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Representations of Myth and History in the Popular Narratives of the Region of Laghouat Through Selected Model

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Abstract

This research examines the representations of myth and history in the folk narratives of the region of Laghouat , through a study of the relationship between oral traditions and collective memory. The research adopts a methodological approach that combines the narrative method in analyzing the structure of these narratives, the anthropological method in exploring their relation to popular beliefs, and the historical method in tracing their development over time. The study discusses the sources of circulation of these narratives, their main themes, and their cultural and social functions, analyzing the mechanisms of their construction and their role in reproducing history according to the symbolic perceptions of society. The study concludes that folk narratives are not merely documentation of the past, but rather constitute a cultural discourse that reflects local identity and collective consciousness.

Keywords: Collective Memory, Folk Culture , Laghouat, Myth, Oral History.

Introduction

The region of Laghouat is considered a rich repository of intangible folk heritage, a diversity that stems from multiple factors, including its geographical location, the variety of human tributaries, and the different sources of this heritage. When speaking of the intangible heritage of any region, the importance of oral traditions cannot be confined to storytelling and tales for entertainment and leisure. Rather, their true significance lies in reflecting the aspects of life experienced by these communities, as they represent an authentic expression of the beliefs and ideas that prevailed in all facets of life.

In this study, we aim to highlight the importance of this dimension by examining selected examples of the intangible heritage of the Laghouat region. Its significance goes beyond social and cultural aspects, extending to various domains of life. Starting from the well-known saying, *"Myth is half of history,"* folk narratives in the Laghouat region constitute a fundamental element in shaping cultural identity and collective memory. Within these narratives, myth and history intertwine, granting them a complex symbolic and social dimension. However, despite their importance, these narratives have not received in-depth analytical studies that uncover the mechanisms of their formation, their functions, and their relationship with popular imagination. From here, this research raises the following problem:

How does the relationship between myth and history manifest in the folk narratives of the Laghouat region? And what cultural and social roles do these narratives play?

Based on this problem, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

* How do myth and history intertwine in the folk narratives of Laghouat region?

* What are the main themes addressed in these narratives, and what are their cultural significances?

* What are the primary sources for the transmission of these narratives, and how have they influenced their circulation across generations?

* What are the social and cultural functions of these stories, and how have they contributed to shaping collective identity?

This study adopts a multi-method approach: it employs the narrative method to analyze the structure of folk stories, their narrative elements, and their role in shaping collective imagination. The research also draws on the anthropological method to explore the relationship between these narratives and popular beliefs, and to trace the impact of social and cultural contexts on their formation. In addition, the historical method is utilized to

follow the development of these stories and to analyze their relationship with collective memory and past events. To interpret the symbols and deeper meanings in these narratives, the study also uses the semiotic approach to uncover the symbolic structure of myth and history within the popular imagination of the Laghouat region.

Stories, tales, and myths are considered part of folk literature in its broad sense.Before delving into the depths of this subject and highlighting its sources, its spread, and the limits of its functions, it is necessary to provide general definitions of a set of terms that will be repeatedly mentioned.

1. Concepts and Terminology ;

The natural conditions of our societies, particularly in desert regions, have contributed to the flourishing of imagination and the consolidation of beliefs that were part of the folk culture for which the region is known. This is reflected in the dominance of oral culture over written culture. Since this heritage expressed the social and economic conditions experienced by these communities, it also embodied the interdependent relationship between nomadism and urbanization: "The shift from orality to literacy remains closely tied to the transition from tribal structures to state structures, and from desert society to city society." [1]

Thus, the transmission of stories, woven from the imagination of nomadic Bedouins, and the creation of mythical, legendary characters whose features were shaped by the desert, were passed down from generation to generation. The process of preserving and transmitting heritage to subsequent generations carried great importance, whether within the family or the tribe, and even in the city—which was not devoid of such practices. Evening gatherings and sessions with storytellers were held to listen to new tales. [2]

Jean Mella (J. Mella) conveyed a vivid image of what he witnessed in the city of Laghouat during his visit in the 1930s, saying: "Memories are the only source of information; they are passed down from generation to generation. Yet over time, distortion inevitably intensifies, as people's memories tend to exaggerate matters—tragically or amicably—in order to give old stories a kind of power and significance to withstand the challenges of the years.

