

Female Monsters in Kabyle Myths and Folktales: their Nature and Functions

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Abstract

This article seeks to explore the nature and functions of monsters in Kabyle myths, which are primarily a male cultural production, and folktales, which mostly constitute the “cultural capital” of traditional Kabyle women in Algeria. Using Leo Frobenius’s (1921, 1996) three-volume collection of traditional Kabyle narratives as a corpus, and adopting a feminist perspective, the investigation has resulted in the realization that the representation of the Kabyle woman as monster is a predominant feature in the myths, and even more so in the folktales. It is argued that the excess of female monstrous representations, and the attractive and complex manner in which these representations are made in the folktales signify much more a symbolic resistance than a reproduction of the Kabyle man’s mythologies about gender power relations.

Key words: representation, monsters, Kabyle, myths, folktales, fertility, negotiation, resistance

Introduction

*Tkhlilek lliyen tabburt/ A Vava Inouva/ Tchenchen tizzebgatin/
Im A yelli Ghriva/ Uggadegh lwahsh lghava/ A Vava Inouva/
Uggadegh ula d nekkini A yelli Ghriva. Please open the door for me/
Father Inouva/ Shake your bracelets daughter Ghriva/ I am scared of
the forest monster/I am scared of it too, daughter Ghriva (Trans.mine)*

Thus run the lyrics of the first two stanzas of one of the greatest contemporary hits authored by the Kabyle migrant singer in France Idir. The great popularity of this song inspired from a Kabyle folktale recounting the story of an old man compelled to live alone after a shameful, I shall say a monstrous escape of wind during a village assembly (*Tajmait* in Kabyle) that stuck him to the ground, tells us all the importance accorded to monsters in Kabyle culture. In the lyrics above, the daughter prays the earth-stuck father to open for her the door

of a room constructed around him to protect him from danger, telling him that she is afraid to be surprised by a monster (*lwahsh*) if she tarries longer in her errand of delivering him the meal of the day. *lwahsh* is a kabyle word borrowed from Arabic to refer to the idea of monster. Its plural *Lowhush* (*Alwuhush* in Arabic) points to all wild animals in the forest which, in one way or another, may constitute a danger to man. The anagram of *Wahsh* in Arabic is *hawsh*, meaning barren land, a land not inhabited by man. In Kabyle culture, the equivalent word for *hawsh* is *amadagh*, *azaghar*, *tamurt lkhal*, etc. So etymologically speaking, the idea of *Lwahsh* (monster) in the Kabyle speech community, just as is the case in traditional societies, emerges from the ordering or binary classification of space in opposite categories distinguishing between what is considered the “organized and safe world” of the Kabyle village, generally constituted of a few acres of land, and its immediate surroundings and the space beyond the Kabyle territory, the “other less familiar world” peopled or inhabited by potentially threatening beings. (For further information on the implications of this spatial cleavage in traditional societies see Eliade Mircea, 1959; Douglas Mary, 1984; Lévi-Strauss Claude, 1966, etc.)

However, though the Kabyle language has borrowed the word for monster from Arabic, it is invested as most loan words in any language with a culture-specific content. The list of monsters covered by the name of *Lwash* in Kabyle includes all the dangerous animals of the forest, panthers, hogs, lions, wolves, etc to which is added supernatural figures like *Hataf Laarais* (Bride snatchers), *Sfar Lahwa* (Whistling wind) the ogress’s son, *Ajdoun Alkubur* (the giant of the cemetery), *Moumouh Aderghal*, the Kabyle name for Polyphemus the Cyclops, *Talafsa* (the hydra), *Waghzen* (the ogre) *Teryel* (the ogress), etc. Two observations need to be made with reference to these monsters. First, if male monsters seem to be more numerous, it is the female ones that cause the most fear or terror. Second, since the art of the folktale is the privileged domain of women, these monsters are mostly the creation of a female imagination. From here, one might ask why Kabyle women take so much pleasure in displaying monsters in general, and the ferocity of the female ones, in particular. Is there a parallel that one may establish between the art of the Kabyle folktale

and the mountainous nature that may eventually explain the emphasis put on the “deformities” disfiguring the world of the folktales? “Vice is a monster of so frightful mien/As, to be hated, needs to be seen,” Alexander Pope writes in the *Essay on Man*? Can we explain the excess in the representation of female monsters in Kabyle folktales as the result of a need felt by women as “guardians of tradition” to represent vice as monster and so define the limits of propriety just as the Kabyle Mountains define the boundaries between the human and the non-human?

Review of literature and issue

Apart from references here and there in articles and books, monsters and forms of monstrous acts have received practically no attention from scholars interested in Kabyle myths and folktales. Though Leo Frobenius (1921) had drawn attention to the significant role that the monstrous plays in Kabyle folklore nearly a century ago, to date the sole studies worth mentioning in this regard are those undertaken by Camille Lacoste Dujardin (1970,1986, 2008). Of French citizenship, just like Pierre Bourdieu(1998), Lacoste Dujardin (2008)has tried to dismantle her fellow French man’s categorical affirmation of “masculine domination” in the Kabyle community by appealing to Kabyle women’s folklore and quotidian lives that she experienced at first hand as an adopted daughter in a Kabyle family and village for many years after the independence of Algeria in 1962. Lacoste Dujardin takes Bourdieu to task for having overlooked women’s textual practice and their self-affirmation against a masculine cultural and social order that her French fellow sociologist describes as historically immutable. Women’s self-affirmation is expressed in symbolic violence embodied in female monsters. This symbolic violence through the deployment of monsters in tales is directed at the patriarchal system putting into relief its main contradictions to audiences who are the inheritors of that patriarchal legacy.

