrational function. Rather, it expresses a kind of shared sense of belonging to the same cultural identity that has actually resulted from a historical dialectic of fusion and revivification. All these elements explain the imaginative significance and paradigmatic omnipresence of this motif in the Amazigh narrative tradition.

strata of a mythical narrative that is structured and ordered by different temporalities but still appears as the guardian of a common anthropological basis for our imaginary. This is, however, the same narrative that has endured, that has survived all the sedimentations of successive narrative traditions and multiple rejuvenations. The narrative framework evoked by the title is the same as the one of the rock drawings and engravings. While much has been said about the filiation that could be established and recognized between certain contemporary plastic and pictorial approaches and the ancient iconographic crucible,<sup>16</sup> would it also be possible to invoke, if not the same genealogy, at least the same inspiration for the novel? Romain Pigeaud wrote:

To reach such a conclusion, it is possible to relate the rock art to local myths, which are still present in populations of the present day, but this must be done carefully. yet we can also use another method, likewise to be treated with caution: mythological comparatism. Mythological comparatism is based on the observation of the universality of certain myths.<sup>17</sup>

The prehistorian Jean-Loïc Le Quellec, interviewed by this same author, adds in this regard:

Thus Gabriel Camps has compared this image representing coitus between a woman and a figure that has the head of a jackal with the expression “marriage of the jackal” that is commonly used throughout the Maghreb and the Sahara to designate a rainbow. It’s possible to go further and note that it’s not just in North Africa but also in Eurasia and as far away as Japan that the popular expression “jackal’s wedding” or “fox’s

<sup>16</sup> This reappropriation and rejuvenation of cosmogonic and primordial signs exemplifies the need to “use creative and artistic forces, whatever their modes of expression, against the rearguard of aesthetic mediocrity” (*Aouchem* manifesto, 1967). The semiotic systems specific to Maghrebian painting and its plastic writing are in fact part of an intersemiotic framework where there is often symbiosis between different signs drawn from the heritage: tattooing, calligraphy, mosaic, tapestry, jewelry, rupestrial heritage, etc. Contemporary pictorial trends in the Maghreb, such as the Casablanca school in Morocco, the *Aouchemet Peintres du Signe* movements in Algeria, and the Tunis school have reconnected with the original plastic symbolism that has remained strong thanks to women in particular and traditional arts in general. By using vegetable pigments such as henna, saffron, or *smagh*, working with copper and skin, and by doing away with canvas, Maghrebian artists aim to remain close to the archaic sources of artisanal skill, keeping a distance from any folkloristic, exotic, or snobbish vision. By rooting their artistic practices in this soil of identity and this imaginative base that underlies our visual culture, these artists open new perspectives to their approaches by transcending the local context and integrating it into the universal. By rejecting easel painting with its academicism and its constrictions and by reappropriating the primordial signs and the original graphic forms of the popular plastic tradition, the majority of the Maghrebian artists have, starting in the 1960s, transfigured this semiological legacy by creating modern pictorial approaches based on the essence of their heritage. This is what provides these works with their originality, authenticity, and a fundamentally distinctive imprint.

<sup>17</sup> Pigeaud Romain, “L’artrupreste: l’image des premiers mythes?” *Sciences humaines* 173 (July 2006): 24.

wedding” refers to rain bathed in sunlight. This phenomenon has not yet been satisfactorily explained, but it is in keeping with a very great prehistoric depth.<sup>18</sup>

The practices of derivation are by no means exclusive to any semiotic system; rather, this is a trans-aesthetic process that can be found in literature, music, and the plastic arts alike, and it can even sometimes promote a kind of transmediality, as is the case with the covers of Amazigh novels. The addition that these authors make with their stories to the elements of tradition is a distinctive and defining feature of myth. Myth is a story that could not exist without palingenesis, which resurrects it in an era whose own concerns it proves capable of expressing.<sup>19</sup> For Claude Lévi-Strauss, a myth is made up of all its multiple versions and of all the updates that are so many re-appropriations of the same story by every historical period. As such, it could be argued that these graphical documents and mythograms, which enabled our ancestors to express themselves even before the narrative skills to tell the myth emerged, appear as a kind of genetics of the text, as a distant source, or even, to use Gérard Genette’s concept, an archaic and primordial hypotext of the two Amazigh novels’ titles. Another question that arises is whether the Amazigh novel, by establishing a conscious or unconscious dialogical relationship with this primitive mythical material and by transforming, transposing, transfiguring, and reworking it, could in the future serve as a repository for this Berber mythology, which is crumbling due to the erosion and social and spatial dispersal of the oral tradition and the decline of the social structures that serve as a crucible for it. The oral tradition and the ethnic arts have provided a conduit between the archaic mythograms and modern writing. In the West and the Middle East, the tragic and epic literary genres performed this function ever since they appeared in Mesopotamia and ancient Greece through by establishing myth in writing so that it left its original context of enunciation, which was essentially ritual and magico-religious, to become literature. Meanwhile, Georges Dumézil has supported the idea that the European realist novel of the nineteenth century played a crucial role in the safeguarding of Indo-European mythology by serving as a refuge for it and by rewriting and rejuvenating it.