"But bringing forth events that have been passed down orally for centuries carries a kind of truth: it is the only important element in all the astonishing stories that have captivated the human mind since long ago." [3]

A significant part of our culture is embodied in folk heritage, which has been shaped over the years and events through the creation of symbols and their interpretations, fulfilling functions that varied with each historical period. It also represents a psychological response to human desires: *"On the other hand, it reflects the moral values of the dominant class—mainly peasants and the marginalized—who tended to embrace forgetfulness,

resist renewal, and sanctify the past at the expense of the present and the future." [4] Moreover, this heritage reinforced social cohesion, contributed to the spread of virtue and goodness, and gained further importance during colonial domination, where it served as an implicit form of propaganda to resist foreign influence and counter the hegemony of its culture—a culture that colonial powers sought to impose and promote in order to erase local identity. [5]

During the colonial era, Algerian folk literature initially received little attention compared to other aspects of popular life. Researchers regarded it as material suitable for uncovering Algerian human behavior and responses, while completely neglecting the artistic nature of this literature. It was therefore natural that these researchers focused their interests on its religious dimension, especially the stories of saints and holy men, to which they devoted extensive books and studies.And if the colonial ideology concealed behind it dangerous mythological motives, it later became itself a subject of study. To understand these societies and to tighten control over their beliefs and culture. [6]

It was necessary, at first, to approach the understanding and study of this heritage under what was called *military anthropology*. One military officer stated: "To control the Algerian people, one must first and foremost control their symbolic heritage, which can only be achieved through a concrete study of their myths." [7]

Although academic researchers, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century—and even continuing their publications on Arabs until shortly after independence—were more scientifically aware than their predecessors, they still regarded folk heritage as the culture of a backward people. One of them wrote: "Like all humans of simple mentality, they are fond of fantastic tales, imaginary stories, and supernatural myths. They are simple-minded, nothing more, nothing less, and they are today just as they were in the past." [8]

Mythology thus constituted both a driving force for the colonizer and a subject for the colonized societies at the same time. And even though this type of anthropology faded away with the end of colonialism—giving way to studies centered on the "self and the mother society"—myths still endure. Everything seems to be governed by myths and symbols that conceal an underlying truth.

If the colonizer once found in folk heritage genuine material for studying our societies, this does not exempt us from re-examining the myths of our oral heritage, transmitted across generations, from an objective perspective free from subjectivity and prior ideologies. This must be achieved by linking it to the cultural and social factors that contributed to the formation of this heritage—contrary to the colonial perspective that never escaped its ideological background. This very realization justifies the return to studying our heritage and our myths. [9]

2. **Sources of Receiving Folk Narratives and Mechanisms of Their Transmission ;**

Folk heritage has various sources and ways of transmission, among which are:

2.1 **The Family:**

The inherited heritage carried by the elderly and the older children is passed on to the rest of the family members. They receive it involuntarily because it meets their psychological needs, develops their mental, linguistic, and other social abilities, and prepares them to interact with these institutions. It also nurtures aspects that help them establish social relations with others. The clan extends beyond the membership of the family, and belonging to it is primarily based on paternal kinship. Kinship may also be dual (paternal and maternal) due to the prevalence of consanguineous marriages, which find support in folk culture among the locals. For instance, they say in their proverbs: "The cousin's daughter, even if undesirable... and the town, even if oppressive." Secondly, an individual gains membership through shared residence within the same neighborhood as members of the clan. People in the population centers visited by the researcher are identified by their clans, where a person is referred to by his name in relation to his tribe, and emphasis is placed on his belonging to a particular clan. [10]

