

## **Literary Imagination in Desert Novels Writing Examples by Ibrahim Al Koni**

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### **Abstract**

we attempted to answer the questions we posed at the outset of this study. How the author avoided the ethnographic trap, the political pamphlet, and ideological leveling while making the desert novel a literary alternative to official history and exotic curiosity. Then we showed how he was able to invest his culture and background in order to create a desert novel. And in order to respond to these two questions, we devised two strategies: The formal level, in which the author has inserted mythical stories, religious discourse, and sorcery prophecies. Despite its richness and longevity in the cultural memory, Arab oral literature has been viewed as a minor genre. Not to mention the etiological narrative, which is a biblical narrative used by the exegete's precursors in the Book of Genesis, the Gospels, cultural legends and other ethnographic fields. Moreover, this literary genre has been the scene of several novelistic experiments, but Al Koni's experience remains unique. Consequently, according to what we have mentioned, this novelistic experience emerged from his conception of the desert both as a mythical space, and a lost paradise where he invested myths, intertextuality, sacred texts, and etiological narrative.

**Keywords:** Desert novel; imaginary; intertextuality; myth; paradise lost

### **Introduction**

In his project 'Desert Novel', which qualifies it as an unprecedented undertaking, Ibrahim Al Koni attempts to denounce the image dependent on the colonial legacy, and presents himself as a precursor of the desert novel in the Arab World. Despite the fact that his works seem to be simultaneous with Abderrahmane Munif's pentalogy (Munif, 1987), *Mudun al-milḥ: Cities of Salt* and *Madīnat al-riyāḥ the City of the Winds* written by the Mauritanian Moussa Ould Ebnou (Ebnou, 1996). In contrast to what Westerners believe, he categorically denies that Arabs wrote a literature of the desert even though they lived there. However, he considers his experience to be an unprecedented project. However, to be objective, let us point out that the desert, outside the world of novels, and far from exotic curiosity, is absolutely nothing but a harsh, austere space. A reign of emptiness and anachoresis, of perdition and death, seen in a bivalent way by the blue man, proud rebel, chivalrous and, at the same time, plunderers and slavers and refractory to any external attempt to bring order. Since this duality results from the ambiguous relationship maintained with them and the other. Their rich and endangered heritage reflects an exceptional fascination with a way of life in total harmony with a harsh and demanding environment. However, from a novelistic point of view, the crossing of the desert by the Tuareg is but an uninterrupted journey undertaken by the ancestors from the dawn of time, and even a journey of humanity towards the unknown, to infinity. This work therefore aims at a better

understanding of the Tuareg universe, space, myth, desert ethics, language, sacred discourse, and rock engravings. This will allow us to approach this allegorical space. Moreover, we have chosen to focus on this corpus for various reasons. First of all, the formal level, where the author invests myths in his novels, which shows the productive tension between the notions of structure and literary myth, a tension that becomes the abundant source of polyphonic signifiers. And the thematic level, where the author practices intertextuality with multiple references to Tuareg culture, and introduces what Mikhail Bakhtin calls plurilingualism and polyphony. For this reason, our work aims to initiate a reflection on the particularity of this novelistic genre according to the following hypotheses: The desert novel: according to the author, evokes an allegorical space, and a native place of the author. The author often draws a parallel between the caravan routes and the paths of life; the journey of humanity towards the unknown. Therefore, he imagines it as a metaphor of destiny. Although he lives in Moscow, Warsaw and Switzerland, where the snow floats on the mountains and the lake, he has never forgotten to look at the dunes of his Sahara from within in his masterpieces- Mythical and Edenic paradise: an astonishing part of Heaven and earthly paradise, namely cities and even republics of disproportionate dimensions, arouse nostalgia for loss. with regard the intertextuality, Al Koni introduces a type of Intertextuality that M. Riffaterre qualifies as "obligatory" whose diegesis is covered with a mythical dimension, which clearly reveals the founding scenes essentially based on biblical mythologies and Jewish Christian and Muslim beliefs. Here we try to provide answers to the questions that we propose as guidelines for this work. Here are some of them: to what extent can the desert novel be considered an alternative to official history and exotic curiosity? to what extent can it be considered as a literary testimony against ideological levelling, political pamphlet, ethnographic trap, and the rescue of a culture on borrowed time? And what are the literary and aesthetic characteristics in the light of the mythical and intertextual investment? Has he succeeded in creating a rich imaginary, in investing his culture in the novelistic framework by giving it an aesthetic and universal dimension, and in transforming his heritage by constructing a new genre of fantastic novels, and founding a novel of the desert? So we opt here for Gilbert Durand (Durand, 2016), one of the precursors of research on the imaginary. He forged tools to study the configurations of images specific to individual creators, social agents or cultural categories. His work on myths and symbols, which draws on many disciplines, can be read as a vast undertaking to rehabilitate the imaginary. And as a substratum of mental life, and it is fat of a religion. And as far as Intertextuality is concerned, we have opted for Mikhail Bakhtin in terms of plurilingualism and polyphony, and Julia Kristeva and Michel Riffaterre in terms of Intertextuality, which the author practices with other multiple references to his mother culture. But it must be clear that this research, far from it, cannot shed light on all the creative springs of this author. Therefore, we will limit ourselves here to a well-defined part of the corpus according to the following axes:

