



## The Manifestation of Folk Heritage Culture in Narrative Fiction: Desert Literature: A Critical Approach

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Submission: 14/05/2025

Acceptance: 09/12/2025

Publication: 24/05/2026

### Abstract:

The preservation of folk heritage is not confined merely to its collection and safeguarding; rather, it also entails transmitting and presenting it to future generations so that they may comprehend and embrace it as an integral part of their identity and as a profound bond with the land and the motherland. In this regard, the Algerian novel has striven diligently to revive this popular cultural heritage by inscribing it within its narrative structures, thereby ensuring its vitality, continuity, and circulation. Therefore, this research sheds light on women in southern Algeria, namely, the Sahara, and their relationships with this folk heritage, which is distinguished by its desert rituals and unique environment. For the purposes of this study, a descriptive critical approach is adopted to achieve the intended objectives.

**Keywords:** manifestation, folk heritage, women, the Sahara, culture, customs

### 1. Introduction

The novel is regarded as one of the most prominent literary genres. It is a modern prose art form that is distinguished from other literary genres. Owing to its distinctive narrative and aesthetic approach through which it addresses crucial issues that have occupied contemporary humanity and continue to do so, the novel has received considerable attention to the extent that it has become the foremost literary art of our age. This is evident in its portrayal of lived reality in all its forms and details, which has inspired writers to adopt it as a framework for narrative writing and encouraged readers to acquire it and search for their absent selves between its lines. Hence, “the extent of the relationship linking the creative text and the recipient becomes apparent to us ... represented in its positive forms through cognitive, scientific, and social dimensions ...”<sup>1</sup> On this basis, the novel has succeeded in achieving this characteristic through the trajectories of novelistic writing extending throughout its temporal development, while simultaneously attaining that distinguished status within the framework of the reading and cultural system.

Among the most significant issues addressed by the novel is its preservation of popular cultural heritage in all its material and immaterial manifestations, particularly heritage related to the status of women within society and the family and their relationship with the patriarchal institution. Thus, the novel became a vessel that preserved heritage from loss and disappearance. Popular culture has played an important role in affirming the identity of



people, including Algerian popular culture, especially the popular culture embraced by southern Algeria, such as the regions of Adrar, Touat, and Hoggar. The latter preserved the identity of the Algerian people, “as it was dominated by the concern for daily needs and the symbolic and emotional character.”<sup>2</sup> Folk heritage is therefore the spirit of the nation that flows through its being across ages and generations. It is also the façade distinguishing the features of a nation from others, since it encompasses everything “that expressed our feelings, sprang from our essence, and flourished upon our land. Heritage is our civilisational inheritance in language, literature, science, art, philosophy, and religion ...”<sup>3</sup>

The interest of the Algerian novel in heritage was evident from the beginnings of its emergence despite the delay it experienced because of colonialism and its repercussions. Among the earliest pioneers in incorporating folk heritage into the Algerian novel was Abdelhamid Benhedouga in his fictional works, notably the novel *Al-Jaziya wa al-Darwish*, which served as the authentic voice of the customs and beliefs of Algerian society. Similarly, the novel that embraced the heritage of the Saharan region and its surroundings became a truthful interpreter of its reality. The Saharan novel documented all the intellectual, social, and doctrinal transformations that occurred within it, keeping pace with developments while drawing from Saharan folk heritage, which constituted the clearest evidence of its identity and belonging.

## **2. Defining the Critical Concepts of the Term: Folklore and Folk Heritage**

### **2.1 Term Folklore**

Historically, the term folklore (Folklore) has been associated with William John Thoms and the English Folklore Society. He was the first to formulate this term scientifically in 1846, and the Society officially adopted it upon its establishment in 1877.<sup>4</sup> The term folklore consists of two components: *folk*, meaning people, and *lore*, meaning knowledge or wisdom. Hence, the meaning of the word folklore is the wisdom of the people or popular knowledge. Thoms\* proposed this term solely to describe “the study of inherited customs and beliefs, as well as what had until then been vaguely known as Popular Antiquities.”<sup>5</sup>

Following the establishment of the English Society, many anthropologists attempted to define the functions of the term, among them Barbeau and Krapp, the latter regarding folklore as a historical science. Some scholars interested in anthropology, such as Bascom, considered the term folklore to have “come in anthropological usage to mean myths, supernatural tales, folktales, proverbs, riddles...”<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Herskovits narrowed the scope of the term and proposed several alternative designations, such as “unwritten literature” or “primitive (folk) literature,” which are now frequently employed in ethnology instead of folklore.<sup>7</sup>

These scholars viewed folklore as synonymous with folk literature transmitted through oral narration. Consequently, they worked to exclude from it the remaining functions of folk literature, beliefs, crafts, and others.<sup>8</sup> This led to numerous definitions of folklore, including its definition as “popular spiritual traditions, particularly oral heritage, and the science that studies these traditions.”<sup>9</sup>



However, this definition corresponds closely with the earliest formulation of the term folklore established by Thoms, who defined it as “inherited beliefs, supernatural tales, customs current among the common people (...) superstitious beliefs, narrative songs, folk proverbs, and others.”<sup>10</sup> From this, it becomes evident that Thoms considered folklore to be that aspect of popular culture.

