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The Image of Woman in Kabyle Folk Song: Selected Examples

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Abstract

Folk literature constitutes an important component of heritage and occupies a position of considerable significance in human societies that remain attached to their cultural origins, transmitted orally from one generation to the next. Its genres are numerous, including tales, riddles, poems, myths and proverbs, and each of these possesses characteristics and features that distinguish it from the others, for folk literature carries within it various dimensions and significations: social, intellectual and cultural. The Kabyle folk song, whether performed by women or by men, is among the literary forms most expressive of human reality, of pain, of concerns, of feelings and preoccupations. It constitutes a bridge of communication between the artist and the audience; in it the artist found freedom, and it proved the most fitting means of making his voice heard by the world, particularly the song performed by women. How, then, is the image of woman manifested in these songs?

Introduction

The folk song is a popular art form of considerable importance in Kabyle society; indeed, it is among the most widespread and most present of the arts in popular milieus. The song is an essential part of the musical and cultural heritage of societies in general, and of Kabyle society in particular, expressing people's feelings, their traditions and their daily concerns. In this artistic mode the artist found a means of disclosing what the tongue is unable to utter. The song thus became a mirror reflecting the deep nature of individuals, since it has translated their pains and their hopes since ancient times. This attests to the presence of Kabyle song in every domain of the life of the Kabyle individual, and especially

of the woman, who is careful to have it accompany her while she performs her domestic tasks and her daily occupations, in their social, cultural and intellectual dimensions.

Kabyle song, in its richness and diversity, stands at the forefront of those expressive domains most closely bound to the broad popular classes, which has made it the platform that discloses most fully the life-concerns of individuals and groups, with both candour and reserve. Through it, singers, and women in particular, have been able to express their ideas and opinions with complete freedom and boldness, for women are the most exposed to suffering under customs and traditions. This is among the reasons that led us to select women's songs, in addition to the fact that they are the most expressive of the reality and the image of woman herself. Woman in folk song may appear in an idealised image, or in an image charged with challenges, according to the cultural and social context. The theme of woman has, moreover, occupied a broad space within Kabyle song: women singers have made of woman a fertile creative world, celebrating her beauty, her comeliness and her attractiveness, while at other moments focusing on her suffering, her struggle, her pain and the various ordeals to which women in general, and Kabyle women in particular, are subjected. Woman likewise appears in folk song in the various roles she performs: mother, wife, sister, grandmother. Folk song has thus contributed to constructing the image of woman in her various figures, which we shall attempt to uncover more fully by answering the following questions: How has the image of woman been represented in Kabyle song? What are the principal themes of Kabyle song that woman has embodied? And what are the most prominent roles that woman has assumed in Kabyle song?

The folk song "has remained resilient because of its attachment to its environment, because it is wedded to melody, because it is the nourishment of the human being and the link between past and present"¹. It differs from other forms of popular expression in "being performed by word and melody together, and not by word alone"², and it frequently comes "to express the psychological state of feeling"³, and to reflect the customs and traditions of a society that children inherit from their fathers and forefathers. It is likewise a platform through which the artist gives voice to his feelings, his sensations, his pains and his joys; in its richness and diversity it has come to occupy the foremost place among the expressive domains closely linked to the broad popular classes. Through its themes it also transmits social truths with candour, reserve and heightened sensitivity. This is what we shall attempt

¹Mohamed Alyan, *Muhadarat fi al-adab al-shabi al-Jazairi* [Lectures on Algerian Folk Literature], vol. 1, Dar al-Ulum, Algiers, 2013, p. 29.

²Nabila Ibrahim, *Ashkal al-tabir fi al-adab al-shabi* [Forms of Expression in Folk Literature], 3rd ed., Dar Gharib, Cairo, n.d., p. 237.

³Hadad Yusuf, *Al-Mujtama wa-l-turath fi Filastin* [Society and Heritage in Palestine], 1st ed., Dar al-Aswar, Acre, 1985, p. 75.

to uncover through a number of Kabyle songs that have embodied differing images of woman: whether through the celebration of her beauty as a trait unique to her, or through the role she performs in society, with particular attention to the ordeals and suffering of the Kabyle woman under customs and traditions and within the environment in which she lives. Finally, we address the most important spaces associated with the Kabyle woman. How, then, has all of this been manifested in song?