### **1. An idyllic space:**

The desert novel does not aim to invent the desert as a real space like those of the etymological and semantic precisions in Arabic lexicon: *bāyḍā* "بيداء", *bāḍiyāh* "بادية" *bāriyāh* "برية",... *ārāa* "عراء" *qāfir* "قفّر"... or from an exotic point of view, where Westerners see the desert crossing as a meditation on the time of origins, and a naked space, volie of rock, sand and light as described by the desert surveyor and writer Theodore Monod: "Nothing, the naked desert, a veil of space, rock, sand and light with which the wind of the spirit clothes itself to play at the desert and the walker" (Monod & Durou, Déserts, 1988, p. 55). In other words, according to this vision, the desert is merely a space where the immensity of space is reduced to time, where time seems to stretch to infinity, back to the beginning of the world. Whereas the contemplation of the vast expanse allows the traveller to imagine the time before creation, to glimpse the dawn of time. Consequently, the desert, in the imagination, is a space of nothingness and of unheard-of radical

otherness, that which separates the human from the non-human, and which, through its timelessness, stimulates reflections on both the time before the appearance of the human and on the ultimate otherness: death. If the Sahara, the greatest of deserts, was first glimpsed as a 'world without traces' (Bouvet, 2013, p. 155). This nihilistic vision, in a way, has long been the main angle in the West through which the desert is viewed, as a nothingness on earth, and is confirmed by Saint-Exupéry the pilot stranded in the middle of the Sahara: 'And I meditated on my condition, lost in the desert and threatened, naked between the sand and the stars, far from the poles of my life by too much silence. For I knew that I would spend days, weeks, months trying to reach them, if no plane found me, if the Moors did not slaughter me tomorrow. Here, I no longer owned anything in the world. I was nothing but a mortal lost between sand and stars, aware only of the sweetness of breathing... And yet I discovered myself full of dreams (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, pp. 63-64). For Elliott Colla, between two sharply opposing world forces. To the South lies a world of myth, magic and superstition. It is a place where the caravans carrying blue cloth, slaves and gold originate. It is a place of cyclical time—the rising and falling of dynasties and the ebb and flow of Islam [...] To the North lie the distant Arab cities of the coast and after that the sea. It is a place associated with mechanized technology and warfare, the direction from which come the ceaseless French and Italian onslaughts. It is a place of permanent habitation, whose calendar is linear. But In Al-Koni's terms, the desert is the "motherland" of "mystery", but the desert sun is also the fatherland of the most lucid vision of truth (Moolla, 2015, p. 193)

But in Al Koni's fictional imagination the desert is an allegory, a dream in which the creator abandons the sensible real and invests the invisible world, even if it means ceasing to exist above the snowy mountain lakes, and surrendering himself to his inner desert, for what is important in the matter is that "the poet is a wandering creature until he has trodden the sands of his own lost island, the shores of his own great desert, which do not lie within the limits of his own Great Desert.

In this sense, art is that which is concealed, true creativity lies in the ability to conceal not to reveal:

"الشاعر مخلوق ضائع إذا لم يدرك شيطان جزيرته الضائعة ضفاف صحرائه الكبرى التي لا وجود لها في حدود صحرائه الكبرى (الكوني أ.، في طلب الناموس المفقود، 1999، صفحة 13)"

So Al Koni's Desert is not an empty, harsh space, but an allegorical place. He is like other creators always looking for a metaphorical real where to unload his burdens. He believes that when he started writing about the desert, it represented a major challenge to the literary theory that considers the city as the mother of the novel, but he later discovered that the city is not the mother of the novel, but rather the human being is the mother of the novel. Wherever he has settled and travelled, he makes a novel, whatever space it takes place in, it is his own epic, because of its ambiguity, its mystique, its symbolism and its mystery, which constitutes a reservoir from which the work of fiction is fed. But he does not deny that the city, with its relationships and complexities, provides the novelist with a ready-made work, which is characterised by the rhythm of life and the people there. He proves that when he wrote the Mediterranean epic, which consists of six parts and deals with the cities of the north and south of the Mediterranean, it was also a challenge, but it was an easy work, if we compare it to the desert novel, where everything is ready, because it cannot be compared to a single work on the desert. Insofar as he considers writing a single desert novel as a miracle, let alone an epic novel with parts about the desert, because writing here is similar to writing about nothingness, but this challenge can be overcome when writing about the symbols of the desert and not the abstract desert as nature as a place, because it is a metaphysical place, a place that has migrated from the place. Because the most important conditions for a place are water, a symbol of stability, and

the desert rejects stability. Despite the association of the desert with the Arab imagination throughout history, it is still considered by many as an arid and dry place incapable of hosting any life, even though each of us carries our desert within and with us (Dib, 1998, p. 19).

## **2.The desert is a lost paradise:**

The meaning of the desert in literature implicitly suggests paradise lost, sin and wandering, and Adam's exodus from Paradise. To speak of the desert is to speak of the lost paradise evoked by the image of Adam during his expulsion. Moreover, the book of Exodus quotes that God inspired Moses to say to Pharaoh: "Free my people to worship me in the desert." The desert is therefore a sacred space for worship. Therefore, the chosen people had to cross the Sinai desert to be purified of polytheism before entering the land. thus, the desert is a place of purification, or exile. In the Qur'anic teworship and purification.

But it is also a place of liberation. It is associated with myth, which is considered the soul of the desert. A desert without myth is absolute nothingness. However, myth is not just a symbolic rubble, for it stores the cultural history of the desert spanning thousands of years, for here a very rich culture was born (Hallaq, Ostle, & Wild, 2002, p. 97).

And for these reasons, Gilbert Durand, one of the precursors of research on the imaginary, opted for the constitutive functions of the imaginary in works of art. He started from an observation: since its origins, Western civilization has devalued the image, it has destroyed it, or at least distrusted it, and therefore, in this sense, it is the substratum of mental life, a constitutive dimension of humanity. With regard to literary and artistic creation, he notes that "Art provides the imperfect and mortal human condition with a kind of enhancement in dignity. It is full of a religion" (Durand, Beaux-arts et archépytes, 1989, p. 24).