Though I agree with Lacoste Dujardin in foregrounding female monsters as symbols of critical resistance to masculine domination, I consider that she has not gone far enough in the direction of illustrating how the Kabyle folktales of the female monstrous stand as

a foil to myths with which that male domination originally starts. Reading contrapuntally the folktales of the female monstrous against male sanctioned myths is one of way of bringing into focus the subversion of the male sacred order of things by female “profane” folktales. This bringing together of gendered sacred texts and equally gendered profane tales as suggested by Leo Frobenius’s three-fold classification of Kabyle narratives (*Wisdom*, *The Monstrous*, and *The Fabulous*) is not without recalling the relation that the *Koran* as a sacred text holds with the *Arabian Nights* as its profane foil. So, I shall argue that though the male Kabyle sacred myths and female Kabyle profane folktales of monsters are steeped in a common folklore, they deploy significantly different epistemologies. Female monsters and female monstrous acts in female folktales are the visible markers of a critical discourse that degrade or uncrown the “rational” mode of knowledge peculiar to the myths that carry men’s “wisdom”. There is an iconoclastic predisposition in the female folktales of monsters that can be comprehended only if seen in opposition to the social and cultural construction of conventional female images or iconography in men’s myths. The female monsters in the folktales do not only eat men, they also cannibalize the Kabyle man’s mythical texts in their display of different categories of female monstrosities (social, political, economic monstrosities, etc) as a textual strategy for masculine domination.

Materials and methods

As Steven Swann Jones (1996) argues, one way of categorizing folktales is cultural. Though they are common to all mankind in various versions, folktales that are popular for one ethnic community or in one cultural area are not necessarily so for another. Folktales are culturally marked by the context of their collective production and consumption, which shows in the saliency accorded to certain motifs and stylistic features in folktales indicating culturally determined preferences of the audiences across ethnic communities. Jones’s suggestion of the possibility of classifying folktales in terms of cultural preferences for particular folktales or versions of these folktales is pertinent for delimiting the material at the basis of this study on monsters and the monstrous in Kabyle myths and folktales.

Indeed if there is one type of folktale that is very popular with Kabyle audiences, it is that of monsters and the monstrous in general and female monsters like *teryel* in particular. As said earlier, monsters are so prominent in Kabyle folktales that Leo Frobenius decides to devote a whole volume to this type that he calls ***The Monstrous***: “Chez les Kabyles, le monstrueux [...] est si prépondérant dans les contes en général mais aussi dans les récits d’aventures enjolivés que j’estime tout à fait justifiée ma décision de faire passer le tome II avant le tome III, consacré plutôt aux fables d’animaux et autres contes merveilleux (1996 :5) : *To the Kabyles, the monstrous [...] is so predominant in the folktales in general as well as in embellished adventure narratives that I consider my decision to place the second volume [of kabyle folktales entitled **The Monstrous**] before the third one devoted to animal fables and magic folktales completely justified.* (Trans. Mine)”

Frobenius’s cultural classification of Kabyle folktales is in line with what Jones says about preferences that cultures and communities accord to certain folk tales over others, but he seems to have overlooked the gender factor that inflects this popularity. If it is true that the monstrous constitutes the “essential of their [Kabyle] narratives,” it is also true that these monstrous narratives are not told and enjoyed in the same manner when they include female monsters and when they do not. Male monsters in Kabyle folktales are pale figures compared to the prominence that female ones receive in narration reflecting in this the preferences of the folktale tellers and their audiences. Frobenius does not seem to have taken heed of the relative preference for folktales of the female monstrous in Kabyle culture in placing them at the end of the second volume though he recognizes in the introduction that female monsters stand out above the male ones. As a cultural subcategory, the tales of the female monstrous comes first in the order of importance. Apart from this gender preference, the folk tales of the monstrous that Frobenius puts together indicate another preference related to age. Jones divides folktales into three subcategories: “tales for children, tales for adolescents and tales for relatively mature adults (22)”. Frobenius’s volume of folktales of the monstrous addresses a predominantly adolescent and relatively mature adult audience, what the Kabyles

refer to as *ilmeziane*, the young in English. So the factor of age also constitutes another specificity to be taken into account in the analysis of the monstrous.

Since Frobenius's second volume of collected folktales explicitly identifies the monstrous as a definitional characteristic of Kabyle folktales, it is used as the basis for the analysis of this cultural phenomenon in Kabyle society. The other definitional features of the folktales, gender and age, will serve as further criteria for the circumscription of the material. The exploration of the monstrous aspects in these folktales as the three volumes collected by Frobenius suggests, demand both a comparative and feminist perspective. It is in the relation between the myths of the first volume called *Wisdom*, that the nature and functions of female monsters and monstrosities in the folktales proper take their full significance. The myths explain to a large extent how the monstrous and female monsters came to dominate the folktales. In the gendered distinction that I establish between Kabyle myths and folktales I follow the lead of G.S. Kirk (1988: 31-41) who, in spite of the controversy over the relation of these two terms among folklorists, maintains the distinction between these two types of traditional narratives by relating them to different social classes, respectively the aristocracy and the peasantry. In the Kabyle case, myth and folktale are divided across gender lines, the former mostly a male, and the latter basically a female cultural production.

Results and discussion

In the introduction to the first volume devoted to Kabyle myths entitled *Wisdom*, Frobenius lets us know that the recitation of myths in the Kabyle community observes a very strict ritual procedure. It demands among other things that these myths be kept a secret from Arabs, that the narrator of these myths put a grain of wheat in his mouth during recitation, and that the recitation take place only at night never in presence of women, and preferably outside home. Before the beginning of recitation, a cock is sacrificed, and at the end of the fourth night, another animal a goat or a sheep is also sacrificed to close the recitation. The sacredness of the myths makes them tabooed knowledge to women. In the same introduction, Frobenius tells us that

the “conte n’est pas de nature exclusivement profane; autrefois, on ne devait le raconter que le soir ou la nuit (p.20): *The folktale is not exclusively of a profane nature: in former times, it is recounted only in the evening or at night.* (Trans. mine)” In other words, the folktales of the monstrous have become a predominantly profane matter. Contrary to the myths that carry men’s “wisdom,” folktales are degraded traditional narratives recited by women at home around the hearth and invested with what is known as the science of women, a female epistemology that Kabyles generally refer to as *Aliilm n tilawin*. Frobenius’s distinction among myths, i.e., folktales regarded as receptacles of men’s wisdom, and folktales of the monstrous proper is to the point, but he seems to have ignored the textual dialectic between these two traditional narratives in relation to gender power relations. Though he recognizes the preponderance of the monstrous in the Kabyle system of traditional texts, his watertight generic classification of these texts seems to have overlooked the textual evidence that the Kabyle man’s myths of “wisdom” constitute the original discursive sites for the construction of female monstrosities over which men have textually and symbolically prevailed in laying down the norms of the patriarchal system. By contrast, there is a noticeable resurgence in the portrayal of female monstrosities in the folktales of the monstrous narrated mostly by women. Because of the excessive, complex and attractive manner in which these female monstrosities resurface in the folktales, I have construed this textual phenomenon as an indication of women’s resistance to the symbolic violence that Kabyle males exert over them through diverse forms of monstification in the myths.

