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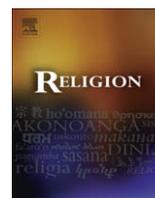
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Dangerous love in mythical narratives and formula tales

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A B S T R A C T

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The theme of love has long been neglected in studies on African myths. The often-heard explanation is that African myths and folktales do not tell stories about love because they primarily express social interests and obligations while love – intended as both emotional imperative and biological drive – is an individual need and feeling. This latter definition relies on a very specific understanding of ‘love’: the Romantic love of 19th century European novels. This paper argues that when love means attraction, affection, passion, and necessity, it turns up as *liaisons dangereuses* in many African narratives. Love becomes a driving force that generates gender constructions by reinforcing the unity of the couple or by fuelling the struggle between partners.

In the case of Kabyle narratives (Algeria),¹ conceptualisations of love as well as the relationships between myths and folktales are explored by analyzing formula tales² and the only known collection of Kabyle Berber myths: those collected by Leo Frobenius, ethnologist and historian of religion, at the beginning of the 20th century and published in the first volume of his *Volksmärchen der Kabylen* in 1921.

The discussion of the relationship between Kabyle myths and folktales touches upon a well-known interpretative problem in the study of religion: the articulation of myth and ritual with history as communities respond to sweeping social, political, and religious changes, such as the coming of Islam, colonization, decolonization, and globalization.

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Introduction: Berber narratives and historical change

The collection and study of North African oral narratives began in the colonial period when European administration and education ‘exported’ interest in ‘folklore’ – developed in Europe in the wake of Romanticism and nationalism – as a means to understand (and control) the ‘natives’. Berber narratives, largely collected in Algeria and Morocco, were soon seen as the equivalents of European folktales and hagiographic tales. Researchers did not expect to find local creation myths in the context of a universal religion such as Islam. As in the case of other universal religions, Muslims are expected to accept and to rely upon the specific creation story narrated by the sacred text, pre-existing creation myths being doomed to disappear. The Kabyle myths collected by Leo Frobenius were thus coldly received by specialists in Berber studies in the early 1920s, and fell into oblivion.³

As indicated by Vera Pagin (1998, pp.7–50) and Arlette Roth (1998, pp.339–348), a number of factors inform the reaction of the specialists. At the time of his fieldwork in 1914, the First World War was about to explode and Frobenius was travelling as a German

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¹ Kabylia is a mountainous area in the north-west of Algeria. Linguistically and culturally it is a rather homogeneous area: Kabyles are Muslim and speak Taqbaylit, one of the several local forms of Tamazight, the Berber language, spoken in Algeria, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Niger, and Tunisia. In Algeria approximately 20–25 percent of the population speaks Berber, while the majority of the population speaks Arabic, the official language. Islam was adopted in North Africa starting from the latter half of the seventh century.

² The genre usually translated into English as ‘folktale’ or ‘legend’ and in French as *conte*, *conte merveilleux*, or *légende* takes in Berber different names depending on the local language, for example *tamacahuṭ* in Kabylia (Algeria) and *tanfus* in the Rif (Morocco). The presence of formulas of beginning and ending is characteristic, for example the expression *macahu!* (‘a story!’) which gives the name to this type of tale in Kabylia. I therefore use the denomination ‘formula tales’ (Merolla, 2006, pp. 104–118).

³ On the collection of ‘folklore’ in the history of Berber literary studies, see Merolla (2006, pp. 22–25).

researcher in a French territory, carrying out his inquiry among local people. After the Second World War, Frobenius' work was suspected of promoting a form of cultural racialism.⁴ A further controversy was sparked by his research hypothesis: Frobenius was looking for a 'hyper-Berberness' to fit into his framework of 'African originality and uniqueness.'⁵ Above all, the specialists regarded with great suspicion the fact that Frobenius did not offer the myths in the Kabyle language but only in German translation, and that he did not reveal the names of his informants and of the villages where he collected the texts.

The situation is indeed complex. Frobenius probably collected the texts by writing down only the translation made by the person helping him. However, traces and indications of Kabyle terms, as well as explanations of translations, are provided in the corpus, while almost all Berber terms given by Frobenius are identifiable in present Kabyle words (Boughchiche, 1998). Furthermore, Frobenius explained in his introduction that, according to his informants, these texts constituted secret knowledge held only by the oldest men in the community – knowledge not to be divulged and that he himself was asked not to disclose. While Frobenius did not respect this request for secrecy, neither did he reveal the names of his informants.