Generally speaking, the function of the artist is like that of the alchemist par excellence when he transfigures, transmutes a coarse matter or a metal. Indeed, the function of the poet must be that of Baudelaire: "you gave me your mud and I turned it into gold" (Durand, La création littéraire. Les fondements de la création littéraire, 1990, pp. 391-400). Whereas, the idea of symbol remains dialectical: its operation is relation, that is, both difference and unity. In poetic creation, the symbol is not a process, it is a fact. It is not instrumental, but central. The symbol is more than a simple metaphor, which is an imagined thing put for something else that alone possesses the meaning (Serraf, 1965, p. 106). It seems here that the author obviously agrees with Durand: true creativity lies in the ability to conceal rather than to reveal, which confirms, moreover, that the desert for him is a homeland and at the same time an allegory where the real and the imaginary intermingle and interpenetrate: "My desert is a homeland, my desert is an allegory " (الكوني ا، صحرائي الكبرى، 1998، صفحة 9) صحرائي وطن، صحرائي استعارة

## **3.The mythical investment**

The mythic investment in the novel shows a productive tension between the notions of structure and literary myth, a tension that becomes the abundant source of polyphonic signifiers: "Myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at 'taking off' from the linguistic ground on which it keeps rolling" (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, p. 210). In this sense, C.L. Strauss asserts that myth is language" and suggests that it can be approached in the same way as language and can be approached by the same structuralist methods used to approach language, he also proposed a structuralist theory of mythology; he states: "myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning practically succeeds in 'taking off' from the linguistic ground on which it keeps rolling. Whereas literature was practically constituted by what Strauss calls the "degradation" of the original language of myth into narratives structured around the "myths" that composed it. This gives literature a rich and abundant pool of thematic sets that the writer will invest by proceeding to "unravel" the myths.

The author has exploited this procedure in his writing, which also allows him to go back to the original narrative of his mother culture, inserting them as they are into his discursive practices.

Now, thematically, we can note that Alkoni's imagination is multiplied by mythical representations, even Edenic, an astonishing part of Heaven and earthly paradise, namely cities and even republics of disproportionate dimensions, drooling predatory, greedy and devastating man who has not known how to keep this sacred place, as time goes by, he revives in himself a nostalgia for loss. Moreover, Imzād's laments increase his hot tears accompanied by the thrills of poetesses and the songs of lost nomads: 'You will only love the Tassili if you can weep with love for the Tassili. For it was once an astonishing part of Heaven where djinns, men, ibexes, lizards, acacia and tamarisk coexisted in the middle of a paradise watered by eternal rivers. But it was man who started it. It was the man who betrayed the pact and raised his hand against his brother. Then he harassed the jinn, chased the ibex, skinned the lizard and broke the limbs of the acacia and the tamarisk. Then the sky thundered with anger, the earth shook and the Tassili was separated from the heavens. The eternal springs dried up. And the man turned back alone in the middle of the void. Cry then! Weep for the Tassili and pray that it becomes a part of heaven again':

"ولن تحب تاسيلي إن لم تبك حبا على تاسيلي، لأن تاسيلي كانت في يوم من الأيام جزءاً مدهشاً من السماء. تعايش فيها الجن والإنس والودّان والضبّ والطلح والأثل في فردوس تجري في وديانه سيول خالدة. ولكن الإنسان هو الذي بدأ. الإنسان هو الذي خان العهد ورفع يده على أخيه الإنسان. ثم كاد للجن، واصطاد الودّان، وذبح الضب، وقطع أوصال الطلح، والأثل ففقدت السماء بالغضب وتزلزلت الأرض، وانفصلت تاسيلي عن السماوات. جفت الينابيع الخالدة، ووجد الإنسان نفسه وحيداً في العراء، فابك، ابك على تاسيلي وتوسل أن تعود جزءاً من السماء" (الكوني إ.، وطن الرؤى السماوية، 1997، الصفحات 60-61).

There are many examples, especially recurring ones, of the mythical dimension in this novelistic imaginary, namely the search for the hidden oasis, which are frequently repeated in the novelist's works where the author alludes to Atlantis or Paradise Lost: "Let us take as an example the legend of Waw It repeats itself to express the idea of Atlantis or Paradise Lost. It takes the form of a lost oasis that appears, from time to time, to certain virtuous migrants before disappearing. It is real and unreal at the same time" (Benmeftah, L'Univers mythique touareg dans l'œuvre d'Ibrahim Al Koni : pour une poétique du « Roman du désert », 2010, p. 42).

While their quest is a founding motif, and their occurrence is almost total in all the texts, representing the main, most significant and most personal task of any Targui. The majority of Saharans spend their lives dreaming of the end without ever glimpsing it or even imagining its quintessence, the roads leading to it are almost impossible to know, its locations seem to move like mirages. It is a painful and obsessive mission that is almost impossible to achieve, because few of the chosen ones have chosen exile and renunciation for a long time, and only a few of them have managed to reach this legendary oasis. Even this exceptional vision requires terrible suffering to achieve it. Because Waw, indeed, never to the one who desires it by seeking it, but it can sometimes be the price of a life of permanent wandering. And only when the wanderer loses all hope, and drains every drop of water from his body, every drop of blood, and sheds his last shreds of clothing under the burning sun. It is at this moment that the hidden oasis comes into view:

"In this hell, at the end of this desperate march, the mirage renounces its legendary severity and gives birth in the darkness of the eye blinded by long thirst, to the spectre of a forest of palm trees ... And the horizon discovers another dimension of this blurred entity, the seductive body that promises water, appearing to the traveller in the guise of long, dark legs whose high heads came together in amorous fusion, as if they were holding conciliabula around an unknown secret": "في هذا الجحيم، خلال المسيرة البائسة، يتوقف السراب عن عبوسه الخالد، ويلد، في عتمات العين التي أعمأها العطش الطويل، شبحاً لغابة النخيل... يكشف الأفق عن مساحة أخرى من الجرم الغامض، الجسم الفاتن الذي يعد بالماء، ويتهيأ للسابلة في سيقان غامضة تلتئم قممها العليا في التحام، يرى من البعد حميماً، كأنها تتداخل لتتشاور وتتدارس سرا مجهولاً (الكوني إ.، صحرائي الكبرى، 1998، صفحة 128).