2.2 **Popular Markets / Cafés and Shops:**

The market, as a social institution, plays a prominent role in the life of the popular community. It serves as a meeting place for the inhabitants of the village, nearby population centers, neighboring rural areas, as well as traders and craftsmen from the region and from other areas, to fulfill their economic needs such as buying and selling agricultural products, foodstuffs, clothing, furniture, farming tools, household utensils, livestock, and repairing agricultural tools, etc., on pre-scheduled days. The market gathering differs from other gatherings by the large number of people who participate in it, and it is not limited only to the inhabitants of the village market does not only include the inhabitants of the village itself, but also the residents of other population centers, the Bedouins, craftsmen, practitioners of folk medicine, storytellers of folk tales, and performers of magical games from various Algerian regions, as well as from Tunisia and Morocco. [11]

Thus, the market signifies not only a commercial activity but also a particular psychological state. It represents a cultural phenomenon as much as it does an economic one, since people come both to meet their material needs and to satisfy other desires. A common proverb says: "Enter the market and you will find what suits your taste", meaning that upon entering the market, one is sure to find something to his liking. In the market, alongside commercial activities, there are circles of folk storytelling organized by professional narrators and performers. [12]

Vendors of folk medicine rely on their memorized heritage to attract the attention of market-goers and persuade them when advertising their goods. They use folk drawings depicting events from tales, epics, heroic exploits, and the miracles of saints. Similarly, magicians and performers of magical games use such drawings during the intervals between their shows.

Book vendors in the market display printed works of folk heritage from Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Lebanon, such as The Thousand and One Nights , Antar ibn Shaddad, The Conquest of Yemen, The Conquest of Syria, The Conquest of Africa, and The Epic of Banu Hilal. The same vendors also offer illustrations representing scenes and images taken from these stories. [13]

The gatherings that attend storytelling sessions, magical performances, and the display of folk medicines are called the "Market of the Maddahin" (praisers) in reference to professional storytellers. Cafés and shops also serve as meeting places for residents from different neighborhoods, where they sit, talk about various matters, exchange stories, and circulate folk narratives. Among their patrons are storytellers of all kinds of folk traditions, as well as artisans and hobbyists who engage with the groups waiting inside these cafés and shops. [14]

3. **Themes of Folk Stories in Laghouat:**

3.1 **Religious Stories**:

Popular beliefs represent an important aspect of the culture received by the individual and practiced within his community. From them, his behavior, philosophy of life, perception of the external world, and the world beyond nature are shaped. And if it is difficult to encompass all the beliefs of any society—since they are hidden within people's hearts, not taught by others but fermenting within their own souls, taking forms either exaggerated or diminished, where individual imagination plays a role that gives them a distinctive character—it is nevertheless inevitable for the researcher of forms of folk expression to address what is common among all people. [15]

Most of the religious beliefs of desert societies in general, and of Laghouat society in particular, stem from Islam and its doctrinal fundamentals: belief in God, the Last Day, Paradise and Hell, angels, Satan, divine decree and predestination, the Preserved Tablet, the origins of humanity and the universe, and the stories of the Prophets, etc. However, due to the doctrinal heritage inherited from pre-Islamic religions, as well as the influences left by various Islamic sects that the region witnessed—especially Shi'ism and Sufi orders—these beliefs acquired new characteristics that gave rise to new issues. This, in turn, led them in the first half of this century to be criticized by the religious reformist movement. The reformists attempted to uproot some of these beliefs from people's minds or strip them of many of their manifestations, relying on the texts of the Qur'an and

Sunnah to combat what they called "innovations, superstitions, and delusions" , considering them deviations from Islamic creed. [16]

3.2 **Stories of Saints (Awliya):**

At the forefront of these beliefs comes the belief in wilaya (sainthood). The saints are considered men close to God, possessing a greater ability than others to connect with Him and endowed with extraordinary powers. These powers remain with them even after their death, and the shrine becomes a symbol of this capacity to act. In essence, they are benevolent, doing what benefits people; however, they are also capable of causing harm if someone angers them. They can aid the weak, weaken the strong, heal the sick, inflict illness on the healthy, bring the distant closer, push the near away, and traverse vast distances in a short span of time. They are also believed to grant certain abilities to those who serve them, fulfill specific conditions, and earn their satisfaction—yet can strip these abilities away if the conditions are violated or if their anger is provoked. People interpret these supernatural gifts as divine blessings from God bestowed upon those who serve Him. [17]

Due to the abundance of saints in the Laghouat region, stories about them have multiplied considerably. From our knowledge of the area and its strong ties to Sufi orders, it is clear that belief in saints is deeply rooted among its people. Their attachment to this belief is strong, which can also be attributed to their adherence to Islam and its teachings.