La littérature des Berbères by Henri Basset (2001 [1920]) probably contributed to the oblivion of Frobenius' collection in Berber studies. This essay, for decades the seminal reference for the study of oral Berber productions, makes no mention of Berber myths. Basset only mentioned 'historical' legends (concerning the Roman past), hagiographic narratives (on the deeds of pious characters and marabouts), and aetiological tales. Although the latter do not concern cosmogonic and anthropogonic creation, they are close to mythical creation narratives as they include, for example, stories about the origin of a certain spring or fountain, tribe or animal, and more particularly of rainfall in February (which keeps 'weeping' because February supposedly lost a day playing against January and March). Basset notes that all Berber narrative genres seem to express a similar mental activity; indeed, similar themes can be found in both folktales and legends (see also Galand-Pernet, 1998), while aetiological tales were often remolded as hagiographic tales (in which the action of the saint was essential to the origin of the spring or the foundation of a certain place or institution). Basset however maintained that it was not possible to speak of Berber myths as equivalent to the Greek myths,⁶ that is, stories deemed truthful and religious that dealt with the deeds of polytheistic gods.⁷

The next important study on Berber folktales was published only in the 1970s: *Le conte kabyle* by Camille Lacoste-Dujardin (1970). Focusing on the logical coherence of the social and metaphysical conceptions of Kabyle folktales as well as their ritualized narration, *Le conte kabyle* hypothesizes that such narratives were 'ethnological tales' with a status between European myths and folktales. In other words, Kabyle folktales were originally mythical narratives whose social role had changed due to the acceptance of Islam. While Lacoste-Dujardin evoked leading anthropological and literary interpretations of the folktale/myth relationship, she did not discuss the existing dispute around the relationship between myths and folktales. According to the structuralist approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss, folktales and myths containing similar themes and characters could co-exist. Folktales were seen as 'reduced myths' in which cosmological oppositions disappear and only social oppositions persist. Conversely, according to the functionalist approach of Vladimir Propp, myths and folktales could not co-exist because folktales derived from the myths in cases of shared common themes and characters. In the latter approach, folktales derive from desacralized myths when people adopt a monotheistic religion and the mythical characters lose their divine qualities. In Propp's interpretation, myth as sacred and truthful narrative (for narrators and their audience) was opposed to folktale as profane and untruthful narrative. *Le conte kabyle* does not address the question of whether it was possible that Frobenius' informants had told myths in a period when folktales on similar themes were narrated.

The idea of a shift from Berber myths to folktales was proposed at the beginning of the 1980s by researchers Tassadit Yacine and Marie Virolle. Comparing shamanistic practices and the (narrated) initiatic travel of the protagonists of Kabyle folktales, Virolle and Yacine (1982) hypothesized that Berber folktales were initially performed in the context of initiation rituals and later transformed into narrative episodes, taking their present form of '*conte merveilleux*'. The earlier initiation rituals and narratives would have undergone a process of desecralization and transformation into entertainment when Islamic reformist movements spread the quest for religious purification from popular and non-orthodox practices and beliefs (such as maraboutism, or the cult of the saints, in North African Islam) into the Maghreb.⁸

While Yacine and Virolle's hypothesis captures important social and religious transformations arising from the responses to colonization, it remains weak in relation to both narrative analysis and contextual data. We can note that in Lacoste-Dujardin's interpretation, the transformation would have occurred during Islamization of the Maghreb since the eighth century, while in Yacine and Virolle's hypothesis the shift from myth to folktale is quite recent, taking place in the last century.

⁴ Frobenius was not involved with Nazism, but his concept of 'culture circle' (or culture areas) has been seen as a precursor of the Nazi doctrine on race and land rights. See Jell-Bahlsen's (1985, pp. 317–318): 'The danger of pseudo-science becomes obvious when Frobenius asserts that the material objects of culture are not only measurable but also associated with geographic areas, which they "permeate" by means of a "mysterious and demonic force." This latter point was essential to Nazi doctrine and was used to justify military expansionism [...], as well as the elimination of ethnic minorities; two cultures (misinterpreted as different 'races'), it was claimed, cannot occupy the same limited geographic space (Lebensraum).'