When the Targui arrives at his longed-for destination; after his last renunciation, the hidden oasis surprises him by opening its doors and receives him like a newborn, at that moment he feels reborn and finds life and happiness, a situation of which the majority of Saharans spend their lives dreaming. While it is only the one who has crossed the wadi of suffering that penetrates:

"Only those who have crossed the wadi of suffering and found themselves born a second time will enter Waw. Lose yourself and you will find yourself"

لا يدخل واو إلا من عبر وادي الألم وولد مرتين . ضيع نفسك تجدها ! (الكوني إ.، المجوس، 1992، صفحة 313)..

So, the chosen ones in this trial die a first time, then they wake up inside Waw, and find themselves on feather beds, surrounded by cushions of down and fine cotton. Taken care of by helpful houris bringing in procession of delicious food on golden trays and serving slightly intoxicating drink in golden goblets inlaid with precious stones:

"Then ... the lost one felt hungry. He then thought of expressing his desire, but no sooner had he opened his mouth than a procession of beautiful women appeared, dressed in transparent veils with multicoloured reflections. Lightly coloured silks, green scarves covering their hair and cascading over their shoulders and firm breasts. Long red dresses, equally transparent, enveloped their tall figures, up to their ankles, which were encircled by solid gold bracelets, while necklaces of shimmering pearls adorned their necks, silver bracelets their graceful wrists and gold earrings encrusted with blue gems shone in their ears:

ثم أحس التائه بأنه جوعان . فخطر له أن يجاهر برغبته ولكن لم يكذ يفتح فمه حتى أقبل طايور من الحسان ، يرتدين لباسا شفافا كغلايات ملونة . حرير شفاف ، ملون. يغطين شعورهن بقطع خضراء، تنسدل على مناكبهن وتتدلى على الصدور النافرة. الفساتين حمراء، شفافة أيضا، طويلة، تستر قاماتهن الطويلة حتى الرسغين. في أرجلهن خلاخيل كثيفة من الذهب، حول رقابهن عقود من الجواهر اللامعة، المتألئة الألوان. في أيدهن الرشيقة أساور من فضة، ومن الأذان تتدلى أقراط من ذهب مطعمة بأحجار كريمة زرقاء (الكوني إ.، المجوس، 1992، صفحة 313).

But, this oasis appears as a place and allegorical, both real, that we can only know its description from the songs of the blind man aède, the griot poet or troubadour, the Homeric avatars who recite stories quoted in the lost book *Ānhī*. There is also the role of the bard *al-naḍīr*, a travelling poet charged with announcing the happy news so that the whole Sahara knows and celebrates the mythical city: the pearl of the desert, "the nipple of the earth". The Sultan, driven out of his capital Timbuktu, has chosen to make it even more beautiful and richer. However, the bard also announces warnings by recalling cities that were safe, quiet, its boon came to it from everywhere in abundance, then it rose ungrateful to the benefits. They brought a taste of violence, of hunger and fear. While the reader knows nothing about this oasis, with a prophetic voice of a poet, who claims that Waw was discovered by two lost travellers, were about to be annihilated after removing their tatters, and embracing the earth by crawling on the sand and freed from all pride.

This allegorical development of Plato, allows the author to invest the conceptual opposition of two antithetical notions of unity and otherness that Plato alluded to in his myth of Atlantis, the sunken continent because of its corrupted wealth, as well as the Athenian democracy in Plato's political philosophy, to a fundamentally earthy archaic Athens (Naquet, 2005, p. 198).

Consequently, given its tyranny and ingratitude, the prosperous Atlantis was swallowed up and begotten by the sea: "this earthly, wise and prosperous Athens was being transformed into a maritime power, a trader (Plato, as we know, repelled all traffic) and a conqueror in the undiscipline, the struggles and the lies of the merchants. The otherness generated by the sea disintegrated, like a huge tidal wave, the unity of the wise city whose men lived in absolute community, according to the principles of *The Republic*. This is exactly what Al Koni's epic novel *The Magi* is about. The intrusion of otherness will be symbolised here by the cursed metal, gold, for which men kill each other, peoples wage war against each other and civilisations are built and disappear, like the New Waw of the novel (meftah, 2010)

#### 4.The etiological narrative

The etiological narrative is a biblical narrative per excellence used by the exegete's precursors in the book of Genesis (Gunkel, 1919, p. 164) as well as on etiological narratives in the Gospels, cultural legends. It is also used in other ethnological, cultural and geological fields (Grappe, 1992, p. 180). Speaking of myths and legends, Paul Veyne writes: "This genealogical literature told of aitia, of origins, that is to say, of the establishment of the world order... History is an enquiry into what is; aitiology, on the other hand, guesses what remains hidden... Its explanatory method consists in explaining a thing by its beginning..." (Veyne, 1981, p. 16). Nojgaard goes on to say: "The purpose of etiology is to expose a certain chain of actions in the distant past and then to draw the consequences that explain a given phenomenon of reality to the reader. Etiology thus works on two temporal sections (Nojgaard, 1964, p. 156).

The author has used this type of story to refer often to the origin, which manifests itself in the form of dreams, longing and so on loss. Such as *The Loss of Waw*, which is always accompanied by a consoling feeling, relates a reference to the mythical as well as the cosmogony that presents the construction of the places of the continents in the same way as Atlantis in the Greek myths, of which the Berbers would be the descendants before their tragic disappearance by sinking, or would be buried in the sands according to other evocations, which also remains one of the avatars of the hegemonic madness. Indeed, the duality of the desert sea remains a repetitive metaphor in his narrative, visibly relating a monotheistic narrative following the example of the Abrahamic religions, but remaining closer to the mystical vision.