3.3 **Stories of Heroic Expeditions (Maghazi):**

There is no doubt that the so-called "realistic element" in the *maghazi* (expeditions) qualified them to play a prominent role in instilling the spirit of resistance and incitement within Algerian society. They offered heroic models that significantly contributed to stirring resistance and encouraging revolution. We can appreciate the symbolic value of the heroes in these narrated maghazi tales—fighting under the banner of jihad—especially when we realize that all the resistance movements and popular uprisings that confronted the French occupation in Algeria were inspired by such ideals.

This was precisely what led the French orientalist Desparmet to speak disparagingly of the maghazi. He claimed that "we must seek art for the sake of art in these expeditions, but in reality, it is art for the sake of expressing a racial sentiment and for promoting an emerging national idea." In the same article, he added that these stories were organized and recited specifically to recruit fighters into the ranks of Emir Abdelkader. They served to instill hope and confidence in a future in which the enemy would ultimately be defeated. [18]

3.4 **Stories of Jinn and Ghouls:**

The world of the jinn represents for the people of the Laghouat region a parallel universe to that of humans. They are invisible beings, unseen by the human eye, capable of taking on any human or animal form. They marry, reproduce, and form families linked together by kinship relations similar to the tribal ties found in the local community. They have kings, leaders, and servants, and among them are both Muslims and unbelievers. They can perform acts that benefit humans, but they are also capable of causing harm. Usually, they act in a favorable way if they fall under the influence of a human who benefits from their work, or in fulfillment of a promise they made when their fate depended on that person's will, or out of gratitude for a previous kindness. However, they are generally considered malevolent, and humans must protect themselves from their harm either by appeasing them or by fighting them through those who deal with them directly.

Many illnesses—especially nervous disorders—are often explained as the effects of jinn entering the patient's body, inhabiting it, and refusing to leave except through rituals (such as offering sacrifices with specific conditions). The jinn are believed to dwell in forests, valleys, ruins, mountains, deserts, and barren lands. Some are attached to particular individuals or dervishes and are known by specific names. There are also other beings that share many traits with the jinn but appear under different circumstances and in different places, such as the ifrit, the ghoul, and the ruhaniyya. The ifrit is considered the closest of them to the jinn. [19]

4. **The Functional Dimensions of Folk Narratives:**

When speaking about the telling of folk stories, their narrators, and the people's responses to them, one must also address their function. Their existence is tied to the roles they perform within the social structure of the popular community. Folk narratives are part of the cultural framework, reflecting social existence. They embody images of reality with its values and relationships, shaped by a society long governed by feudal relations and marked by economic and social inequalities. [20]

At the same time, they reflect the moral values of the ruling class, which are characterized by a tendency toward stability, resistance to change, glorification of the past at the expense of the present and future, excessive reverence for authority, resignation to the individual's inability to change prevailing conditions, and reinforcement of the idea of hierarchy and inequality

of ranks.

On the other hand, and by virtue of being circulated among broad segments of the people—comprising oppressed peasants, small craftsmen, and shaped by the class belonging of the storytellers—folk narratives carry a tendency toward change, criticism of authority, protest against class disparities, and a yearning to eliminate or

at least transcend them. They also elevate the moral values embodied by the poor person and champion the principles of justice, truth, goodness, and love. Consequently, they serve an educational and cultural function.