Since myths are the original sites of the emergence of female monsters, I shall start this discussion part of the research with the analysis of this monstrous or anomalous aspect of myths in order to see how the idea of female monsters came to be constructed as a danger to male social, political and economic order. The first Kabyle myth with which Frobenius begins the first volume offers an indication of how monsters came to existence. The myth explains that at the beginning of the world, in *illo tempore*, there were only one man and one woman, living in the depths of the earth. This Kabyle Adam

and Eve were totally ignorant of their sexual differences. One day they went to the fountain to quench their thirst. In their fight over who would drink first (in Kabyle the verb “drink” has a sexual connotation), the woman fell down revealing her nakedness as her clothes opened out. Looking at her genitals, the man realized that she was sexually different from him. Curiosity pushed him to put his finger in the woman’s genital organ, starting thus an eight-day-long love making. Nine months later, the woman gave birth to 4 girls, followed by 4 boys nine months later, after another pregnancy. This cycle of pregnancies and births continued until the number of their offspring reached a total of 50 girls and 50 boys. Not knowing what to do with their children, the first parents of the world sent them away, the former going eastward and the latter northward.

As they walked on and on underground, each gender group came to a sky-open hole out of which they emerged into day light, a kind of separate chthonian, second birth, resolving the problem of incest. As the 50 girls and the 50 boys started to interrogate loudly the world around them, asking plants, rivers, the moon and the sky to tell them who created them, they realized that they were close to each other standing on opposite sides of a river. To cut the narration of this myth of the first Kabyle parents short, the 50 boys and 50 girls came to live in a forest clearing, putting a safe distance between them. One day, the boys told themselves that they would no longer live under an open sky, deciding to build houses instead. Accordingly, some of them started digging up holes and some others underground galleries to use them as shelters, but soon some of them realized that stones and trees could be used for construction works. The myth tells us that among each group, there is one anti-social person in each of the two gender groups, living separately from their own gender group. It happened that the male anti-social person, prowling around the boys’ compound, surprised one of the girls, a dare-devil of her kind, spying on the boys before entering one of their houses during their absence. Roaring at her, the girl took fright and fled out shouting in the direction of the girls’ encampment. Alerted by her shouts, the boys altogether ran after the fleeing girl only to meet half way through with the girls who also hurried to her rescue from the other direction.

A mythic battle of the sexes took place, with a female-Amazon war cry that each and every girl had to throw down a boy of her choice to the ground in order to confirm what the dare-devil girl had told them about their sexual difference earlier when she returned from spying on the boys bathing naked in the river. Tearing the boys' clothes off, they took out the swelling boys' genital organs in their hands, and with throbbing hearts, these Amazon girls decided to unclothe themselves and to make love to the defeated boys. Becoming more excited in their turn, the boys took their partners to their newly-built houses. The myth tells us that they married, and goes on to add that once settled in their houses, now their conjugal homes the boys told themselves that "Ce n'est pas correct que ce soit la femme qui se couche sur l'homme! Désormais, lorsque nous nous accouplerons, c'est nous, les hommes, qui seront sur vous, les femmes. Ainsi nous deviendrons les maîtres (Vol. 1, p.32): *It is not right that a woman lies on a man. Henceforward, when we make love to our women, it is we men who will sit upon you, women. In this way, we shall become your masters.*(Trans. mine)" At this point, the myth tells us that men and women lived happily in their homes, except for the two anti-social types, the wild woman and the wild man who refused to integrate the new social order. The two of them are discursively transformed into the first monsters, the former into the first she-ogre called *Teryel*, and the later into a lion *izem* or *ayred* in Kabyle. Both of them are represented as human flesh eaters, coming out of the forest only to prey on the young children of their socialized siblings.

Some observations need to be made about this mythic process of monstification at this stage. For one thing, one can note that these first two monsters had not had some sort of supernatural birth. They were the result of a social and cultural metamorphosis caused by the refusal of the first social charter that is the myth itself. In other words, it is their anti-social behaviour that the myth deploys to monstrify them. This anti-social behaviour expresses itself in the refusal to join in the civilization or acculturation process of home and family building, refusing to live in socialized spaces and homes by taking to the wilderness, and giving themselves up to human flesh eating instead of feeding themselves on plants, and last but not least preying

on the offspring of those who made the first charter among the Kabyles. At first sight, this myth places the female monster and male monster on the same footing. Yet looking closely at it, the myth suggests that the social and cultural monstrosity *Teryel* is even worse. Unlike her fellow Amazon sisters who gave up what seems to be a first matriarchal order of things signified by women making sex to men, *Teryel* rejected domestic and sexual subjugation at the hands of the founders of patriarchy. She emerges out of the myth as an untamed Amazon who not only questions the new gender power relations, but threatens even the offspring of her 99 siblings who agreed to negotiate the new terms of gender power relations that gave Kabyle men the fruits of women's fertility.