Moreover, the long walk in the desert, according to some evocations, their main objective is to watch for and interpret signs under the injection of exile that precipitated them from their original homeland, the sky. When the augur arrives while crossing the fields of tumuli and the tombs of the ancestors, recalls the stories about the origins of the Tuareg according to the *Nāmūs*:

"الرواية الأولى تقول إنهم نزلوا الصحراء امتثالاً لأمر النفي من وطنهم الأول في السماء، والرواية الثانية أكدت أنهم أقبلوا على بعد أن أضاعوا "واو" والرواية الثالثة هي التي قالت إنهم أقبلوا من جزائر البحر بعد أن ابتلع مدتهم المعلقة بين القناطر" (الكوني، إ.، واو الصغرى، 1997، صفحة 142).

"The first account says that they descended into the desert under the injunction of exile which precipitated them from their first homeland, Heaven.

The second states that they entered the desert after losing Waw; the third is that they came from the islands of the sea after the ocean had

This clearly relates the wanderings of the Hebrews in the desert of Egypt, and their exit to the promised land for forty years. Similarly, Al Koni focuses on the spiritual significance of the desert crossing recounted in the *Nāmūs*, the lost book, which characterises the desert as a necessary stage of purification and liberation from sin and scandal after wearing the litham. The only salvation is wandering in the realm of idols that enslave men to desire and vanity. He even describes it as a Promethean world where only what is human has a place, and immerses itself in immanence, and also feels itself in this divine world, which is nothing but a transposition of their human society. And as we pointed out earlier, wandering is synonymous with freedom where the mountains plot, the jinn move in tribes and the desert is a hell of goodwill. If wandering has a long history in the republic of letters (Casanova, 2008), it has its origins in the distant, but here it is the parallel of freedom.

Moreover, this recourse to mythology, and even the etiological narrative, is not a simple identity display, among others, intended to give local colour to African literary works. Above all, it allows authors to achieve an original creation by avoiding the trap of total acculturation when they are led to express themselves in a language and genre foreign to their culture of origin (Derive, 2005).

And in a prophetic voice, the bard announces that he has delivered the final message: 'I wanted to say that I have delivered my final message to you, and that I accept the crossing as Certitude.

أردت أن أقول إنني أكملت لكم وصيتي، ورضيت لكم العبور يقينا" (الكوني ا.، البحث عن المكان الضائع، 2003، صفحة (221).

Drawing a parallel with what Surah Al-Maidah clearly quotes:

"اليوم أكملت لكم دينكم وأتممت عليكم نعمتي ورضيت لكم الإسلام ديناً (المائدة(3))."

This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.

As well as, The ultimate purpose of life is death, and death too is the ultimate purpose of death. "غاية الحياة الموت، والموت أيضاً، غاية الحياة" (الكوني ا.، في طلب الناموس المفقود، 1999).

And in the context of curse and ingratitude, the narrator quotes

That day the forces of the Unknown struck the Mythical Kingdom and annihilated it forever. And the few survivors of this strange battle lost their minds or sank into eternal silence and amnesia :

وهو اليوم الذي ضربت في القوة المجهولة المملكة الأسطورية وأزالتها مرة واحدة. وكل من يبقى على قيد الحياة بعد تلك المعركة العجيبة تدروش وفقد العقل أو لزم الصمت الأبدي وأصيب بفقدان الذاكرة (الكوني ا.، المجوس، 1992).

And when the narrator brings up the problem of cosmogony, the augur then recalls the three stories about the origins of the Tuareg as the Nāmūs relate them: to a Sufi vision of the ability to make oneself invisible to the being or object of the sacred in the face of the danger of defilement or degradation:

"No one knows the limits of wandering. No one knows the spatial or temporal limits of this fate. When did the exile from Waw occur? When was the Saharan torn from his roots, from his origins? Where did the journey of suffering begin? Where does the legendary continent called Sahara begin? Where do the boundaries of the desert end?

لا احد يعرف حدود الضياع. لا احد يعرف حدود هذا القدر لا في الزمان ولا في المكان. متى تم الخروج من "واو"؟ متى انفصل الصحراوي عن المنبت، الأصل؟ أين بدأت مسيرة الشقاء؟ أين تبدأ القارة الخرافية المسماة صحراء؟ أين تنتهي حدود العراء؟ (الكوني ا.، الربة الحجرية، بيروت).

## 5. The Intertextuality

### 5.1 the hypotext: founding sacred texts

For Genette, the object of poetics is not the text, considered in its singularity, but transtextuality, or the textual transcendence of the text. Roughly speaking, transtextuality is defined as "that which places a text in relation, manifest or secret, with another text" (Genette, 1982, p. 7). And to establish the basic meaning of this concept, it is usual to go back to the etymology which defines the Latin prefix "inter-" in the concept intertextuality indicates the reciprocity of exchanges, like other words: interconnection, interference...and by its radical derived from the Latin "textere", textuality qualifies the text as "weaving", weft (Limat-Letellier, 1998, p. 17). which is, in fact, a semantic redoubling of the idea of network, of intersection. Thus, it is characterised by the generation of a text from one or more previous texts, whereas writing is an interaction by external and pre-existing statements. It refers to cognitive issues, methodical literary elaborations that are currently very common. What allows it to be widely deployed as a field of research has given rise to variable interpretations, terminological reworking and rapprochement with other disciplines.