I. The Image of Woman in Kabyle Folk Song

1. The Beauty of Woman in Kabyle Song

The celebration of woman's beauty is an expression of appreciation for her physical and spiritual beauty, and it is among the most common themes in literature and poetry across the ages. Such celebration is frequently used as a means of extolling the elegance, delicacy and attractiveness that woman possesses, as when a woman is praised for the features of her face, her eyes, her smile, or her long, silken hair. This is what we observe in the song of the artist Louiza entitled "Muqlet" ("Look!"):

*Muqlet Muqlet
Acheboub almi d amas
A zin yesfan
Yarna d lala-s n tulas
Mi ara d-3edi
Mtimi tit tkehel
Mba3id 3eqlagh-tt d yel-is imazighen
Tefhem teghra
Ur tettzukhu s zin-is*

This passage may be rendered as follows:

Look, look
She of the long hair
She of limpid beauty
The lady among women
When she passes by
She of the brows and the kohl-lined eye
From afar I knew her for a daughter of the Amazigh
Understanding and learned
Who does not boast of her beauty

What is striking in this song is its title, "Look!", cast in the imperative in order to capture the listener's attention and impel him to continue listening and to grasp the meaning of the song. The singer therefore persists in this aim of attracting attention, opening her song with the repetition of the word "look", and moving directly, in the second line, to a celebration of those physical attributes of woman that symbolise her beauty: the eyebrows, the eye adorned with the kohl that accompanies the Kabyle woman throughout her life, and her long hair.

The singer does not confine herself to the woman's external attributes; she also treats her limpid, pure and arresting beauty as a trait that sets the Kabyle woman apart from other women. To this are added those fine qualities that consist in the Kabyle woman's being understanding and learned while remaining, for all that, modest.

On the beauty of woman there is also the song of Chérifa entitled "M la3yun n tir" ("O Eyes of the Bird"), some verses of which run as follows:

Am la3yun n tir
Yuli was svah lkhir
L3eslama inem a yeli-s n tsedda imlula
Lqed u sefsaf
Di ledjnan yara tilli

This may be rendered as follows:

O eyes of the bird
The day has broken, good morning
Peace be upon you, O cub of the lioness
O you, tall as the willow
In the shaded orchard

It is evident from the title of the song that the singer approaches the beauty of woman from another angle, that of simile, whose purpose is to bring her beauty into relief: she likens the woman's eyes at one moment to the eyes of a bird, which symbolise beauty, and at another to the most beautiful of animals, the lion cub (yeli-s n tsedda), which likewise suggests beauty. The singer then resumes her similes, this time with respect to the woman's stature, for to celebrate the beauty of a woman's height is to reflect a particular appreciation of the physical qualities that stand out in her, such as tallness of stature, which the culture regards as a symbol of elegance, strength and attractiveness. The artist celebrates this

height by describing it as a feature that distinguishes the woman from others, so that she is depicted in a singular manner reflecting beauty and perfection.

In many songs we find the tall woman portrayed as embodying loftiness and majestic beauty. Height may be deployed as a symbol of confidence and splendour, so that the woman is likened to tall trees or towering edifices, as the artist Chérifa sang when she said:

O you, tall as the willow
In the shaded orchard

Such imagery highlights the woman's radiance and her presence, so that height becomes part of the total image that constitutes beauty, blended with a strong and elegant bearing.