As it is put forward in the myth of the first parents, the asocial man is also monstified as a lion, (*Izem* or *aired*). The third Kabyle myth recorded in Frobenius's volume confirms this since it excludes the lion from the list of animals. This myth about the "first wild bull at the origin of the wild animals" tells us that the "lion provient de la transformation d'un homme sauvage mangeur de chair humaine (Vol.1, p.40): *that the lion issues from the transformation of a wild man, eater of human flesh.* (Trans. mine)" However, there is a sense of nobility in male Kabyle mythology about the lion that is totally absent or missing when the name of *Teryel* is evoked. The name of lion is symbolically associated with manliness, courage (*thirugza* in Kabyle) that sheds positively on all Kabyle men. So his monstrosity is more often a positive feature than a negative one. This is suggested in the myth of the first parents where the wild man scares the spying girl, thus starting the whole process of patriarchal civilization. As a positive monster he sets the decorum, domestic limits or threshold that women can cross only at their perils. In myth 18 in Frobenius's list, we learn that in "the time of folktales and kings" seven orphaned brothers persecuted by their mother-in-law (another female monster in Kabyle folktales) lived with seven orphaned lions in a nearby forest. The orphaned children grew up to behave just like their monster hosts when one day they were tricked to drop out their animal skins stolen by a hunter while bathing in the river. To hide their nakedness, they accepted to wear man-made clothes proposed by the same hunter who

gave them shelter in his home. In this myth, we have a re-transformation of lions, male monsters into men. This myth concludes with the moral coda that “ce sont les hommes les plus beaux et les plus forts qu’on ait jamais vus! (p.76): *they [the lions metamorphosed into men] were the most handsome and strongest men we have ever seen!* (Trans.mine)”

It follows from the above discussion that the original male monster, the lion, can undergo a reverse transformation from monster to man. Such a reverse metamorphosis is denied to the original female monster *Teryel* in male Kabyle mythology. She is irreversibly monstrified by a sexual and domestic politics which rejects women who dare challenge it outside the bounds of the patriarchal law to the monstrous margins of an unfamiliar space that the Kabyle call *amadagh*. The immutability of *Teryel* as a female monster is further supported by the mutability of the first woman of the world into a monster, a witch (a *setut* in Kabyle language) as she takes age, i.e., becomes infertile. Kabyle myths do not only tell us about how men instituted their domestic and sexual politics that make women subordinate to their men, they also narrate how women came to be excluded from politics as the power to organize society. In order to legitimate the exclusion of women from exercising power in the public sphere, after having discursively imposed male supremacy in the home, men constructed several other myths illustrating the monstrosity of women in the domain of politics proper.

In myth 9 in Frobenius’s collection, we learn how Kabyle women inevitably metamorphose into monsters (in this case a *setut*) as they take age following in this a mythical pattern set by the first woman of the world. This myth recalls that the first woman of the world used to master magic, which she transmitted to human beings, to avail themselves of it in carrying out the various difficult tasks of their quotidian existence. Thus empowered, it was easy then for people to have a wood or a stone pile cut or quarried, to take seat on that pile, and to order it to carry them to their villages and homes just like a magical carpet. However, as she grew older, the first woman of the world (now monstrified to a *setut*, a sorceress or witch because of her infertility), she wanted to make people now living in different

villages believe that she created everything including water (a symbol for life, and thus fecundity) that she no longer mastered because of her old age. Reminded of the limits of her magical powers, she decided to punish them for doubting the absolute character of her knowledge by committing the most tabooed act, I would say the most monstrous act, for the Kabyles, which is that of breaking wind in public. For a Kabyle woman, breaking wind stands as a symbolic act signifying an infertile belly or barren womb. One day during the religious feast of *Eid-El-Fitr* celebrating the end of the fasting month of Ramadan in the Muslim ritual calendar, a day when women needed a lot of wood to cook food, she woke up early and preceded the other village women to the forest. She prepared a wood pile, sat upon it and ordered it to carry her to her home. In the middle of the journey back home, she broke wind on the pile of wood. Deeply hurt by such a monstrous offense, the pile of wood stopped moving. It expressed its outrage at such an abominable behaviour before losing, forever, that magical power of speech and communication. The first woman of the world, who became the first sorceress *setut*, came back home with the pile of wood on her back, and told the village women that henceforward wood would have to be carried on their back.

This fall from the magical female world caused by the breaking of wind by the first woman of the world further resulted in confusion and birth of languages, conflicts and separation of human beings into distinct peoples. The myth closes with the reminder that “thus was power [understand male power], powerful nations and empires were born.” To put an end to the anarchy thus loosened upon the world, the ant (a cultural heroine for the Kabyles) advised the elderly males (*imgharen izemnyen* in Kabyle) to guide the disunited people by assigning each and every people a separate and definite national territory. This myth of the political monstification of women, allegedly thirsty for absolute political power takes its full significance only if set within the context of that Kabyle political and social organization the *tajmait* through which political power has been exercised in the public sphere in the Kabyle village communities even since then. The *Tajmait* is a village assembly constituted of the elderly males. Its access is closed to elderly women judged to be polluting

because of their infertility, and hence a danger to the management of political affairs. What has to be observed in this myth about how the first woman of the world was toppled down from political power is that the relation of knowledge to power and age is rendered differently for the two sexes. Age or seniority makes the males assume an epistemological respect that entitles them to the exercise of an allegedly rational and democratic form of political power. On the contrary, the factor of age and seniority inevitably leads women to an epistemological excess that metamorphoses them into political monsters (*setut*) whose dominant feature is political intrigue or manipulation, personal aggrandizement, unconscionable appetite for power, and the refusal of politics as a democratic game.