The stories told within the family are primarily directed at children for their upbringing, as they nurture imagination, develop intellectual abilities, provide role models of proper behavior, and help children understand social relationships, preparing them to become members of the community. The explanatory value of certain stories also serves as a tool of knowledge, shaping the child's perception of the universe and the social environment. Yet the educational and cultural purpose is not limited to children alone. The stories narrated in gatherings of adults—such as circles held in markets and neighborhood assemblies—often carry strong moral and didactic purposes, occupying an important place among the narrated tales. Cultivating collective emotions and instilling ideal social values remain central themes, presenting to both young and old audiences the image of the ideal person the community aspires for each individual to embody. [21]

During this period, Algerians were subjected to foreign domination that wounded their national consciousness and pride, restricted their freedoms of expression, and imposed upon them a political authority that acted toward them in a hostile manner—an authority they perceived as alien, usurping their land and rights. The relationship between citizens and authority was one of enmity and suspicion, reflected across all aspects of life. Under the weight of a military power that imposed its rule through iron and fire, attempts at self-defense and resistance emerged in the form of numerous revolts and armed uprisings that never ceased throughout the colonial period. At the same time, colonial cultural policies sought to freeze national culture and uproot the elements of national consciousness within it.

They clung to this culture, which became deeply rooted in people's hearts and was employed in the defense of identity and national character, as well as used to express suppressed feelings, hopes for emancipation and freedom, and to spread the spirit of resistance. At the same time, the Arabic language was fought against, the link between official Arab heritage and educational curricula and cultural institutions was severed, and official Arabic literature was eliminated. What remained of national culture was embodied in the oral folk heritage, which the colonizer could not strip from the minds and hearts of the people. This heritage was the treasure that Algerian citizens clung to during the era of cultural dispossession, carrying it in their spiritual life, in their emotions and sentiments, and in their inner hopes and aspirations. Among the most flourishing and widespread forms of this heritage was folk storytelling. [22]

In this context, Roselyne Qrish writes: "The Algerian folktale filled a great void in the literary, cultural, and social life of the common people. Colonialism, with all its power, sought to persecute the Arabic language and attempted to eradicate it. Official literature withdrew into isolation, confined to a limited circle—mainly those

who had received religious education in Arabic. It became a weak literature that addressed topics far removed from the people's concerns and struggles. Here the role of folk literature—especially the folktale—emerged, as it spoke to the people in a language they understood and dealt with subjects that touched the core of their lives, stirred their hidden feelings, and ignited their enthusiasm." [23]

Certain types of stories during this period gained particular popularity, and maddahin (praisers) and narrators of heroic epics specialized in them. However, the lack of sources documenting the history of folk literature makes it difficult to trace the development of the different types of stories and the precise identification of their periods of popularity may be difficult to trace. However, it is certain that certain forms of storytelling experienced development or wide dissemination across various regions of the country during the French occupation. In this way, folk stories played an active role in preserving the foundations of national identity, preparing minds for revolution, instilling a spirit of resistance in the hearts of citizens, and mobilizing the masses in the national liberation movement.

In this case, it becomes necessary to reconsider the view of some researchers who claim that "folk narrative heritage may be critical in some aspects, but it is never revolutionary." In contrast, Azeddine Ismail affirms the revolutionary role of folk heritage, stating: "A study of the folk heritage of all nations may reveal the presence of certain models within this heritage that carry political and revolutionary significance for a specific period of time in a specific environment." [24]

Before leaving this discussion, it is worth noting that the reformist movement in Algeria—despite its Salafi orientation and rationalist approach—also invested in this art. In this regard, Abu Bakr bin al-Hajj Issa al-Aghwati, in an article in Al-Basa'ir newspaper, writes: "A mother must invest in a child's inclination toward stories, planting within him through them the seeds of virtuous morals. She should often tell tales of Arab heroism and nobility so that he may feel his dignity and take pride in belonging to his people. There is no harm in recounting legends and some of the stories of Abu Zayd al-Hilali, Antarah ibn Shaddad, and Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan in a style suited to his understanding, in order to strengthen his imagination. But the mother must beware of ghost and ghoul tales, for these only increase the instinct of cowardice within him."