Thus, the archaeology of this archaic Berber substratum could prove to be a great heuristic resource in the critical approaches that assess this pioneering corpus. In this regard, it could take on a programmatic value by revitalizing this criticism with a culturalist contribution that would provide it with its vital substance and restore its specificity that remains at a remove from all essentialism. Unfortunately, as far as the pre- or proto-historic and ancient period is concerned, the information that is available is scarce. This state of affairs is essentially attributable to the inadequacy of archaeological excavations but also, and perhaps first and foremost, to ideological reasons related to a policy of memory that cultivates collective amnesia by repressing the

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>19</sup> Mercia Eliade, *Aspect du mythe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

entire pre-Islamic period in the farthest recesses of what remains unaddressed because it is reminiscent of paganism and the *jahiliyya*. This is probably also because the founding political myths of the Maghrebian nation-states (except perhaps for Tunisia) do not go back any further than the Middle Ages, relegating all of ancient history and prehistory to oblivion, despite the fact that these eras still profoundly structure our identity and our collective imaginary. Forgetting and rejecting this “proto-symbolic Maghrebinity” is perhaps also a historical constant of our basic personality, an internalized inferiority complex, likely generated by the chronic political acephaly of the Maghreb that has frequently been described, alongside successive invasions, as a historical curse. Hichem Djait points out:

The fact remains that since Roman times, writers, artists, and thinkers have constantly expressed the acerbity of Maghrebian provincialism, the devastated awareness of the distance from the center — that is, from a living cultural environment. Added to this is the image of non-recognition that this center sends back, from Apuleius to Ibn Khaldun, and even up to the present day, where the Maghreb, caught between two centers (France and the Mashreq), can only aspire to play a mediating role. This inability of the Maghreb to be culturally self-centered, the Maghreb is derived in part from its past inability to unify... and the outside world was always there to impose itself on it or draw it into its wake.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Khatibi adds: “We Maghrebians maintain a certain negation of our being, and this self-negation ends up clouding the most lucid of minds.”<sup>21</sup>

Will the novels of Amazigh expression rehabilitate all the social, linguistic, and cultural realities that have been censored, ignored, or scorned by the dominant ideologies that have enshrined what Arkoun has called institutionalized ignorance?<sup>22</sup> The return to myth, the nostalgia for paganism, the dimension of the carnivalesque, and the primitivist paradigm are some of the most telltale features of this “romantic” breath that brings life to these works and determines the *revivalist* impulse accompanying them. Any interpretative semantics of the titles of the Amazigh novel cannot ignore this cultural substance.

### Significance of Cultural Semantics

The Amazighophone literary microcosm seizes upon this folkloric substratum, which is comprised of a confused stock of fantastical images, symbols, and allusions to specifically Berber customs and traditions. A novel such as Abdellah Sabri’s *Azerf Akoucham*, which could be translated as “*Invalid Law*,” highlights one of the judicial and deliberative structures that is the most deeply rooted

<sup>20</sup> Hichem Djait, *Les cultures maghrébines à travers l'histoire in Les cultures du Maghreb* (Paris: l’Harmattan, 1996), 78.

<sup>21</sup> Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Penser le Maghreb* (Rabat: Smer, 1993), 17.