⁵ Frobenius' approach to Africa was ambivalent. On the one hand, Frobenius emphasized the 'uniqueness' of African civilization and the high value of its arts and culture (which was of great influence on the works by Africanist activists and writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois and L.S. Senghor). On the other hand, he hypothesized that this uniqueness was due to the influence of an ancient (vanished) West African civilization ('African Atlantis') that still permeated the present 'degenerated' African cultures (Miller, 1999, p. 4).

⁶ Basset does not give an explicit definition of 'myth', but we infer it from his text. See, for example: 'L'Égypte, la Syrie, l'Asie Mineure, la Grèce ont jadis crée les plus nombreux et les plus complets cycles mythiques que l'Antiquité nous ait transmis: chez les Berbères, nul mythe, rien que le rite', Basset (2001 [1920], p. 179). ('Egypt, Syria, the Middle East, and Greece created the most numerous and complete mythical cycles transmitted from the Ancient Times: no myth, but only rites (were created) among the Berbers' (my translation).

⁷ This was the usual definition in the disciplines concerned with myths, in which Greek mythology together with the Latin-Christian concept of religion and the Euro-American concepts of history and science provided the parameters within which narratives were compared and interpreted as 'myths'. More updated definitions of 'myth' take into account the time of the narrated actions that are set in a remote past (the time of creation) when all things were different than they are now (Bascom, 1965) and the 'mythopoeic approach' (productive of myth) that creates and establishes the reality of storytellers and audience through the narration itself (see Brelich, 1970, pp. 24, 26). For the African context, see the discussion in Okpewho's *Myth in Africa: A Study of Its Aesthetic and Cultural Relevance* (1983).

⁸ The 'Maghreb' refers to the occidental regions of North Africa, usually including Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mali, and Niger. The long-term process of 'Islamization' and 'Arabization' of the Maghreb started with the Arab expansion in the seventh century and was consolidated in the 12th century. Maghrebian Islam presented forms of syncretism, particularly with reference to practices linked to maraboutism. Islamic Reformism, developed in the late 19th century in several Muslim countries, spread in Algeria in the 1930s (under the influence of Sheik Ben Badis) and was central to the development of anticolonial movements.

A consequence of these varying chronologies is that, theoretically, mythical narratives and formula tales could have co-existed at the time of Frobenius' fieldwork. The 'origins' of Frobenius' collection, however, have remained unanswered, in particular the question of why no other researcher had or could collect complex and well structured mythical Kabyle narratives, such as those published by Frobenius.

The Frobenius Collection and the interpretation of the LOAB

As indicated before, a consequence of the controversy around the Frobenius publication was that his Kabyle myths fell into oblivion for nearly 70 years. Globalization, however, has favoured a 'return to the present' of this collection: in the 1990s a Kabyle student, Mokran Fetta, migrated to Germany where he learnt the German language and decided to translate and publish the Frobenius Collection of Kabyle myths and folktales in French. The French translation (*Contes Kabyles 1995*) made them available to a new public and attracted the attention of the *Littérature Orale Arabo-Berbère* (LOAB) research team at the CNRS, led by the Kabyle specialist Camille Lacoste-Dujardin.⁹ Working on both German texts and French translations (Roth, 1998, p. 209), seven researchers tried to verify – or falsify – the authenticity of the Frobenius Collection, by looking at the narrative form and the logical structure of the myths and comparing the folktales in his corpus with other collections of Kabyle folktales.¹⁰ The results were published in the *LOAB Journal* in 1998.