The epistemological and political monstrification of Kabyle women through female agism is consolidated through many other myths. So in myth 7 in Frobenius's book, we learn that the first *setut* was responsible for the first human sacrifice. She magically made the sun drop down into a bucket full of water, thus causing the first solar eclipse, happening every five years since then, and with the resulting loss of the benefit of one day light for all humanity for the same period. Worse, the sun accepted to rise back into its sphere on the condition to be propitiated with the sacrifice of a child. Moreover, in myth 10, we are told that she was responsible for the transformation of children into monkeys. Apparently a gourmand, one day the *setsut* met a boy and told him that when we help ourselves to a couscous dish containing no meat that dish deserves to be defecated on once we are full of it. With such an epistemic or behavioural monstrosity lodged in his mind, the child committed the monstrous act of defecation on this Kabyle dish par excellence at the first occasion he was given to eat from a couscous dish made without meat, the result of which was his metamorphosis into a monkey. The list of monstrosities that the first *setut* is long and can take weeks and weeks to narrate as myth 10 in Frobenius's first volume tells us. But it seems that one of the most fatal for man in the generic sense of the word is that of the transformation of sleep into permanent death. Myth 17 recounts how the first woman of the world, now grown into a *setut* let a new mother know that God would come and ask her to make a choice between a

temporary separation from or death of her newly born and permanent death for humanity. Until then, people had not known what death was like, for when they were physically tired, their souls temporarily quitted their bodies and returned after a span of rest. The setut advised the new mother to choose the option of permanent death instead of temporary rest or sleep, when God would come to propose her the two options for choice.

Myth 12 relates the death of the first woman of the world. Even her death is not without negative consequences for humanity. This myth starts with a reminder of how the first woman of the world caused the disappearance of a magic world where both animate and inanimate objects speak and where people speak the same language. It goes on to put the blame on her for all the physical disabilities that man can suffer from, before moving on to how she meets with death at the foot of the Djurdjura Mountains while grazing her sheep and cattle. It happens that one day close to the end of the month of January (*Yenneyer* in Kabyle) the first woman of the world was sitting in the middle of her grazing cattle and sheep, busy churning her milk when she heard one of her sheep coughing from a cold. At this, she began launching insults at Uncle January telling her sheep not to be afraid since the month was finished. Having heard her insults, Uncle January went to his brother February (*Furar* in Kabyle) and told him to lend him just a week in order to punish her. He obtained the prolongation from his brother and caused the fall of snow for seven days and seven nights, the consequence of which is the freezing of the first woman of the world and her animals into stone. The long- term result is the death of old women in the particularly cold first days of February.

The political monstrosity sometimes has no age for women in the myths. This is what myth 16 entitled “God’s message and his gifts to peoples” teaches the Kabyle. In the early ages of humanity, this myth recounts, women were more intelligent than males, and so God thought of assigning a young girl the mission of distributing gifts to his various peoples. He gave her two bags full of money and two others full of lice with the order of handing the former to the Kabyle people and emptying one of the bags of lice on Arabs and the contents of the remaining other bags on the Europeans. This female messenger

did not follow God's order since she left the two bags of lice for the Kabyle, one bag of money for the Arabs and another one for the Europeans. The core theme of this myth is economic monstrosity. The female girl was not able to manage God's wealth and gifts for the benefit of her own people the Kabyle, for apparently this first female messenger is of Kabyle stock. God was furious when the girl reported how she distributed his wealth or gifts to humanity. God is quoted saying, "Voilà comment, à cause d'une femme, naissent la méfiance et la mauvaise foi sur la terre! Les femmes sont plus intelligentes que les homes; mais elles ont si mal agi en commettant cette faute qu'à l'avenir, elles seront tenues de rester à la maison. (Vol.1, pp.66-67): *This is how because of a woman, suspicion and bad faith were born on earth! Women were more intelligent than men. But they acted so badly in committing this mistake [mismanagement of God's gifts] that in the future, they will have to stay at home.* (Trans. Mine)" After this divine decision to exclude women from the economic sphere, God punished the female culprit by transforming her into a crow doomed to live separately from other birds and to fly around in the sky croaking the avowal "rkeg", meaning "I was wrong in English."

Some other observations need to be about the representation of monstrosity and the monstrous in Kabyle myths at this second stage of the discussion. First, what is notable about these myths is that they ascribe monstrosity more to females than males. Female monstrosity seems to be totally negative and immutable while the male one is redeemable, and can at times turn out to be positive as is the case with the lion. Second, there are several aspects or levels of female monstrosity. At least three aspects or levels can be identified. One of them is sexual, social or domestic monstrosity caused in part by *Teryel's* rejection of the patriarchal family at the beginning of the world when she refused to negotiate her fertility for the benefit of the Kabyle man. The second is political monstrosity ascribed to the first woman of the world, the matriarch *setut* whose autocratic rule was the cause of all sorts of monstrosities and abuse of power caused in part by her loss of fertility. Third follows economic monstrosity that finds expression in the female messenger whose economic mismanagement of God's wealth or gifts made the Kabyles the poorest people on earth.

Now if one has to ask the question about the main function of female monstrosity in Kabyle myths, the answer is not hard to come by because of the adulation that males receive in the same myths. Female monstrosity in Kabyle myths, I shall argue, serves both as a mechanism of repression and oppression of female rebels, and an ideological tool for legitimating the exclusion of women from the public sphere of politics and economy, their confinement and subordination in the household, and the logical replacement of a women's order of things by a patriarchal economic, social, economic, and cultural system judged to be more rational simply because it is instituted by males. In short, the monstrous mode of representing women in Kabyle myths is, to quote Bourdieu, a form of symbolic violence that Kabyle men use as an instrument of masculine domination.

In what follows, I shall argue, that there is a "clash over the referent" between the representation of female monstrosity in the Kabyle folktales and that in the myths. If Kabyle myths, as I have said earlier, use the monstrous mode of representation as a means of repressing female rebels to the new patriarchal order, the folktales offers an ideal narrative site for the return of the repressed monstrous. "Where there is power, there is resistance," Michel Foucault (1978:93) tells us. The Kabyles do not seem to escape from this dialectic of power and resistance reflected in the relation of myth, a basically male sacred narrative retracing the birth of patriarchal power against the background of female monstrification, and folk tales which are basically female profane narratives through which women subvert, undermine and resist the patriarchal order imposed on them by giving full vent to a positive female monstrosity. So as cultural productions, Kabyle myths and folktales reflect two diametrically opposed views of female monstrosity.