<sup>22</sup> Arkoun has called institutionalized ignorance. Mohamed Arkoun, “Le Maghreb Contemporain,” in Maria Àngels Roque, ed., *Les cultures du Maghreb* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), 84.

in Amazigh culture, namely the customary jurisdictions or *azerf*, the equivalent of the Kabyle *kanun*. This title refers to the intention of Amazigh novelists to revalorize and revitalize the legal oral heritage of the Maghreb<sup>23</sup> by integrating vernacular forms into the literary universe of the novel. This has the potential to revitalize the discourse of the masses and to open up practices that have long been confined to the ethnographic ghetto and been weighed down by the negative stigmas of primitiveness, rusticity, and rurality. Restoring the status of a culture that is geographically isolated and customary practices that have been hidden and dismissed from the national and official institutional structure is an act of commitment. This can be seen in the evocation of certain community institutions that are representative of the Berber tribe such as the Agadir, a collective granary that some consider to be an embryonic form of the public treasury. There is likewise the council of elders (the *tajmaat*) embodying the deliberative and democratic tribal authorities, a penal code that banishes the death penalty and that human rights associations today evoke to give a certain cultural legitimacy to their abolitionist claims against capital punishment. Another manifestation of these ancestral modes to be found among Amazigh novelists is the collective oath, which is the touchstone of the Amazigh legal system, as noted by David Hart (1966). In addition to the titles, there are also many characters that reflect this universe, such as the *Ineflas* (community leaders, as in *Akounad*), the *Anzzarfou* (customary jurisdiction lawyers such as *Faska*, the hero of *Azerf Akoucham*) and the bandits of honor (the hero of the novel *Ighed n tlelli*, (“*The Ashes of Freedom*”) by Lhou Azergui). The representation of the customary legal fact in Amazigh novels and the reappropriation of this legislative and institutional legacy that continues to last because it has powerful roots in the North African cultural humus, is part of the imaginary of identity in the Berber novel. Moreover, it is also important to point out that in the face of the process of inexorable desymbolization of the traditional universe, this literature could take on an invaluable documentary significance by offering testimony on certain forms of politico-juridical and social organization that are disappearing under the onslaught of modernity and the dynamics of standardization and homogenization that it entails.

### Zaid Ou Hmad, the “Zapata of the Atlas”

The figure of the bandit of honor makes reference to the codes of an ancestral legal and symbolic system, particularly in terms of the institution of honor and the various *retributive* systems such as the concept of vendetta, which pitted entire families or clans for several decades against each other in this pre-colonial Maghreb that was plunged into a climate of violence and infighting. *Iyed Ntlelli* or *The Ashes of Freedom* is a medium-sized Moroccan novel of Amazigh expression. It contains 136 pages in an Amazigh language that blends different languages, written in Greco-Latin characters and telling the story of a

<sup>23</sup> Since the Roman period, Morocco has been a country of *multilateralism*, as evidenced by several documents, particularly epigraphic ones such as the *Table de Banassa* and the *Edit de Banassa*. The customary legal structures and ancestral legislative practices have continued to last because they have strong roots in the North African cultural soil.

resistance fighter who led a guerrilla war in the Eastern High Atlas and south-east Morocco. On the front page of the *Annales coloniales*<sup>24</sup> from March 10, 1936, Zaid Ou Hmad is presented as follows: “On various occasions over the course of the past year, we have reported the murderous exploits of isolated djouch in the region of the High Atlas seen from the upper Dra and Djbel Saghro.” In an article devoted to him in the magazine *Lamalif* (Khettouch, Moha Lamalif, 1981), the caption reads:

Who is familiar with the heroic figure of Zaid Ou Hmad? Is this just a legend limited to the area southeast of the Atlas? Or was it a brilliant moment of resistance to French colonization during the 1930s? The following account evokes the memory of the vengeful epic of Zaid Ou Hmad who, for two years from 1934 to 1936, stood up to the colonial forces as an indomitable guerrilla.<sup>25</sup>

The saga of Zaid Ou Hmad, as is the case for the majority of the bandits of honor, began in a building site, a space that emblemizes the system of colonial exploitation and predation. This hero, who started out inconsequential, was forced to do the duties instituted by the Protectorate authorities. Following a dispute one day, he was slapped twice by the white foreman. His revenge was terrible and lasted for two years, with several indigenous affairs officers, legionnaires, and Goumiers assassinated in ambushes carried out in the impregnable Atlas Mountains. The stealth and ubiquity of this invisible guerrilla have become legend and the collective popular memory has inflated his prowess. Moreover, the technique of the composite portrait was used in Morocco for the first time after several expeditions failed to find him. He was turned in by his own people, and the house where he had taken refuge was surrounded and attacked with grenades. He died with all the members of the family that had taken him in. His body was cremated and deprived of a ritual burial. It is the ashes of these heroes that the title of this novel celebrates, serving as a hymn to life and a promise of rebirth.