What also draws attention is that Kabyle society is known for the daily activities and multiple tasks it performs, particularly in the domain of agricultural labour, which has made these tasks dependent upon female labour. The Kabyle woman is active in many kinds of work such as weaving, the grinding of grain and the gathering of olives, which she performs while singing. On this theme Slimane Azem sang, describing a group of Kabyle women as they gathered the olive harvest, in his poem "Ssut n tsekkurt" ("The Song of the Partridge"):

Ssligh i ssut n tsekrin
Asmaken i d3edagh din
Ger at ya3la d bni mensur
Avehri ni i tidyebin
I tkhedem lqedra nwehnin
Anssa yeka yetthuzu tjur
Zighen ar d ttiqvayliyin
S yichewiqen d tteghratin
Ara yleqdhén azemour
Ttvanented ger tzemrin
Amzun d ttimarjatin

Slimane Azem is comparable to the master who serves as a model for his pupils: he was a model for the generations of young artists who came after him, foremost among them, perhaps, Lounis Aït Menguellet. "Da Slimane" was therefore careful that his poetic texts, or rather his songs, should constitute a measured narration of lived reality. He accompanied life in a rural environment among the people of the village, knew its customs and traditions, lived its hardships, and learned the meaning of life, the difficulty of

performing such labours, and the extent of their importance in an agrarian Kabyle society that draws its livelihood from them.

Nor did he overlook the role of woman in the life of the man, and indeed in Kabyle society as a whole; he sang of her with pride in what she accomplishes and in the effort she expends. From this passage we understand that she is gathering olives, and the poet seizes the occasion to bestow upon her attributes of the highest order: first, he likens her to the partridge, one of the most beautiful of birds, to which women are customarily compared; and second, he evokes her sweet voice, borne upon the wind as she performs her songs while working at one and the same time.

2. The Ordeals of Woman in Kabyle Song

To sing of women's ordeals is to summon up the suffering of women and the challenges they confront in the various domains of life, ordeals that may include difficult social circumstances, and their steadfastness in the face of challenges that are often complex and painful. Song, as a form of literary art, casts light on the concerns confronting women in numerous cultures and societies, from social and economic discrimination through to the physical and psychological violence arising from the pressures they endure. Here we shall attempt to bring out the various ordeals suffered by the Kabyle woman through what the women singers have expressed in their songs, for each singer has her own ordeals and her own suffering. Among them we find the singer Hnifa, whose songs served as a means of expressing and alleviating her suffering, as in her song "Azehriw" ("O My Fortune"):

*A zahr-iw anda tenzidh anda tenzidh
Di lekhhmis nagh di ldjem3a
Tizwara-inu d-tigujelt
Tagara-inu d-tudjla
Meltiyi dwa
Ghaf win a3zizen ar tettut
Tizwara-inu d-tigujelt
Tagara-inu d-tudjla*

Its meaning is as follows:

O my fortune, where were you sold, where were you sold?
On a Thursday, or on a Friday?
My beginning was orphanhood

And my end, widowhood
Show me the remedy
That I may forget the one dear to my heart
My beginning was orphanhood
And my end, widowhood

It emerges clearly from this song that the theme of fortune has commanded the attention of Kabyle women singers. It is among the fundamental themes, portrayed as an unstable element that shifts between evil and good, between joy and sorrow. This song, and others in the same vein, speaks of the effect of fortune upon the life of the individual, and of how it may be the cause of the human self's success or failure, of its joy or its grief. The theme recurs, moreover, because people commonly attribute responsibility for their suffering to their ill fortune, as is the case with the artist Hnifa in this passage: she sang at length of her ill fortune, which is announced from the very title of the song. She treats it by asking where it went and where it was sold, and when this fortune of hers departed. She further names the causes of her suffering: the first is her upbringing as an orphan from childhood, for Hnifa lived deprived of her father after his divorce from her mother, although he was still alive; the second cause of her misery is the loss of her husband, for she was unable to preserve her married life, having divorced three times, so that her marriage became a dead marriage. Worse than all this is that the man she loved and with whom she dreamed of a shared life left her and emigrated, so that she found no recourse but to appeal to others in the hope that they might possess a remedy through which she could forget. Hnifa thus demonstrates to us that song is a mirror reflecting reality, for she sang precisely what she lived.