From a terminological point of view, it was Julia Kristeva who coined this concept in 1966, in two articles included in *Semiotikè. Recherche pour une sémanalyse* (1969): "Le mot, le dialogue et le roman", dated by the author in 1965, and "le texte clos", dated 1966-67. These last publications highlighted the Kristevian concept which became an essential reference in the context elaborated by Bakhtin's work at the articulation of linguistics and literary theory. Kristeva was able to bring together the coincidence between the horizontal axis (subject-



recipient) and the vertical axis (text-context) to reveal that the text is really only a crossing of texts: "...the horizontal and vertical axes coincide to reveal a major fact: the text is a crossing of texts where at least one other text is read. This makes her substitute Bakhtin's two terms dialogue and ambivalence respectively, which were not clearly distinguished. Even if he lacks rigour, Bakhtin remains rather the first founder who drew attention to this phenomenon in literary theory: every text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text. Instead of the notion of intersubjectivity, intertextuality is introduced (Kristéva, 1969, pp. 145-146)

According to Genette's equation, it turns out that the Konian diegesis is covered with this mythical dimension which clearly reveals the founding scenes, based essentially on biblical mythologies and Jewish, Christian and Muslim beliefs, whose original scenes (Bible, Koran, and desert mythology) which are indeed founding texts of the sacred in humanitarian life, which is evident in the epigraphs of his masterpieces, as well as in other philosophical, literary and historical quotations, and even within his corpora. This also makes their writing a veritable melting pot, fusing myth and fiction, the imaginary and the real, of which the Fault, the Fall, and the Exile appear eminently.

It is therefore appropriate to illuminate the parallels between biblical and Qur'anic lexicons and verses, such as the parallel between the fate of Adam and Eve, the first human beings created by God and driven out of the Garden of Eden, and that of Anchor Mandām who was driven out of his tower of Waw after his disobedience to the prescriptions of the Supreme Sultan. Therefore, he and his descendants were condemned to wander in the desert, and here are some examples:

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasant to the sight, and that it was precious for opening the understanding, she took of its fruit, and ate of it; and she gave some also to her husband, who was with her, and he ate of it" (The Book of Genesis, 3).

And regarding Adam's fate and their placement in the Garden of Eden, the Bible quotes:

"And the Lord God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it.

"16 And the Lord commended Adam's god, saying, "Of all the trees of paradise eat more, 17 and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil do not eat them, for you are one day eaten, die. 18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone. So I will make him a helper like him. 19 And the mountain of the Lord of the earth and all the wild animals and all the birds of the air I brought to Adam to see what they invited, and all called the same life of Adam. 20 So Adam called by the names of all the beasts, and the birds of the air, and all the wild animals. As for him, he found no equal help. 21 Then the Lord God put Adam to sleep, and he fell asleep, and took one of his ribs and filled it with flesh. 22 And the Lord God formed the rib which he had taken from Adam into a woman, and brought her to Adam. 23 And Adam said, This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She is called Woman, because she was taken from a man. 24 Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and they become one body. 25 And they were both naked, Adam and his wife, and they were not ashamed. (The Bible, 1987, pp. 5-6).

Similarly, in a chapter of one of his famous novels the Magi, the author introduced intra and extra diegetic elements to set scenes, including the duality of story time and time where the reader can clearly distinguish this scene from the rest of the novel, and discovers that there are common symbols between the sacred narrative and Tuareg mythology. And here is the example of the snake that symbolizes betrayal and deceit, and that has effectively been metaphorized to signify the wickedness and betrayal of the woman:

"Why did you tell her when you knew she was a serpent? Woe is me! Woe is me!

Why didn't you tell me about the ban? Do you not know that the serpent does not rest in the womb of the female until it saturates her curiosity by violating the secret and committing the forbidden?"

-ويلي! ويلي! لماذا أخبرتها ما دمت تعرف أنها حية؟ لماذا لم تخبرني بالتحريم؟ ألا تدري أن الحية لا تهدأ في جوف الأنثى حتى تشبع فضولها بانتهاك السر وارتكاب الحرام؟ (الكوني ا، البحث عن المكان الضائع، 2003، صفحة 256).

As for the Koranic text, it directly condemns Satan without exonerating Adam and Eve from the abuses, following the second personal pronoun addressed to them, in contrast to what is mentioned in the Book of Genesis and Tuareg mythology.

وَيَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ فَوَسَّسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوْآتِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَتَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ \* وَقَاسَمَهُمَا إِيَّيَّيْ لَكُمْ أَلَمِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ \* فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكَ الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلْتُ لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا مُبِينٌ \* قَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنْفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ" (الأعراف 21/19).

(19) And "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat from wherever you will but do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers (20) But Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that which was concealed from them of their private parts. He said, "Your Lord did not forbid you this tree except that you become angels or become of the immortal (21) And he swore [by Allāh] to them, "Indeed, I am to you from among the sincere advisors. (22) So he made them fall, through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their private parts became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the leaves of Paradise. And their Lord called to them, "Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is to you a clear enemy? (23) They said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers".

And in the following verses of Surah Al-A'raf, it is clear that the order to be expelled from paradise was addressed to both people.

[Allāh] said, "Descend, being to one another enemies. And for you on the earth is a place of settlement and enjoyment [i.e., provision] for a time

"قال اهبطوا بعضكم لبعض عدو ولكم في الأرض مستقر ومتاع إلى حين. قال فيها تحيون وفيها تموتون ومنها تخرجون (الأعراف 25/24)

The discourse becomes clear when God addresses Adam and Eve, explicitly stating that their sins are due to their enemy, Satan:

(116) And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam," and they prostrated, except Iblees he refused. (117) So We said, "O Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Then let him not remove you from Paradise so you would suffer. (Taha: 116-17).

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى. فَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ إِنَّ هَذَا عَدُوُّكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ فَلَا يُخْرِجَنَّكَ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ فَتَشْقَى (طه/17/16).