Researchers Claude Breteau and Arlette Roth were able to confirm that the themes and episodes in the Frobenius Collection were coherent and very well structured. Their textual analysis further acknowledges that the anthropogonic narratives are consistent with other myths in the collection, in particular with those on the origin of Wild Animals, on the First Mother of the World, and on the Ant as a cultural heroine. Breteau and Roth's conclusion is that the anthropogonic myths may very likely have been narrated by one person only – considering they are homogeneous from the stylistic point of view – while other myths and folktales are more likely to have been composed and narrated by various storytellers.¹¹ As to the authenticity of the anthropogonic myth, Breteau and Roth's conclusion is that:

[Ce mythe] paraît dans ses éléments constitutifs, de par sa structure et son contenu, authentique et peut se situer par rapport aux systèmes religieux méditerranéens. On reste néanmoins frappé par la quasi éviction du principe d'un dieu mâle créateur [...] Ce mythe, enfin, surprend par son idéologie anthropocentrique, par le fait que le mal n'est jamais absolu et par l'absence totale de sentiment de culpabilité chez les humains. (Breteau and Roth, 1998, p. 132)¹²

With regard to the corpus of Kabyle myths as a whole, the researchers write:

Nous sommes enclins à penser, pour notre part, qu'il pourrait s'agir d'un mythe polythéiste afro-méditerranéen, de caractère agraire, susceptible d'avoir été réaffecté, à des fins idéologiques qui restent difficiles à déterminer. (Breteau and Roth, 1998, p. 118)¹³

In other words, Breteau and Roth suggest that the mythical themes included in the Frobenius Collection existed in Berber cultural heritage, but they also infer that the anthropogonic myth may have been narrated by one particular person, who put various existent themes together so as to form a coherent unity. This person might have been, for example, the translator or informant who helped Frobenius during his fieldwork. The implication is that the Frobenius Collection provides some sort of partial authenticity: the anthropogonic narratives are 'authentic' in their parts, themes, and episodes, but they may have been remoulded by one specific person – whom we could call the 'mythographer' – who created such a single coherent myth for a particular aim. For example, the mythographer's goal may have been to answer the request of Frobenius, who was clearly hunting for Berber myths. The researchers also suggest that such a person may well have had other aims related to identity construction in a period when the Kabyle region was being swamped by revitalized Islamic orthodoxy, Arab ideology, and French colonialism. Finally, we cannot help but wonder whether this is a case of derisive manipulation of a European researcher by some members of the community under study. If it actually were manipulation, however, it was brilliantly perpetrated, as Breteau and Roth's analysis has shown.

Love and Kabyle 'myths'

The exploration of gender and gendered relationships can help us shed some light on the complex relationship between the myths collected by Frobenius and Kabyle narratives as a whole. Continuity and differences between myths and formula tales indeed emerge when the theme of love is considered.

The first volume of the Frobenius Collection offers a group of texts on the origin of human beings, particularly on the relationships between men and women, on the origin of animals and extra-human beings, and on the origin of death and of several atmospheric and natural phenomena. The remaining narratives included in the three volumes belong to the 'formula tales' genre, which roughly corresponds to the European 'folktale' genre.¹⁴

As examples of anthropogonic texts and other aetiological narratives, we will consider the subject matter indicated by the few titles provided by Frobenius: *The first parents of the world and the myth of the Amazons*; *The first cultivation of cereals*; *The first wild buffalo and the origin of wild animals*; *The origin of the sheep and the division of the year*; *The first conflict and the origin of people*.

The anthropogonic myth narrates the following story. The first man and woman of the world lived under the earth. They knew neither sexual difference nor sexuality, but they discovered both when they started to fight for water. The woman then first gave birth to four girls

⁹ See 'Pourquoi un dossier Frobenius' and 'L'horizon scientifique', *LOAB* (1998, pp. 1–6, 361–362).

¹⁰ Claude H. Breteau, Lamara Boughiche, Jeannine Drouin, Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, Arlette Roth, Ahmed Touderti and Vera Pagin.

¹¹ Breteau and Roth suggest that the storytellers used shared (traditional) stories in an original and innovative way. See below on the anthropogonic myth.

¹² 'Due to its structure and contents, [this myth] appears authentic in its components, and it can be situated in the framework of Mediterranean religious systems. One remains nevertheless struck by the absence of the principle of a creative male god [...] Finally, this myth surprises for its anthropocentric ideology, for the fact that evil is never absolute and for the total absence of guilt felt by human beings' (my translation).

¹³ 'We tend to think that it could be a polytheist Afro-Mediterranean myth, of an agrarian type, that was likely re-enacted with ideological ends, which remain difficult to identify' (my translation).