As explained earlier, the myth of the origins of the first parents retraces the origins of the first female monster *Teryel* excluded from the human fold on the basis of her rejection of the institution of the patriarchal family model. What is to be noted about the mode of representation of *Teryel* in this myth is that it is allegorical. In other words, the portrayal of the female monster is limited to a sketchy

description of character traits related to her resistance to the masculine order of things. No sooner is this female monster mentioned than her presence is ritually expelled to the margins as a danger to the purity of the newly instituted domestic order. She is never to be referred to again in the rest of the myths, except in the implied comparison with a *setut* or witch with a stomach full of wind as a shared index of their danger to purity and fertility. To this ritual expulsion from the discursive space in the myths corresponds the discursive saliency accorded to her presence in the folktales of the monstrous proper. Indeed the saliency of this female monster is such that people especially women, i.e., the primary narrators of folktales, and its young audiences believe in her real existence. "It is a strange phenomenon," Frobenius remarks, that "narratives of adventure resorting to witches (*Teryel*) are regarded by their narrators as true stories, accounts of experienced events. (Introduction to the first volume, p.6)" The folktale of the monstrous, therefore, contrary to myth, is a narrative site wherein the female monster *Teryel* returns in a bid of self-affirmation and resistance to male power at the level of the imaginary. The audience's expectations are that it is practically impossible for a Kabyle to imagine folktales without this female monster. One of the consecrated expressions in referring to *Teryel*'s independence in the folktales is that "vav bukhem thnesth" literally meaning that the owner of the home is she. The same expression can be extended to include the folktales themselves as *Teryel*'s proprietary narratives.

Ever since Vladimir Prop's study of folktales (1994), scholars have generally looked at folktales as being "heavily functional". Functions are more important than characters in the analysis and classification of these types of narrative. This does not seem to hold completely true in the case of the Kabyle female monster, *Teryel*, because of the complexity of her characterization. She is not just a stock character or type that can be pigeonholed in a given role to fulfill an assigned function in an ordered set of functions in the folktales. Her physical appearance and her psychological attributes are so various that they set her apart from other folkloric monsters and make her look like, to use Freud's terms in another context, a real

female discontent with man's civilization. The complexity of this monster is what makes for the pleasure of the text in the narration of Kabyle folktales of the monstrous. To paraphrase Roland Barthes (1977), she is the heroine in her own sphere of action most often situated outside the Kabyle village.

So what are the definitional characteristics of the female monster in terms of physical appearance and psychology? As in the myth of creation, the folktales generally describe *Teryel* as a "wild" woman of giant proportions. Furthermore, just as in the myth, she remains recognizably human in spite of the metamorphosis that she has undergone because of her resistance to male power. In accordance with her wildness, she wears long, disheveled hair with pale, blue eyes and long crooked nails. Sometimes she is described as shortsighted and as hard of hearing. At other times, she is represented as an unparalleled beauty with a higher degree of intelligence than other monsters. She carries her long breasts flung crosswise at her back. At night when she is deeply asleep, the heroes and the heroines can hear the beasts that she devoured during the day making a formidable noise in her large belly. In most of the folktales, this is taken as the signal that the time for escape has come. Her habitation space is generally the forest (*amadagha* in vernacular) with an isolated home of her own, but in some folktales she has neighbours who envy her prosperity.

Most of the time, she is often portrayed as a single mother with a female child alternatively described as a beauty (Loundja) or a hideous, shorted-sighted figure (Aicha Bouteliss). In exceptional cases, she has a husband, standing above him in terms of both intelligence and physical stature. In equally very exceptional cases, the folktales say that she has given birth to one or seven ogres. Brother monsters are never mentioned in connection with her, but she is said to have several sister monsters that she is always happy to invite for a feast on human flesh. Her food preferences go to fattened boy children or adults. She is also portrayed as a property owner. Her fields in which she works all day long having barely enough time to gulp down her food are always prosperous and jealously guarded. The heroes or heroines are usually trespassers on her property. Her jars (*ikhufen*) are always full of agricultural produce, gold and jewelry. It is in these jars

that Kabyle trickster heroes like Isher (fingernail in English) ask *Teryel* to put them. Her cattle and sheep are grazed fat. In spite of the mostly monstrous characteristics adduced to her, heroes and heroines often lovingly call her *Yama Jidda*, mother grand-mother in English. Arguably, *Teryel* is not a stock folkloric monster since, as the folktale "The Wicked Husband and the She-Ogre" (Alliouï Youcef, 2002, 26-33) shows, even married women often call her for help when they are victims of domestic violence.

The brief model description above makes clear that there is a discursive expansion of the representative of female monstrosity in Kabyle folktales. Admittedly, this is due to the propensity of the genre of folktale, but that cannot be so easily dismissed. I rather consider this saliency as a response to the negative monstrosity assigned to women in Kabyle myths. All the types of negative female monstrosity identified in the myths are taken over and transformed into positive forms.

Let us take the monstrosities one by one and see how the narrative process of monstrification in the myths is subverted in favour of women in the folktales. The first type of monstrosity is undermined in the folktales is the domestic one. What all the folktales seem to suggest is that *Teryel* is a non-conformist in her relation to the patriarchal family. Contrary to the myth of creation which makes such a small case of this monstrosity, the folktales provide all sorts of anti-family, monstrosities if seen through patriarchal eyes. So, the folktales sometimes delineate *Teryel* as a single aged woman reigning singlehanded over her home and domain; sometimes she is delineated as a single mother or parent with a female or boy child; sometimes, she is married to an ogre with no children; and still at other times, she has forcibly married a human being. All these anti-family types are monstrified forms of the Kabyle family type marked off by patriarchy, patrilinearity, and the production of a huge number of male children. Against the miserable fate of the idealized mother who die at a young age exhausted by her many pregnancies, *Teryel* often lives to a healthy advanced age because of her practice of birth control.