**5.2 The hypertext:** In the previous hypotexes, it is Adam who assumes responsibility for leaving paradise, but nothing like that in the Bible, whereas in Tuareg mythology it is the woman who seduced Mandām, and the Tuareg version confirms that the first sin of the first Tuareg ancestor was due to his wife. It was she who seduced him, and induced him to eat the forbidden food. After swallowing it, it remained forever in his belly, it poisoned his body with fire, the fire of desire, and he was sanctioned by a sharp languor, just as he had tasted it. He began to complain, vainly seeking serenity and quietude. But nothing of the sort happened, the anguish sent his heart wandering into the bushes or climbing the palm trees and winches. He tried everything to extinguish the fire that had broken out in his chest and his whole body: 'His wife cradled him like a little child. She rested his head in the hollows of her naked lap and

comforted him with a feminine seduction: 'The woman cradled him like a little child. She rested his head in the hollow of her naked lap and consoled him with an all-female seduction:

"There is a secret in the mouth that is more beautiful than anything in the world. The poison of truth is more delicious than any other food. Truth is the treasure hidden in the mouthful, and fire is the prize of that truth, the prize of this truth, the price of the forbidden:

هددته المرأة كطفل. وضعت رأسه في حجرها العاري وعزته بغنج الأنثى:  
هي اللقمة سر أبهى من أي شيء. سم الحقيقة ألد من أي طعام. الحقيقة هي الكنز المخفي في اللقمة. والنار ثمن الحقيقة ثمن الحرام " هي الكنز المخفي في اللقمة. والنار ثمن الحقيقة ثمن الحرام" (الكوني ا.، المجوس، 1992، صفحة 250)

Despite the consolation of his wife, who embraced him in a feverish embrace, he shook with shudder and sank into despair. Suddenly a laughter thundered through the thicket, and shook them to the ground beneath them: 'They flinched and parted. The woman leapt to hide behind a fig tree. She grabbed the leaves and wove them around her dainty waist. He climbed a palm tree and gathered the fibres. He made a veil around his ugly mouth and then went downstairs".

"في تلك اللحظة جلجلت في الأحراش ضحكة زلزلتهما وزلزلت الأرض تحتهما. انتقضا وانفصلا. قفزت الأنثى واختفت وراء شجرة التين قطفت أوراقها وخاطتها حول خاصرتها اللعوب. أما هو فتناول في النخل ولملم الليف. نسج منه لثاما حول فمه الكريه ونزل إلى الأرض" (الكوني ا.، المجوس، 1992، صفحة 251).

But the Sultan's chamberlain explained to Mandām that it is futile to wait for the forbidden morsel to come out of his belly. Then begged him to lock his head in oblivion, but in vain: "Too late. From now on you will be unhappy with knowledge and you will no longer know oblivion. The secret is in knowledge."

Complaining, Mandām asked to go to see Monseigneur the Sultan to plead his case. But it was too late, for the Sultan ordered that no more doors should be opened. Besides, the time for mercy was over the moment he swallowed the forbidden morsel. Then Mandām struck his face veiled with fibre. He cursed his wife and shouted in her face :

-You are the cause of all this !

The woman leapt like a lioness and pointed an accusing finger at the chamberlain:

You are the cause!

The chamberlain laughed and threatened him with a finger, saying perfunctorily:

-Did I commit an offence when I informed you that the Sultan had forbidden us to approach the gazelle garden?

The chamberlain has convinced them that repentance will not bring the gazelles back to life and the forbidden bite will not come out through remorse. And must not hide the shame behind the veil of Mandām. Then he asked her to take his wife and go away. Despite his protest and his wife's lamentations, he informed her that this was the final decision of the Sultan, so he had only to go out into the world, and earn his substance by the sweat of his brow. Then, there was only the boundless desert in front of him that no one knows where it starts and where it ends. So, this is a merciless punishment reached the highlight .

An hour later, Mandām found himself on the other side of the imposing enclosure. He tied the veil around his face and his wife covered herself with the braided loincloth of fig leaves. In front of them lay a desert covered with a mirage. This was the beginning of the wandering journey, and the veil has since become the distinctive sign by which the Saharan hides his shameless shame:

Despite the consolation of his wife, who embraced him in a feverish embrace, he shuddered and sank into despair. Suddenly laughter thundered through the thicket, and shook them to the ground: "They shuddered and parted. The woman leapt to hide behind a fig tree. She grabbed the leaves and wove them around her dainty waist. He climbed a palm tree and gathered the fibres. He made a veil around his ugly mouth and then went downstairs."

So Mandām and his wife met the same fate as Adam and Eve and were expelled from paradise, and condemned to eternal wandering similar to the exodus or wandering of the Hebrews in the wilderness of Egypt, and their exit to the settlement in the promised land for forty years: This evokes here the story of Moses who underwent this experience when he kills an Egyptian who struck a Hebrew. When the murder was discovered, Moses fled to the wilderness of Midian "God saw that he had turned aside. (Exodus, 3.3). And similarly, "When Moses had grown up, he went out to his brothers and saw their hard work. He saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his brothers. 12He looked around and saw that there was no one there and killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." (Exodus 2). Their destiny was exile so that he would realise that he was not God and that he could not steal fire, like Prometheus, to become one. Since he would have to feel humiliated, and would become a man of the desert which would then become a place of enlightenment. Not only that, the desert will become a sacred place of learning and knowledge. But not within the reach of the sinful person who should be driven out of his paradise for his disobedience. Al Koni, similarly, focuses on the spiritual significance of the desert crossing recounted in the Nāmūs, the lost book, which describes the desert as a necessary stage of purification and liberation from sin and scandal after wearing the litham. From then on, the only salvation is wandering in the realm of idols that enslave men to desire and vanity. He even describes it as a Promethean world where only what is human has a place, and immerses itself in immanence, and is also felt in this divine world, which is nothing more than a transposition of their human society.