He also quotes the writer Ahmad Amin, who says:

"If she raises them from childhood on risk-taking and adventure, tells them stories of heroes and great men, accustoms them to struggle against life and overcome difficulties, teaches them that principles are above persons and the homeland above the lives of individuals, and reproaches them when they flee from duty and shames them when they commit dishonor—then there will be true men, dignity, and honor." [25]

5. **Examples of Stories and Legends from Laghouat :**

5.1 The Legend of Sidi al-Nasir and the Kasbah of Ibn Fetouh:

As a model, we have taken a legend woven long ago about the city of Laghouat, in order to analyze it and perhaps draw some conclusions. Although this legend was transmitted in French sources, while ancient Arabic references only alluded to it without details, it concerns an incident connected to the origins of the city. It was mentioned by one traveler, Ibn Nasir al-Dar'i, who said:

"In the year 1096 AH, their scholar Sidi Ahmad ibn Abi Ziyan told me about the fate of a village that was located near the city of Laghouat." [26]

General Philebart recounted the following: Sidi al-Nasir, a righteous saint in the palace of Ibn Bouta, was respected by all. He had a beautiful daughter who was proposed to by the son of the chief of the Kasbah of Ibn Fetouh, after falling deeply in love with her. But her father refused and instead married her to a young man from the palace of Ibn Bouta. Enraged and determined to take revenge, the suitor, on the wedding night and under the cover of deep darkness, stormed the house of the newlyweds. He killed the husband and fled with the bride. The followers of the saint pursued and encircled him, whereupon he slaughtered the girl and committed suicide upon her body. When Sidi al-Nasir learned of this tragic event, he took a handful of soil, placed it in his palm, blew it away, and prayed that God would scatter the inhabitants of the Kasbah of Ibn Fetouh just as the soil had been scattered. God answered his prayer, and the Kasbah of Ibn Fetouh became deserted. Its inhabitants dispersed across many regions, including Ghadames, which took its name from them. It is said that when they met families who had migrated from Fezzan and were asked, 'Where are you from?' they replied, 'From the Kasbah of Ibn Fetouh, since yesterday.' Thus, the place where they settled was named Ghadames." [27]

5.2 Stories and Tales of Sidi al-Hajj 'Issa:

The devout ascetic, adorned with radiant virtues and sincere states, Shaykh Sidi al-Hajj 'Issa ibn Sidi Ibrahim, and Mahbuba, daughter of Sidi al-Hajj Bouhafs (of the Ouled Sidi Sheikh clan), traces his lineage back to Sidi Idris, the founder of the city of Fez. He was born in Tlemcen in the year 1089 AH / 1678 CE, where he grew up, was educated, and acquired a considerable share of knowledge. He became well-versed in jurisprudence and excelled in the arts of language, poetry, sermons, and wisdom. He migrated from Tlemcen to Laghouat, settled there, and founded his zawiya. He passed away in the year 1150 AH / 1737 CE, and his shrine in Laghouat is well-known and visited. [28]

Shaykh Abdullah ibn Muhammad Hashlaf mentioned him in his book Silisilat al-Usul fi Shajarat Abna' al-Rasul (The Chain of Origins in the Genealogy of the Descendants of the Prophet, peace be upon him):

"Among the descendants of our master Ahmad ibn Idris are the Ouled Sidi al-Hajj 'Amir and among them is a branch in Laghouat known as the Ouled Sidi al-Hajj Issa, a man of many miracles. This master had a prominent role in the chanting of malhoun (traditional sung poetry) in the manner of allusions used by perfected saints, which attests to his exalted rank in sainthood and his elevated status with his Lord. These are part of the divine unveilings. May God be pleased with him. He is one of the grand saints about whose sainthood no two people disagree. His reputation spread far and wide; the distant and the near revered him. His grave in Laghouat is well-known, highly esteemed as a shrine, with a great structure built upon it. All his words were wisdoms that guided people in anticipating what the future might hold." [29]

Among the stories of Sidi al-Hajj Issa that endured even after his death, and that became part of the popular culture of the inhabitants of Laghouat and its surroundings, are:

***The Impact of His Miracles (the Harvest and the Fal):**

After demonstrating numerous miracles on different occasions for the people of Laghouat, they developed the custom of offering him the fal (i.e., the first fruits of the harvest), both during his life and to his descendants after him. This was done to seek his satisfaction and his blessed prayers, and to avoid his anger or his supplications for misfortune. This practice remained alive until fairly recent times, although it has significantly diminished. [30]