In the folktales, *Teryel* is generally described as someone who has refused to negotiate her fertility for the benefit of man as is the

case in the myths. Instead of marriage, she prefers to remain single without losing completely the maternal feeling. Though barren, very often folk tale heroes appeal to this maternity feeling by jumping at the back of *Teryel* to suck her suspended breast becoming in this way her adoptive children. The status of adopted child ensures the security of the hero. When she is married, her children are generally female for whom she shows a great love. So on the whole, *Teryel* in the folktales opposes or resists the forceful male appropriation of women's fertility in the Kabyle myths. The terror that she inspires is mostly due to the possibility that women have of withholding this fertility from men, and proposing equally viable models of family.

This deconstruction of the patriarchal model of family is also accompanied by the critique of the home as it is conceived in the myths. Contrary to these myths, *Teryel* is not represented as the monster who has refused to have a home built, preferring to live instead in caves and underground holes. The picture that stands out in these folktales is that of a female home owner not obliged to spend her time in the kitchen. Arguably, the most prominent folktale in this regard is that of "Mkidesh". Mkidesh the title character was born to a sterile mother who managed to cure her sterility by taking a fertility medicine consisting of an apple. Because she helped herself to only a half of that apple, that is half the dose of the medicine, Mkidesh came to life a physically diminished person, but with extraordinary intellectual capacities associated with his miraculous birth. In the version of the folktale consigned by Frobenius, Mkidesh is portrayed as one of *Teryel*'s close neighbours, which eliminates the spatial discrimination usually found in other versions. In other words, both the monstified *Teryel* and Mkidesh live in a socialized space while usually *Teryel* is segregated in another negatively associated space like the forest (*amadagh* in Kabyle).

Frobenius's version of the folktale tells us: "Un jeune homme nommé Mqidech habitait dans le voisinage d'une ogresse qui était immensément riche. Comme Mqidech était pauvre, il décida de s'emparer par la ruse et la subtilité de quelques-unes de ses richesses (p.261): A young man called Mqidech lived in the neighbourhood of a she-ogre who was immensely rich. Since Mqidech

was poor, he decided to cunningly and subtly seize some items of her wealth. (Trans. mine) The initial situation of lack (poverty) which triggers the action is the one which we usually find in the folktales of a mountainous people whose scarcity of sources often send them to distant lands in search of means of livelihood. In this case, Mkidesh is portrayed as a covetous stay-at-home villager who decides to trick a female single neighbour taxed as a monster out of her hard earned wealth. What is notable in this tale is that female and male roles are reversed since Mkidesh stays at home and desires the objects, all of them symbolic as we shall see, that *Teryel* possesses. The first object that he covets is a beautiful woolen blanket or carpet used as bedding, and that *Teryel* has stretched out on her fence on a sunny day before she goes away to work in the fields. Taking advantage of her absence, Mkidesh puts needles in the carpet. At night, dead tired because of hard work, *Teryel* feels a prick of resentment at the uncomfortable feeling caused by the little needles in her bedding. So she throws it out of the window. Waiting outside under cover of darkness, Mkidesh runs away with it to his home, takes the needles out and beds down comfortably on it. Clearly, *Teryel* does not throw away the carpet, so much as its prickle, a symbol of the sexual activity and the fertility in children that it connotes for her covetous neighbor.

The second object that our female monster throws out at Mkidesh's instigation is the domestic grinder mentioned in the Kabyle myths as the first kitchen utensil to be originally handed to women in order to transform the grain produced by their men into flour, a transformed ingredient necessary for making food. Disturbed by the noise of the grinder that Mkidesh keeps turning through an arranged system from outside home at a late hour in the night, *Teryel* gets up and throws it out of the window. As in the first case, Mkidesh takes it to his home. "*Imensi*" in Kabyle society is the last and most important meal of the day that all the members of the family often take together in the evening. It is in the context of this meal time that the dismissing gesture of *Teryel* throwing the grinder takes its full significance. What she refuses to comply with in this case is the transformation and nourishing activity assigned to women in Kabyle homes. Such a daily

routine or ritual activity does not fit in well with her independent character.

As Mkidesh weaves out his tricks, *Teryel* finds excuses to desecrate the most sacred objects and activities assigned to women as traditional homemakers. First, she throws away her fat hen that everyone in the village wanted to buy, thus doing away with the image of woman as hen raisers; she captures Mkidesh, but she lets herself be duped too easily into putting him in an earthen jar or granary (*Ikufen* in Kabyle) full of dried figs in order to be fattened for slaughter. Mkidesh like another trickster figure *Ired* (the Grain of Wheat) in another Kabyle folktale pollutes the provision granaries that Kabyle women generally manage for the household. At first sight, as some critics like Lacoste-Dujardin claim, this sounds as a derision of *Teryel* for her incapacity as a manager of man's produce. Indeed, it is Kabyle women who are supposed to store, manage, and preserve the domestic sources amassed by men from impurity. But in the case of the folktales of Mkidesh and *Isher* (Grain of Wheat), the monstrous act which consists of polluting domestic reserves and endangering the survival of female-centred and economically viable households comes as a result of envious male tricksters. If the social function of the folktales consists in proving that *Teryel* deserves the name of monster because she cannot classify products into convenient categories (humid vs dry) and to store the adequate one in the granary as conventional homemakers would do, there is a certain militant irony in these folktales at the level of discourse because to all evidence *Teryel* was good home manager before the intervention of these expedient tricksters.

Studies of the traditional Kabyle family structure have revealed the domination that mothers exercise on their "adult" sons and daughters. They relate this domination to the rigid patriarchal system which accords social status only to mothers with male children. Until a woman proves that she is fertile in sons, she is reduced to a non-entity because she has nothing of value to negotiate, and so risks to be repudiated. Mothers with many sons offer a labour force to the household and the village as well as protection for their honour. The terms of such negotiation between husband and wife on the one hand,

and the mother and son on the other include the provision that mothers were the ones who manage the household for the benefit of the patriarchal system, that they choose a partner for their sons, who becomes also a domestic help mate. The son remains eternally indebted to his mother who reminds him that it is, because of him, that she has borne out all the rigours of the patriarchal system. As a consequence, he is obliged to prove constantly his attachment to his mother whereas his partner promises not to outdo her in love towards her son. The final result of this negotiation is the development of incestuous relations and the short-circuiting of normal conjugal relationship (Khodja Souad, 1991). In other terms, the rigidity of the patriarchal system leads to the social monstrosity of the possessive mother or the adulterous father denounced in folktales such as the “ungrateful woman” and the “ungrateful mother” in Frobenius’s second-volume collection. In these tales, the monstrous emerges from within the patriarchal family itself not from outsider monsters like *Teryel*.