In the same vein she sings her song "D zzehr-iw i d ssebba" ("My Fortune Is the Cause"), in which she says:

D zzehr-iw id-sebba
Ur kettdawin tebba
A zzehr-iw
A zahr-iw aka i-k-yehwa
Medden farhen nek ttrugh
Zzehr-iw yesseh am-lehwa
Ur s3igh hed ad-sahkugh
Tura zrigh ur s3igh dewa
S ledjruh-iw ur hellugh

*A zzehr-iw
Snagh wi-yidhelmen
Yenker mi skhedmagh n-lkhir
Snagh wi-yiregmen
Nigh-ed d smah ayakhir
D zzehr-iw i-ttikhedmen
Ad-elkhiq ur-yetikhir
Ur s-ttsemihagh i-zahr-iw
Icenfen ayen vghigh
Tafat-iw tugi adedheher
3efsagh ghef tirgett arghigh
Tazmrt-iw tettugaher
A lehvav wellah ar a3yigh g zzehr-iw*

This may be rendered as follows:

My fortune is the cause of my ordeal
Not even physicians can heal it
Thus you willed it, O my fortune
People rejoice while I weep
My tears have flowed like rain
I have no one in whom to confide
My wounds will never close
I know the one who wronged me
Ungrateful for all my kindness and my favour
My fortune is the cause
Injustice never departs from me
I shall not forgive my fortune
Which deprived me of what I desired
My light has vanished and no longer appears
I ran upon embers and was burned
My health is broken and spent
O my beloved ones, I am weary of this fortune of mine

Here the title of the song is sufficient indication of its content: the singer indicts her ill fortune as the principal cause of her misery, her suffering and her despair, complaining that she has found no cure and that even the physicians have failed. She blames ill fortune for everything, to the point of exhaustion and the depletion of her health, so that she finally

surrendered to it, since it did not allow her to live a dignified and happy life like other people, or at least like other women of her condition.

The song "Allah y-a-rebbi" ("O God, My Lord") by the singer Chérifa takes the form of a complaint at the suffering caused by the multitude of tasks and duties assigned to her. She felt their weight, likening herself to the beam that forms the foundation of the house and bears the whole of its load, and invoking the cause of her misery, which goes back to her having been orphaned of both parents and raised in the household of her maternal uncle. This led her to sing of her lived reality: she sees that she has lived a sorrowful life, acknowledging that she never witnessed a joyful day, indeed that she never encountered one at all, so that her youth passed like lightning along the roads without her feeling or seeing it. Her text runs as follows:

*Allah allah y-a-rebbi
3ebagh i g3eba wejgu
Itij felli id ijebbu
I tin ur nes3i imawlan
Meltiyi amek atezhu
A yemma menhu i-yid3an
Ur-ufigh ass yelhan
Ur-zhigh ur-frihagh
Temz-iw truh deg vardan*

Its meaning is:

God, God, O my Lord
I have borne what the house-beam bears
The sun rises upon me without ceasing
What of her who has no family?
How is she to rejoice?
O mother, who invoked evil upon me?
I have never met with a fair day
I have known neither delight nor joy
My youth has passed away upon the roads

Among the ordeals sung by Kabyle women singers is that of emigration, which robbed them of their husbands, as in the song "Am-la3youn" ("She of the Eyes") by the singer Chérifa:

Am-la3youn tettru
A yruh wergaz-is
Yeguma ad-teddu
Am-la3youn tettru
Teguma ad-tesver
Argaz-is iruh
Izger i levher
Am-la3youn tettru
Ghef zzehr-is dirit
Argaz-is iruh
Ye3cheq tarumit

And in its translated meaning:

She of the eyes is weeping
For the departure of her husband
Who refused to take her with him
She of the eyes is weeping
She can endure no longer
Her husband has gone
Across the seas
She of the eyes is weeping
Over her ill fortune
Her husband has gone
And has fallen in love with a French woman

Thus the artist Chérifa conveys to us, in a sweet melody, the torment and suffering of the woman occasioned by the departure of her husband, who left her and set out for France in search of a livelihood, while in reality he falls in love with a French woman and binds himself to her, as we observe in our own lived reality. In former times, moreover, it was held shameful to take one's wife to the land of exile, since this ran counter to Kabyle customs, traditions and common law, as we have witnessed among our grandparents, our relatives and our acquaintances.