¹⁴ See Merolla (2006, pp. 104–118).

and later to four boys, until 50 girls and 50 boys were born. The group of the girls and the group of the boys left respectively for the North and for the East, emerged separately to the surface of the earth and discovered daylight. On the earth, the girls started to scream and ask all things who their creator was and whether the stars had created them. At that time – as the myth unfolds – stones, plants, and animals could speak, but the girls did not get an answer and continued to scream. From far away, the boys heard the girls shouting and approached them, but the girls did not want to walk together with the boys. The boys then decided to build houses and bathe in the river. A girl who had seen the boys bathing in the river told the other girls that the boys' bodies were different from theirs and described them in detail, adding: 'When you see them naked, your heart beats hard and you feel a great desire to hold them in your arms.' The same girl later went to explore the houses of the boys but she then had to run away as she was chased by the boys. Hearing her screams, the other girls reached her to defend her; boys and girls thus fought each other, but the girls were so strong that they overpowered the boys and knocked them down to the ground. Still, the girls were curious as to whether the boys were really different from them, and this was how both boys and girls discovered sexuality. After marrying, the girls moved to the houses of the boys, who decided that the girls had to stay under them, and – as the narrative tells us – this is the sexual position that the Kabyles have adopted ever since.

In other mythical narratives, the first girls and boys eat the plants they find on their way until a mythical being, the Ant, teaches them to sow seed, breed animals, and cook. The acquisition of such cultural knowledge is narrated along with the description of sexual relations and affection among animals – in particular between the bull and the cow. The bull follows the cow everywhere, even before they discover sexuality. The bull thus teaches all animals to do as he did by saying: 'Behave as I did with the cow. She was happy with me and we felt good together.'

Other aetiological narratives of the collection concern 'The first mother of the World,' who creates animals and natural phenomena and initiates cultural practices but is also presented as being responsible for death and for the curse of hard work that haunts all human beings on earth.¹⁵

As can be expected from mythical narratives that construct the social and moral order of the world, the current order is established at the end of the narration, and the narrative perspective coincides with that of the male characters.¹⁶ The final position in sexual intercourse indeed conveys the construction and acceptance of gender roles as well as of the dominant position that men have in society. It is indeed only in the mythical times that passionate relationships are possible. However, the myth reveals that both men and women show interest in the exploration of sexuality.¹⁷ In the case of the first couple, the man takes the initiative but, in the case of the groups of boys and girls, the latter are the ones who take the initiative. The first man/woman relationship is shaped by competition and fights, with descriptions of reciprocal punches: a fight that eventually turns into attraction. The attraction leads both sides to discover pleasure and then to intercourse. In both episodes, the discovering of sexuality is described in detailed explicit language. In the case of the girls, it is significant that attraction and more complex feelings, such as the thumping of her heart and the longing for an embrace, are awakened by looking at the Male Other.¹⁸

Love and Kabyle 'formula tales'

We can now compare the language of love in the Kabyle myths collected by Frobenius with the language of love in the Kabyle formula tales presented in two large collections, respectively published at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. If a striking congruence is present in myths, naughty anecdotes, and folktales as far as style, metaphors, and themes are concerned, differences are important as well.

An example of congruence occurs when, in the myth, the girls and the boys leave their parents and respectively go North and East. Claude Breteau and Arlette Roth write (1998, p. 104) that both directions are positive: the female North refers to the direction of the sea and to the colour green, metaphors for water and life, while the male East refers to the rising sun and, we can add, to the sacred direction of the Mecca.¹⁹ Such geographical, social, moral, and religious orientation is also found in folktales and naughty anecdotes. It is also worth noting that episodes presented in the mythical narrations can also appear as individual folktales in other collections.

The first difference is that the mythical discovery of sexual difference is expressed through a language that includes the sort of realistic details that are not usually encountered in Kabyle folktales. Nonetheless, in the Berber area, explicit or erotic language is not unknown if we consider the naughty anecdotic tales, called *contes grivois* in French, narrated for amusement among men. According to Frobenius, the myths also belong to a secret knowledge only shared by a restricted number of old men. Kabyle folktales, on the contrary, were usually addressed to women and children. It is quite possible, therefore, that the difference in language between myths, anecdotic tales, and folktales depends on the different audiences to which these narratives were addressed.

The comparison of gendered elements further shows continuity as well as distance among these genres. In the naughty anecdotic tales, women in general, and sexually 'active' women in particular, are clearly portrayed as negative characters. Moreover, love feelings are not envisaged in anecdotes, as happens in myths and folktales.