Indeed, the Saharan seeks peace and serenity in the silence he imposes on himself thanks to the *liṭām* (اللاثام), this often blue veil, the characteristic dress of Tuareg men. For this veil, far from being "a coquetry" participating in an exotic vision of "blue men" or manifesting a sympathetic cultural exception in the midst of an environment that conversely imposes the veil on women, goes back to the founding myths of Touareg society. It is, as we have seen, to hide the ugliness of the mouth, responsible for the first guilty ingestion of the Mandām ancestor, and to stop or delay the indecent flow of speech-babil, that its use is imposed on young Tuaregs from the age of puberty. To sink into the world of silence is to try to find that state of plenitude where speech is superfluous.

In fact, this expulsion is only a journey to purify the view of all human representation, and that wandering in this place reflects the image of the inner life of the wanderer. Few people can understand that the desert is not only the symbolic image of the spiritual life, but also, within us, a place that others cannot reach. The Targui experience contains precisely the opposite of the sedentary life. It also allows him to wash away all his foreign bodies in order to accept the suffering and pain inherent in the usual life, to break with the cult of the material, which allows him to put himself in front of their true and limited nature. And by purging himself of all his false values, he finds himself. Moreover, it can be articulated between two dimensions, one, a place of light that offers spiritual purification, and the other a place of death that can be similar to hell.

In reality, the desert is a place chosen by the ancestors so that their descendants understand that it is their eternal destiny, without forgetting to remind them that it is in itself mortifying, since they do not have the means to go beyond their small limits, and that they are also doomed to death. But from the moment the unknown call begins, it becomes a place of transfiguration. Exactly the same fate as the Ancestor Mandām, who was condemned forever to wander in the desert, and undertake his long journey to undergo an inner experience of the desert that should lead him precisely to a purification, to learn to taste the fundamental, not the secondary things. So it's like the Babylonian theme of sinning, it's evident in committing sins that require divine retribution. Some of their texts consider the sinner to be the one who eats what the gods have forbidden him. Just what happens the Mandām Ancestor He preferred the misery of reason and refused renunciation of earthly life: 'Man preferred the misery of reason to renunciation and traded the quietude of Paradise for the hell of knowledge. So he denied the

Law, ignored the commandments, and hoarded as do the people of the cities in the land of sin. He stocked up on food for the next day but the worm of sin and punishment was in the fruit. Taking advantage of Moses' absence from the Mount, man built the temple of the Golden Calf, which he worshipped rather than his Creator who had fashioned him from clay and endowed him with the paradise of reason. He committed another sin by believing that freedom is not to worship a god who created you but to provoke him and become a god yourself."

"الشقي استبدل التسليم بشقاء العقل ، وقايض هناء الفردوس بجحيم المعرفة، وأنكر الناموس، فأنكر الناموس وعصى التعاليم ، وكنز كما كامن يفعل أهل المدن في أرض الدنس. كنز الطعام إلى الغد فدبت فيه ديدان الفساد والقصاص. انتظر حتى غاب موسى في الجبل، فابتنتى بمعدن النحوس نصب العجل ليعبد به بدل أن يعبد الرب إلهه الذي خلقه من طين ووهبه فردوس العقل. ارتكب خطيئة أخرى لأنه رأى أن الحرية ليس أن تعبد إلهاً خلقك، ولكن الحرية أن تتناول على الإله وتصير بنفسك إلهاً" (الكوني ا.، صحرائي الكبرى، 1998، صفحة 12)

At the same time, each Saharan must undergo the experience of thirst, loneliness and the burning breath of the Qibli **ريح القبلي** in the desolate expanses in order to purify himself. Each time he resumes his long walk through the desert, he begins to watch for signs to interpret before making a decisive decision for the tribe, in this case the advisability of breaking camp, the Chief and the augur reach the Western Hamada where they cross fields of burial mounds, the tombs of the Ancestors. This is why this legacy was passed on to the Saharan, who became attached to the journey, which originated in divine damnation and punishment of the latter for his disobedience, and since then has become a way of life. From then on, it became a goal in itself, even a royal road to the lost paradise, the heavenly Waw, which can only be reintegrated at the price of renouncing earthly life.

Thus, there is a clear similarity between the narratives of the sacred books and the Tuareg mythical snippets, which makes the former hypotexts, founding texts, and the latter hypertexts, which are texts derived from pre-existing founding texts at the end of a transformation operation.

## Conclusion

We have now reached the end of our research into the literary imagination in the desert novel. We hope to have answered the questions we asked at the beginning of our research. These questions can be summarized in two main issues:

As a primary objective, was the author able to make the desert novel an alternative to official history and exotic curiosity, and avoid the ethnographic trap?

Far from the political pamphlet, and the ideological levelling, was he able to invest his culture in his novelistic framework by giving it an aesthetic and universal dimension, and to transform his heritage by constructing a new fantastic novelistic genre, and to found a desert novel? And to answer these two questions we evoked two levels:

On a formal level: What distinguishes the desert novel is the introduction of mythical narratives, sacred discourse, prophecies of augurs and sorcerers. Indeed, despite the richness and durability of Arab oral literature in the collective memory, it has been treated as a minor genre, even marginalized. Not to mention the etiological narrative, which is a biblical narrative used by the exegete's precursors in the Book of Genesis, the Gospels, cultural legends and in other ethnographic fields. On a thematic level: the considerable contribution of the practice of intertextuality with multiple references to Tuareg culture, whose diegesis covered a mythical dimension clearly reveals the founding scenes by evoking original scenes (Bible, Koran, and desert mythology) which are indeed founding texts of the sacred in humanitarian life. Finally, the techniques borrowed from the desert novel take us into an allegorical, idyllic universe where the creator abandons the sensible reality and invests the invisible world, using processes that provide sensations of reverence, of recollection inside a sacred enclosure. He gives voices and eyes to...the author's creation is based on what he affirms elsewhere, that art is what conceals...and true creativity lies in the ability to conceal rather than to reveal. The author strives

to mobilise the aesthetics of the invisible and the visible which ensures the singularity of a production and a particular theme.

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