3. The Roles of the Kabyle Woman

Among the most important images represented by Kabyle women singers in their songs is the role of woman in Kabyle society and her position within the family. One of the

finest examples is the song "Yemma Ta3zizt" ("My Dear Mother") by the singer Hnifa, in which she says:

*Yemma ta3zizt n tassa
Mi devdragh issm-im farhagh
Tussed nuva assa
Idh d wass fellam ad khedmagh
Yemma ur tess3i lemtel
Win i-tticuvan ulach
i-3zizagh i-yithemel
mi ghavagh ghef walen-is
izrri seg metti yuzel
d lessnin nek deg rebb-is
ala yidi idelha
ma-udhnagh yejrah wul-is
s lekhyal-is ul-iw yezha
seg wassmi ligh di dduh
yidi tezga mkul lwaqt*

This may be rendered as follows:

My dear mother
I rejoice greatly when I utter your name
Today my turn has come
I labour night and day for your sake
My mother has no equal
No one resembles her
I am dear to her, and how she loves me
Whenever I am absent from her
Her eyes shed tears
Her absence fills the house with sorrow
For years I lay in her lap
She had no occupation but me
If I fell ill, her heart was wounded
The very thought of her gladdens me
Since I was a child in the cradle
She has always been at my side

It is clear from the title that the theme of the song turns upon the mother in terms of her position within the family, her role in raising her children, her tenderness towards them, and her affection and love for them, as appears plainly in verses 6, 7, 8 and 14; and further upon the extent of her vigilance over her children, especially when they fall ill, and her anxiety when they are away from the house.

The artist likewise sang of woman's standing when she said, in the voice of the son: "My mother has no equal ... no one resembles her ... her absence fills the house with sorrow." Truly the mother's place has no equal and no one can take it, for she is tenderness itself and the pillar of the house, what we call in Kabyle *tigejdit*, the central pillar of the house; or, as the proverb has it: "*Tamettut d Isas, argaz d ajgu alemmas*" ("The woman is the foundation, the man the central beam")⁴. In the Kabyle cultural imaginary, woman is known for her devotion to raising her children, given that the man is outside the home or in exile, as we have already indicated. She therefore watches over them from birth until adulthood, since any conduct the child adopts will be attributed to his mother's upbringing. The son, for his part, becomes a tender and affectionate companion to his mother, and above all the daughter, who remains with her mother at all times, accompanying her in all her tasks and daily occupations.

Among the songs that likewise bring out the role and standing of woman is that of Djura, "*D nek ay iwumi qaren tametut*" ("I Am the One They Call Woman"), in which she says:

D nek id-itij n chetwa
D nek id-zarv n lharma
Gat sumer id-dughagh azzer
D nek id yelis n tirugza
D nek id ttakhssimt n reffu
D nek id-tamectaqt n 3egu
Hssu d nek id ttazzayrit
Dagi itekhleq tleli

And in its meaning:

I am the sun of the winter season
I am the enclosure of honour
My roots are of At Sumer

⁴Hacina Kherdoussi, *La chanteuse kabyle (voix et texte littéraire)*, p. 5.

I am the branch of knowledge
I am the daughter of valour
I am the enemy of anger
I am she who never tires
Know that I am the Algerian woman
In my arms freedom was born

We note that this passage is replete with metonymies suggesting the role and standing of woman. How could it be otherwise, when she is likened to the precious winter sun that all people seek? For the sun rarely appears in winter, and when it does it breathes life and joy into souls wearied by dark and clouded weather. The second verse symbolises the woman's honour and inviolability, whereupon the singer proceeds, in the verse that follows, to speak of the authenticity of the Kabyle woman, proud of her roots, her lineage and her forefathers, those men of valour in whom she takes pride. She then concludes with a series of qualities peculiar to the Kabyle woman: love, peace and contentment, her aversion to anger, and the fatigue that never overcomes her, for she is an active woman, full of vitality, who performs her work without weariness or tedium; and she is Algerian, and proud to be so.