The narrative substratum of this novel is borrowed from the legend transmitted from generation to generation through the popular collective memory. From the outset, the narrator of the novel claims: “*ass-a ad awen-mley tabyest d tasda n inezbayen imaziyen d tkendawt yef ur sawalen yidlisen n umezruyus unsib arun yicenga.*”<sup>26</sup> This suggests a subtle combination of a story and history, with the latter serving as a backdrop for the fiction it supports. This combination gives primacy to the imagination, the symbolic, and aesthetic emotion. It also indicates a desire to deride history through myth, which makes it possible to challenge the semantic hegemony imposed by those who oversee official memory by using historical material in a different way, far from the univocal and

<sup>24</sup> Jean-François Clément, “Zaïd u Ah’med, héros méconnu de l’histoire marocaine,” *Lamalif* 130 (Nov. 1981): 50-53.

<sup>25</sup> Moha Khettouch, “Zaid ou Hmad, un héros de l’Atlas,” *Lamalif*, 128 (1981): 50-53.

<sup>26</sup> “Today I will tell you the saga of the Amazigh resistance fighters and the great deception that the history books of our enemies fail to mention” (Iyed Ntelli, 12).

monosemic certainties of “official truth.” The novel of Amazigh expression can allow this return of repressed history by dismantling the mechanisms of occultation. It is a matter of using a counter-narrative to oppose the hegemonic narrative consecrated by official history and hagiography. For Paul Ricoeur,<sup>27</sup> “the resource of the narrative thus becomes a trap when those with greater powers take over the direction of this plot and impose a canonical narrative by means of intimidation or seduction, fear or flattery.”<sup>28</sup> Here, too, the legend is presented as a hymn that celebrates the land of the ancestors and the saga of a culture that is constantly silenced and killed yet always manages to be resurrected and regenerated like a phoenix rising from the ashes. Therefore, beyond any referential exteriority, the reappropriation of this historical material expresses the need for a return to the source and the need for memory and truth to find identity even through an imaginary reconstitution formed from deconstruction, from the *unravelling* of a memory which has the literary text as its sole anchor.

The fascination exerted by the character of the bandit of honor and the significance of memory that it implies result from the fact that they are based on a powerful mythological foundation. These representations refer back to the archetypal figures of the dissident, to the righters of wrongs who, driven by an unshakeable faith in their cause, fight against an unjust and dominant order. The imbalance of power and its asymmetrical nature accentuates the heroic act despite its futility, and the bandit of honor is a character who rejects the separation between the ideal and the real and asserts himself to the end, even to death. The Maghrebiana author’s ethical and aesthetic commitment is to restore the status of a culture that is constantly reified, folklorized, and repressed in *vernacularity* and exoticism. By revalorizing old wisdom and traditional forms of mutual aid, these writers condemn solitude, the degradation of ancient solidarities, and the triumph of quantitative and productivist logic, emphasizing that the myth of progress may sometimes include regressions.

### **Title Between Intertextuality and Interculturality**

The novel of Amazigh expression is gradually opening up to universal literature, attempting to enter into a dialogue with world masterpieces by way of pastiche titles such as Lhoussain Azergui’s novel *Imggura g’ Imazighen* or *The Last of the Amazighs*. This parodic title exemplifies the imperative to read, as Riffaterre calls it, required to decipher it, since it inevitably evokes James Fenimore Cooper’s historical novel *The Last of the Mohicans*. The relationship of domination between peoples and ethnic groups as well as the complex dialectic between barbarism and civilization are issues that are at the heart of these two novels, despite the difference in terms of their historical, geographical, and cultural contexts. J.F. Cooper is recognized as one of the first American novelists to give Native Americans the status of characters in their own right,

<sup>27</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’Oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

with real complexity.<sup>29</sup> His novel exemplifies what Claire Barel-Moisan describes as: “that voice of the American guilty conscience that ponders the original sin of every Nation.” This comparison between the ethnocide suffered by the Native Americans and the situation of the Berbers in North Africa is commonplace in Maghrebian literature, as can be seen, for example, in the dedication that Driss Chraïbi wrote for *La Mère du printemps* (*The Mother of Spring*), or in the work of Mouloud Mammeri as well as Kateb Yacine, who was influenced by his reading of Faulkner.<sup>30</sup> According to Roland Barthes, this is how the title appears as “a fabric of quotations resulting from a thousand centers of culture.”<sup>31</sup> More recently, Said Balaadich published a novel entitled *Tayri g uzemz n Corona*, which literally means *Love in the Time of Corona*. The allusion to Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s masterpiece *Love in the Time of Cholera* could not be more explicit. These intertextual allusions to masterpieces of world literature express a desire for dialogue and an openness to world literature so as to better break free from the constraints of literary provincialism and to better focus on an aesthetic of wandering that nomadizes from one imaginary to another, from one culture to another.