***The Empty Fortresses:**

Local popular memory attributes the emptiness and destruction of many desert fortresses, as well as the drying up of certain water springs, to the supplications of Sidi al-Hajj 'Issa against them and their inhabitants. Examples include the old fortress of Damed, which became deserted after its spring dried up ; [31] the Red Fortress (al-Qasr al-Ahmar) and the White Fortress (al-Qasr al-Abyad) belonging to the Taraifiyya tribe in the Amour Mountains; [32] and the fortress of Taouiala, also in the Amour Mountains. Regarding the latter, Sidi al-Hajj 'Issa is reported to have said:

O Lord, empty Taouiala,

Remove the noble men within it.

No prayer, no learning,

No worldly joy for it.

Indeed, the old fortress was abandoned, and another was built not far from it. [33]

*** Foresight (al-Jafr or al-Nashd):**

According to local folklore in Laghouat, al-Hajj 'Issa had many predictions. Perhaps the most famous among them was his prophecy of the French entry into Laghouat, contained in a poem titled:

"We still keep repeating the tales,

O you who ask me, I shall recount a story to you." [34]

5.3 Stories and Tales of Sidi al-Mihyoub al-Harzali:

He has many stories associated with him, among them:

His Story with the Ouled Zayd:

They are a branch of the Arba'a tribes, as mentioned earlier, and were known for their great strength and might. However, they once wronged Sidi al-Mihyoub, who, in turn, supplicated against them in poetic form. His curse led to their dispersal and scattering across the land. The verse goes:

The Ouled Zayd were young in arrogance,

They came boasting of their dark steeds.

People ate like cattle grazing grass,

And the servant was beaten without cause.

They wronged the shaykh—he destroyed them, they perished,

In every land they wandered, scattered aimlessly. [35]

5.4 Stories of Hilalian Origin: Dhiab ibn Ghanim, the Daughter of al-Khiss:

Among the French researchers who studied popular tales is René Basset, who wrote about the story of Bint al-Khiss* and the Maghazi (expedition tales); Alfred Bel, who published the story of al-Jaziya and provided commentary on it; and Joseph Desparmet, who also wrote about the Maghazi.

René Basset traced the story of Bint al-Khiss back to its roots in Arab tradition, concluding that this heroic tale "belongs to the body of traditions carried by the Banu Hilal during their migration to the Maghreb, where it acquired a local character, yet its origins go back to the earliest periods of Arabic literature."

This same researcher also published the tale of The Raid on the Castle of Gold and The Battle with the Ghoul's Head, after translating both into French and comparing the manuscripts with their oral versions.

As for Alfred Bel, he published the text of the story of al-Jaziya and offered remarks concerning its Arab origins, as well as the reasons for its popularity among Algerian Bedouins, noting how it reflected and developed aspects of the lives, temperaments, and ambitions of the nomadic Arabs, which had been transplanted to North Africa.[36]

Conclusion:

The study reached a set of important findings, most notably:The popular narratives in the Laghouat region are not merely oral tales told for entertainment; rather, they constitute a cultural discourse that reflects the interaction of myth with history in the collective memory.

These narratives re-create the past through symbolic representations that express local identity and social beliefs, making them a vital cultural tool.

effective in shaping collective consciousness.

Popular tales perform multiple functions, such as providing cultural interpretations of events, strengthening social bonds, and transmitting values and beliefs across generations.

Systematic analysis has shown that the **narrative approach helps in understanding the structure of these stories, while the anthropological approach reveals their relationship to society, and the historical approach makes it possible to trace their development and transformations over time.

Documenting these popular narratives is essential for preserving them as part of the intangible cultural heritage, which calls for further scholarly efforts to collect and study them in a scientific manner.

This study opens the door to further research on the role of popular storytelling in shaping cultural identity. It also invites examination of the impact of modern social transformations on these narratives and the extent of their continuity in the contemporary popular imagination.

Refereces:

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