Such were the roles of woman, ranging from the educator of her children to the performer of the various household tasks and the labours of the fields, all of which have made of her a woman of distinguished standing in Kabyle society and within her family, a standing attained through her noble and honourable qualities.

4. The Spaces of the Kabyle Woman

A further aspect portrayed by the women singers is embodied in the woman's own space. We begin with her traditional space in the song "D Aray-iw" by the artist Hnifa:

Assmi id-yussa zzehr-iw
Nek yufy-id di lekhla
Lkhalat megrent irden
Nek megragh tuzdla
Assmi id-yussa zzehr-iw
Nek yufay-id deg tegzirt
Lkhalat zudent irden
Nek la megragh tamejirt

Translation:

When my fortune came
It found me in the open country
Women like me were reaping barley
While I was reaping noxious weeds
When my fortune came
It found me at Tigzirt
Women like me were grinding barley
While I was reaping the tamejjirt weed

We note in this passage the singer's mention of the most important spaces of the Kabyle woman. The first is the open country (*lekhlā*), where the harvest takes place, for among the tasks of the Kabyle wife is to assist her husband in gathering the crops; and she is careful to be more sparing in consumption than the man, whence the Kabyle proverb: "*Tametut d tamda, argaz d targa*", that is, the woman is the one who economises more than the man. The second space is the house, where the grinding of barley is carried out. These are among the most frequently recurring spaces in Kabyle songs, appearing in several songs by the artist Hnifa, such as "Afus afus" and "Ta3eldjett".

Another space appears in the song of the artist Chérifa, "Aqlagh Nusad" ("Here We Have Come"), namely the space of the wedding, indicated by the words of the passage, in which she says:

Aqlagh nusad
Nusad angheni
A vav tmaghra
Rebbi akihenni
Aqlagh nusad anezhu

Which means:

Here we have come
We have come to sing
O master of the wedding
May God grant you happiness
We have come to rejoice

The space of the wedding, or *urar* in Kabyle, is a gathering of women at the home of the wedding party to celebrate their various joys, such as marriage, circumcision or birth. This cultural practice is of great importance in Kabyle communities, to the point that no

wedding can be held without *urar*. This space grants the woman the opportunity to sing, to dance and to rejoice in complete freedom, enabling her to disclose her feelings and to loosen the bonds of silence upon what has been repressed. Such is the *urar lkhalat*, the women's gathering, which it is impossible for a man to penetrate, and which possesses its own inviolability and sanctity.

Nor did the women singers forget the most important space of the woman, *tala*, that is, the spring, to which she resorts at least twice a day, morning and evening, to fetch water or to do the washing. The singer Hnifa addressed it in her song "Azzehr-iw" ("My Fortune"):

Zigh amgud n tchina
Ar yiri n tala
Neqlaght gher ledjanan yugh
Lukan maci d lehya
Ad nadigh lekhla
Ghef zzehr-iw

This may be rendered as follows:

I planted an orange tree
At the edge of the spring
I moved it to the orchard and it bore fruit
Were it not for my modesty
I would go searching the open country
For my fortune

The space of the spring, or fountain, is likewise among those spaces synonymous with woman: there she gives voice to what is repressed within her with complete ease, without a man intruding upon her.

II. Woman and Heritage

The wife is regarded as the pillar of the house, particularly in domestic labour, ensuring that it is clean and well ordered. Although Kabyle society is an agrarian society requiring abundant labour, the husband does not contemplate binding himself to several women at once, for this is held in disfavour among the Kabyles, who do not encourage polygamy unless some excuse imposes it, such as sterility, the wife's failure to bear male children, or her disobedience to the orders of her mother-in-law. From childhood the girl is raised to embody the image of the traditional Kabyle woman, and she is treated with greater