It is therefore following this logic of survival but also of resurrection that the choice of this kind of title that participates in this “literary renaissance” can be understood. However, it is worth remembering that the novel of Amazigh expression can hardly be reduced solely to a mission of writing down and safeguarding, urgent as it may be, fragile oral material that is crumbling with the relentless disintegration of the traditional social structures that have served as its receptacle. It is also inspired by the contemporary world, by ordinary social life, by the everyday in its banality and complexity, by news items – in short, by Maghrebian reality in all its endless richness. The transition of literature of Amazigh expression from the oral to the written at a time when there are predictions of the latter’s decline, and with all that this establishment in the written form could imply in terms of objectification, decontextualization, erosion, and even impoverishment resulting from the depletion of the pragmatic aspects, could be tantamount to a kind of extinction of this original literary imaginary. This would be the price to pay for protecting this culture and language, saving them from a relentless extinction that would

<sup>29</sup> On this subject, see Roy Harvey Pearce’s *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), 197; Cited by Claire Barel-Moisan “Fenimore Cooper’s Indians: A Reading of the Last of the Mohicans,” *Romanticism*, 130 (2005): 55.

<sup>30</sup> Kateb Yacine himself has acknowledged in several interviews that he was influenced by his reading of Faulkner (<https://www.sam-network.org/video/sur-camus-et-faulkner>). See also the work of Frances A. Brahmi “William Faulkner’s *The Sound and The Fury* and Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma*: A Comparative Study of Style and Structure as Related to Time,” MA Thesis, (Butler, 1976), 497: <https://digitalcommons>; and Jacqueline Arnaud *Recherches sur la littérature maghrébine de langue française: le cas de Kateb Yacine* (Paris: Harmattan, Lille, 1982) frequently compared the racial divide between the white and black communities in the Mississippi of *Light in August* to the conflict between settlers and natives in the French Algeria of Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma*. They are also both characterized by chaotic writing and the multiplicity of points of view and versions of the same plot.

<sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 65.



deprive the Maghrebian cultural personality of one of its most fundamental tributaries. The majority of Amazigh writers are driven by the same deep desire to rehabilitate a thousand-year-old culture by overcoming the old antagonism between the particular and the universal and by considering the unity of the multiple and the multiplicity of the one through a dialectic of rootedness and openness.

As such, through its titles, the Amazigh novel exhibits its immemorial cultural foundations, while reanimating and revalorizing an archaic memory by integrating it into the text. It tears a buried imaginary from the silences of history and injects it into new circuits of meaning. These titles thus assist, on the basis of a specificity and a soil, in challenging a new readership and loudly proclaiming the advent of a literature that will certainly enrich universal literature. The survival of Amazigh culture, atavistic and ancestral, has been subterranean and in the periphery, in accordance with what some have called a dialectic of margin and permanence; today it is in a position to nourish and rejuvenate Maghrebian culture and contribute to the intellectual renewal of its thinking and its arts. Renewal is not necessarily a denial of the past, even if it may be very distant; it is part of a process in which ruptures and continuities succeed one another and respond to one another, far from any linear vision of History. The Amazigh novel transfigures the Maghreb as a geo-cultural space with a symbolic profile that is polyphonic, the product of an incessant dialectic of conflict and symbiosis between successive invaders and natives. It bears all the vertical and horizontal divisions that have structured Maghrebian societies and profoundly shaped their identity, including the plain and the mountain, the city and the tribe, the desert and the sea, the Jew and the Muslim, the Amazigh and the Arab, the sedentary and the nomadic, the urban and the rural, the erudite and the popular, the orthodox and the heterodox, and the state and dissidence.

The resurrection of this literature proves that this culture can hardly be confined to *pastness*, to the unsurpassable limits of museographic ancestry, indigenism, or primarity, since over the course of the centuries it has always been a place of continuous palingenesis. The Amazighophone novel could therefore be considered a hymn to life, to rebirth, and to the resurrectional values of this culture that is enriched and fertilized by its openings and its contacts with otherness.

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