Love and affection do indeed appear in folktales even though, as already mentioned, the description and language of love are much more contained than in myths. One example is the folktale of the paternal cousins (Dallet 1970, pp. 158–203). The male cousin disregards his father's advice and abandons his house because he is deeply in love with his female cousin. The woman, however, deceives him with her words and special potions and finally betrays him. It should be noted that here the female cousin is characterized by magic skill, which she

¹⁵ According to Yacine (1993, p. 138), in another narrative, the First Mother of the World is an old woman who cannot contain herself and farts on firewood, which – from that moment on – will not walk by itself any more, therefore people will have to carry it on their backs.

¹⁶ As indicated by Cohen (1969, pp. 349–350) 'one of the important functions of myth is that it anchors the present in the past'. However, this does not mean that myths are unchangeable. On the contrary, flexibility characterizes myths that have to change (and have to be changed by the storytellers, in terms of narrative or of interpretation) to adapt to new historical social orders. See van Baren's *The Flexibility of Myth* (1984).

¹⁷ See also Breteau and Roth (1998, p. 79).

¹⁸ Frobenius (1921, p. 58); *Contes Kabyles* (French translation) (1995, p.30).

¹⁹ The cardinal orientation of the Kabyle house is, however, East–West, see Bourdieu (1979 [1970], pp. 143, 150). West and East are the directions actually connected to female and male activities in the house. West is the side of the house where people sleep and die, while East is the side of the house where female and male activities take place. The fireplace is situated in the North, weaving-loom in the West. Symbolically the dark nocturnal part of the house is the female one. Bougchiche (1998, p. 314), notes the confusion between (Kabyle words for) North and West in another text of the Frobenius Collection.

Table 1

Differences and continuity in myths and formula tales can be summarised as follows with regards to gender and love.

	Myths	Formula tales
Language (see audience)	Explicit; sexual details	Contained
Audience	Men	Women and children
Sexually active women	Positive	Negative
Love as affection	Present	Present as <i>accepted</i> feeling (see example of the intelligent girl): <i>iħemmel</i>
Love as passion	Constructive feeling (but controlled by men)	<i>Disruptive</i> feeling (see the examples of the paternal cousins and of the man deeply in love with wife): <i>iħecceq</i> vs. <i>iħemmel</i>
Syncretic adaptation to Islam	Lacking/difficult: girls associated with risky questions on creation	Present (women associated with magic vs. men associated with official Islam)

uses in order to reinforce her power over her male cousin. Her evildoing will be undone by a pious old man or – in other versions – by a religious couple. At the end of the story, the male cousin returns to his father's home and the woman receives the deserved punishment at the hand of her brothers, who kill her. The unity of the paternal male cousins is thus reinforced, the unfaithful wife is punished, and passionate love disappears.

In another tale, a man who deeply loves his dying wife decides to yield half of his years to her to make her live longer (Dallet 1970, pp. 190–203). But his passion prevents him from seeing that his wife is disloyal to him. Finally, another man shows him the harsh reality and the Angel of Death restores the right order of things. This story ends with the suggestive moral: 'Never trust women'.

A different outcome is envisaged in narratives that resemble the style of Arabic tales, in which the hero can express his attraction for a beautiful princess with courteous words, and often with a playful exchange of verses, before defeating his rival and gaining the new wife. However, the appropriate form of love between Kabyle spouses is provided in a more local style narrative, in which a girl outdoes her husband in intelligence yet remains respectful towards him. Once again, the language used to describe feelings and relations is the element that underlines the difference between these narratives.

In the case of the intelligent girl (Dallet 1970, pp. 40–57), the accepted and valued feelings between man and woman are described by the verb *iħemmel*: to love, in the meaning of 'holding in esteem' or 'having affection for somebody.' In the case of the paternal cousins, instead, we find the verb *iħecceq*, whose meaning is 'to fall in love with passion' and 'to desire'. This verb also has a sexual connotation, at least in the derivative term *timeħcaqin*, which means 'mistress.'