harshness so as to be prepared to bear humiliation in her husband's house, while she remains marginalised in the house of her own family. Her mother strives to instil in her the limits, the licit and the illicit, and thus "the young Kabyle woman internalised the essential principles of the feminine art of living and of a bearing at once physically and morally becoming, the two being inseparable ... acquiring little by little, through unconscious imitation as much as through overt obedience, the best manner of fastening her belt or her hair, of moving or holding still this or that part of her body while walking, presenting her face or directing her gaze"⁵. The belt, in the Kabyle region, is a necessity, and it is held shameful for a girl to go out without it, since it is "one of the signs of the closure of the female body, together with the arms folded across the chest, the legs held together and the garment knotted, which still impose themselves upon women today ... and the belt that binds also symbolises the sacred barrier protecting the vagina, socially constituted as a sacred object"⁶. The mother likewise strives to teach her daughter not to raise her voice in the presence of men, and not to appear before them except out of necessity; and the girl is trained in domestic work from an early age. Her life, accordingly, "does not develop according to the three stages known in the West: childhood, puberty, marriage"⁷; rather, in Kabyle society in particular, the family contemplates marrying her off before she reaches the age of majority, so that the Kabyle girl passes through two stages only: childhood, and then puberty followed by marriage. Her mother instils in her obedience to her husband and patience within the conjugal home, teaching her to refrain from taking part in conversation and from divulging the secrets of her household, and forbidding her to leave the house for the houses of the neighbours, all of which is manifest in many folk proverbs, for example:

Qim deg uxam-im ad-yiyzef rebbi lemr-im

"Stay in your house and God will lengthen your life."

Folk literature has thus occupied a distinguished and important position in Kabyle, Algerian and Arab societies, societies that take care of their cultural heritage, transmitted orally from generation to generation, in order to ensure its survival. This is manifest in the multiplicity of oral folk genres such as tales, proverbs, myths, riddles and poems, the last of these being among the literary forms most expressive of human concerns, preoccupations and feelings, and an indivisible part of heritage. The credit for preserving these literary genres belongs to woman; perhaps the greatest evidence of this is the role played by

⁵Pierre Bourdieu, *Al-Haymana al-dhukriyya [Masculine Domination]*, trans. Salman Qafarani, Arab Organisation for Translation, 1st ed., Beirut, 2009, p. 52.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 35.

Shahrazad in the Thousand and One Nights, in which she demonstrated, on the one hand, the role of woman in preserving folk heritage, and, on the other, the extent of the influence exercised by the art of storytelling upon individuals since antiquity, and upon men in particular, after she succeeded in transforming the outlook and the thinking of King Shahrayar with regard to womankind. Shahrazad was able to save "the women of her sex from this bodily violence through her skilful use of the word, as though language ... were able to save women from bodily violence and to absolve them by the word of the curse their female sex had inflicted upon them"⁸. This is further evidence of the importance of oral literature in daily and literary life, not to mention the great moral that each tale carries at its close. All of this is owed to woman, who has cared for the oral tale since the beginning of history, telling it to her children or her grandchildren as they formed a circle around the *kanun* (the hearth), preserving it into our own age and transmitting it from generation to generation, so that "women remain the mothers of civilisation and the mothers of popular culture"⁹. And yet, regrettably, whatever woman does and however much she toils, she remains, and always returns to, where she was: marginalised, occupying second place after the male, who invariably occupies the centre.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can only affirm that Kabyle song, and women's song in particular, is a mirror reflecting the reality of the Kabyle woman. It serves as an outlet through which she gives voice to the various concerns that occupy her: beauty, in which she is likened to the most beautiful of beings and creatures symbolising beauty: the bird, the partridge, the lioness, the moon, without forgetting her captivating charms. It was likewise the most fitting means of disclosing her suffering and the ordeals to which she was subjected, so as to bring herself relief, and above all what she endured as a result of her husband's emigration and the bitterness of exile. Thanks to song, too, she was able to make her voice heard and to assert her standing within a conservative society governed by customs and traditions. A final point we draw from this study is that the women singers have made the listener acquainted with their various spaces, in which they find repose precisely because these spaces lie beyond the reach of the male.

References

⁸Buthayna Shaaban, *Miat am min al-riwaya al-nisaiyya al-Arabiyya* [One Hundred Years of Arab Women's Fiction], 1st ed., Dar al-Adab, Beirut, 1999, p. 45.

⁹Ibid., same page.

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