In “the ungrateful wife,” we learn that a father demands that his seven sons kill their wives and wrench their hearts to be eaten by him as a cure for an explained disease. He holds this as sign of loyalty from his sons. All of them executed the father’s monstrous wish, except one of them. The latter’s refusal of this barely disguised adulterous relation leads to his expulsion from the father’s home. He first finds refuge in a house belonging to 99 ogres, 98 of whom he exterminated, unknowingly leaving one of them agonizing in a closed room. As time passed, his wife discovered the remaining ogre during her husband’s absence, healed him only to fall in love with him not long after. In the meantime, the husband meets with the “monstrous” *Teryel* who becomes his foster mother after a ritual of breastfeeding. She warns him that his wife will betray him. In front of his unbelief, the loving *Teryel* has her foster son promise to plead with his wife to send his bones to her if her prediction turns out to be true.

Everything happens as *Teryel* has predicted. On his return back home, the wife starts crying as soon as he sees him telling him that she is afraid that he no longer possesses enough physical force to protect her. The only way to assuage her fears and prove that he can still

assume her protection is for the husband to accept to be tied and try to break his ties. At a first trial, the husband snaps the cords, but at a second trial tied with his wife's hair he remains powerless. At the appearance of the ogre-lover, the husband realizes that he is betrayed, but before being devoured he pleads with his wife to gather his bones, put them on a donkey's back with the direction to take them "where horses feed on grilled oats," a reference to *Teryel's* house. The wife complies with the husband's last wish, and the unbroken bones reach *Teryel's* house accordingly. This familiar monster re-arranges the bones on the ground to form a skeleton, over which she sprinkles her milk every day. Little by little, the skeleton regains flesh and blood and the husband was reborn. When *Teryel* realizes that he has completely recuperated his strength, she lets him go back to his home now occupied by the adulterous wife and her ogre-husband, to avenge himself. Disguised as a beggar, the adulterous couple showed him charity by inviting him for *Imensi*, the last meal of day. The vengeance on the monstrous act assumes a peculiarly Kabyle shape. During the course of the meal, the husband is asked to recount a story, a request that he kindly accepted. In the process of narration, the adulterous wife and the ogre gradually sink into the earth as they shamefully realize the drive of the tale denouncing their monstrosity. Before their heads are swallowed up by the earth, the man cuts them off with his sword.

The folktale of the "ungrateful mother" follows the same narrative pattern, except that in this case the son saves the life of his mother with whom he lives in the forest after killing the same number of ogres. The adulterous monstrosity of the "ungrateful wife" is replaced by the incestuous monstrosity in this folktale. Instead of the idealized mother of the patriarchal household, the folktales helps us to an oedipal scenario wherein the son first saves the mother when his father tells him to do so, gets killed by the mother with the complicity of an ogre, spares her life when he regains the upper hand and abandons her to her fate in the forest. He goes in quest of adventure and wins the hand of a beautiful girl after killing *Talafsa*, another female monster which is depicted as a seven-headed female serpent. Feeling very regretful at his abandoning the monstrous mother, he

goes back to her and takes her to his new home. The possessive mother tries to poison him. He survives and finally kills her by cutting her into pieces. Obviously, the oedipal conflicts as portrayed in this tale are much more difficult to surmount in the Kabyle community than those represented in Greek tragedy because of the rigidity of the patriarchal system. It is this same patriarchal system that engenders female monsters such as possessive mothers, adulterous wives, and malicious mother-in-laws. The latter are there because of the early death of mothers submitted to an excessive procreation for the perpetuation of the patriarchal system. These inside monsters fabricated by this same system are even more threatening to its existence than the sympathetic *Teryel* figure living outside of it.

In folktale 32, "The Agile Hunter and the She-ogre," *Teryel* invites herself to the village assembly the *Tajmait* in search of a fleeing hunter caught poaching on her territory full of game. Metamorphosed into a beautiful woman, *Teryel* takes seat next to the hunter before she rises up to announce that she will marry the man in the assembly who will wrestle her down to the ground. In their response to the challenge, the assembly members are beaten up in front of the frightened hunter. At last, she comes back to the latter shaming him to take his chance like the other village assembly men, which he finally does. *Teryel* falls on purpose at the first touch. The irony of it all is that he the agile hunter who is supposed to be a protector of the village from external danger finds himself married to her and obliged to submit to her rule. In this tale, it is the political monstrosity on which Kabyle man's mythologies have constructed the patriarchal system that founders. *Teryel's* defiance of the *Tajmait* and her conquest of the agile hunter one of its best representative men reverse or rather subvert the sexual roles and the values that the same political organization has assigned to them.

Conclusion

It follows from this discussion that female monsters in Kabyle folktales are not simply representations of vices to be seen in order to be hated. We have seen that the Kabyle myth system monstrifies women as *Teryel* or *setut* in order to legitimate the patriarchal system of domination at all levels. The women's refusal to negotiate their fertility for the political, social, economic benefit of men makes of them monsters in the eyes of the community. On the other hand, this analysis shows that the representation of female monsters in folktales do not necessary reproduce the masculine ideology of the myths as some sociologists like Bourdieu affirm. In the folktales, it is less a matter that women are represented as monsters, and more a question of the preeminence given to these resisting monsters, as well as the complex and attractive manner in which they are presented by the predominantly female storytellers. By displaying female monsters like *Teryel* in a complex and attractive manner, it is what the patriarchal system castigated as female vices (female independence, birth control, single parenthood, etc.) rather than virtues (easy recognition of male ownership of female fertility, domesticity, etc.) which are promoted.

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