In folktales, passionate love is a male feeling. Females' passionate love is associated with sorcery and deception, and the women who arouse passionate love in men are unfaithful and use their men's passion only to control and betray them. Moreover, such a passionate love for a wife is presented as disruptive to the social and cosmic order since it compromises both the unity of male relatives and the separation between death and life.

Worthy of note is the fact that, in folktales, 'official' Islamic religious knowledge is positively dominant and wins out over female magic knowledge.²⁰ This is exemplified by the character of the pious old man/couple who successfully counters the 'magic' power of the female cousin in the tale of the paternal cousins.

Comparison

When we compare the gendered relations in folktales and in the anthropogonic narrations collected by Frobenius, we see that the mythical setting allows for a different narrative approach to the man/woman relationship. The mythical narrative does not express disdain for passionate love, even though the myth is normative and guarantees the social order. Passion is not a disruptive power, but a force for the essential discovery of sexuality, for the construction of gender and for the control of it by men. At the same time, myths do not lay down a cosmic or social condemnation of passionate love *for* or *by* women. Attraction and love belong indeed to both men and women. Similarly, in the first mythical cycle, there is no moral or social censure directed at women because of their behaviour, although the sexual and social control is stated by the men's chosen position.²¹

Another interesting element shows continuity and difference: in the myth, the girls scream to ask questions about the creation and the creator, but their questions remain unanswered. This appears to be a strategy to both take into account and, at the same time, avoid questions about God. This also appears to be a strategy to elude the difficult syncretic inscription of a Chthonian – underworld – myth of the origin of people within the framework of the official Islamic narration of the genesis. This strategy – associating girls with the dangerous aspects of creation – is not surprising. On the contrary, it is almost to be expected when we consider that, in Kabyle society, 'women, female lineage, and magic' are connected and opposed to 'men, male lineage, and official religion.' An example of this opposition is in the folktale about the paternal cousin, in which the woman uses potions to control her husband, but a pious man and the paternal link between male cousins are stronger than her magic.

Furthermore, the mythopoeic mechanism, that is, the narrative device by which the present reality is fixed in the past, is at work in both genres. However, in folktales a full effort to adapt and submit the narrative themes to Islam is made, while in the anthropogonic myths this

²⁰ On the tension between magic (associated with Kabyle women) and Islam, see Plantade (1988). Bourdieu (1977, p. 43) indicated that such a tension is also linked to the different ways of establishing kinship relationships. For example, in the case where the wife is a cross-cousin of her husband (i.e. the mother's brother's daughter, matrilineal tie), and she was actually chosen for this reason (female strategy), but she is officially presented as the father's brother's daughter's daughter (patrilineal tie): 'The heretical reading, which privileges the relations through women that are excluded from the official account, is reserved for private situations, if not for magic'.

²¹ The female gender, however, is constructed in much more negative terms in the mythical collection as a whole, when we consider that the Ant and the First Mother of the World are cultural heroines, but the First Mother is assigned the role of introducing evil on earth. See Yacine (1993, pp. 138, 144, 149).

full adaptation to official religious knowledge is avoided. This could also explain why the myths were presented to Frobenius as secret knowledge not to be divulged (Table 1).

Conclusion

The construction of passionate love in myths and formula tales shows the distance between these genres. This distance can also be recognized in the tension between mythical narration and official religious knowledge – which again is expressed in male/female terms. However, when we look at the myths, folktales, and anecdotes collected at the beginning of the 20th century, their continuity also points to an organic oral tradition. Moreover, the differences between myths and folktales are also coherent, and this confirms Breteau and Roth's analysis. Furthermore, the diversity in literary genre and audience can explain the differences in the language, style, and themes of gendered relationship. In the contemporary situation, folktales are still a lively genre in oral communication and in other media. Conversely, no anthropogonic myth has been collected after Frobenius, and when mythical/aetiological episodes are narrated they are inscribed in the framework of Islamic belief and creation narrative. Without launching new hypothetical historical reconstructions, it is possible to conclude that – regardless of whether myths were diffused as such in society or whether they were recreated by a specific storyteller at the beginning of the last century – the fact that nowadays the Kabyle myths collected by Frobenius are no longer narrated indicates the demise, in the Kabyle context, of the anthropogonic narration and of its view on gender and love outside the Islamic norm and knowledge. Alternative views emerge instead through more contemporary genres, such as songs, poems, novels, and films.

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