## **2.2 Term Folk Heritage**

Folk heritage is the Arabic term corresponding to the English term “folklore.” It has circulated within Arab critical discourse as a result of the phenomenon of mutual influence between East and West, as well as through translation, which has produced numerous alternative terms such as popular traditions, popular narratives, folk arts, and popular culture, among others. Despite their differences in formulation and arrangement, all these terms convey the same meaning carried out by the term “folklore.” The credit for introducing the term “folk heritage” belongs to Professor Ahmad Salih Rushdi, who “applied this term to this type of study, and his writings continue to constitute the cornerstone in establishing the foundations of this discipline in the Arab world.”<sup>11</sup> Many Arab scholars and researchers have adopted this term, considering it the most critically appropriate in comparison with the other circulating terms.

What, then, is the nature of folk heritage according to Arab critics and scholars?

Said Yaqtin approaches the definition of folk heritage and the extent of its ambiguity, explaining its concept as follows: “Heritage is an ambiguous concept, for in the various studies that have addressed it, it signifies everything bequeathed to us by the Arabs and Muslims on the one hand, and temporally refers to everything they left us before the Renaissance on the other. According to this definition, it expands to include all written and oral inheritance, and all surviving remains of architecture, customs, and traditions linked to bygone eras. Such comprehensiveness and breadth can only lead to confusion and ambiguity.”<sup>12</sup>

Abdelhamid Bourayou defines folk heritage as “the totality of symbols, forms of artistic and aesthetic expression, beliefs, perceptions, norms, techniques, customs, traditions, and behavioural patterns inherited across generations and whose existence continues within society by virtue of their adaptation to new conditions and the continuity of their old functions, or through the assignment of new functions to them.”<sup>13</sup>

Nasir al-Balquti defines folk heritage while also clarifying the characteristics distinguishing it from other forms. He states, “Folk literature is defined as a verbal production based upon several components; if not all are present, most of them suffice to determine the concept of this literary genre.”<sup>14</sup> Among its essential foundation is the vernacular language. However, this does not mean that all vernacular poetry or *malhun* poetry is necessarily folk poetry in al-Balquti’s view because *malhun* poetry stems from individual emotions expressing the poet himself, whereas folk poetry constitutes a collective experience in which emotions are communal. “The cultural content expressing the values of the group and reflecting its particularities is among the constituents of this literature, as are its oral circulation and transmission within the group from one generation to another.”<sup>15</sup>



Among the characteristics he mentions is the anonymity of the author: “It is self-evident that every literary work has an author; however, in this context, the personality of the creator dissolves into the collective personality to such an extent that, after a period that may be long or short, the original author of the text becomes unknown.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, this text, which appears fixed, becomes capable of being reformulated each time it is recited, according to the narrator’s abilities and the extent of his creativity.

Thus, from the foregoing, it becomes evident that the subjects of folklore or folk heritage are represented as follows:

- Popular customs and traditions, including customs related to marriage, birth, divorce, death, and festivals.
- Popular beliefs and ideas, including magic, sorcery, and folk medicine.
- Folk arts, including folktales, superstitions, songs, riddles, myths, proverbs, folk poetry, and *malhun* poetry.

All these subjects perform “a prominent role in translating and crystallising individuals’ feelings, desires, concerns, sorrows, joys, and problems. Folk literature is the spirit of society, expressing its taste and aesthetic values.”<sup>17</sup>

### **3. The Algerian Novel and Saharan Heritage**

Certain Algerian fictional texts have succeeded in revealing to us the expansive worlds of the desert, with both its harshness and gentleness, through their adoption of Saharan cultural heritage and its presentation in an artistic style grounded in fictional imagination and lived reality. Within the novels of the desert literature, we focused on and discussed the direction of this research. This literature succeeded in conveying the culture of this circulating folk heritage while simultaneously linking it to Saharan women, thereby engraving within our memory the features of their image in southern Algeria, whose contours have remained obscure to us compared with the clearer image of women in northern, eastern, or western Algeria. Much remains unknown to us concerning their identity, family life, customs, and traditions.

Hence, we found in certain Algerian fictional texts the object of our inquiry, such as the novel *Tilka al-Mahabba* by al-Habib al-Sa’ih and the novel *Mamlakat al-Zaywan* by al-Hajj Ahmad al-Siddiq al-Zawani, among others. These narrative texts embodied the culture of folk heritage in the southern region, and what is remarkable is that they linked it to Saharan women, whether Tuareg, Adrarian, Touati, or Hoggari women, as the pillar of the tent, as the saying goes, meaning the family and, consequently, Saharan society.

At this point, one may ask whether the Algerian narrative discourse has succeeded in introducing the culture of folk heritage in the Algerian Sahara.

Has the Algerian novel preserved this heritage from loss and disappearance through its narrative documentation?

Has the Saharan novel succeeded in portraying the role of Saharan women in consolidating the popular culture of their society?

#### **3.1 Saharan Women within the Folk Heritage Culture**



The reality of Algerian women in our patriarchal society has often been characterised by submission and humiliation under the authority of the father, brother, or husband, who is regarded as the supreme authority within the family and the bearer of its burdens, including those of women. These are customs and conventions recognised since ancient times, and they form part of our culture and belief system. The man is the pillar of the family, its guardian, and the support of each of its members. Saharan society also does not fall outside the framework of male domination, despite certain claims that Saharan society is matriarchal.

However, Saharan women, whether Tuareg or Touati, enjoy respect, esteem, protection, and absolute freedom. Tribal society venerates women and associates honour, prosperity, and authority with them. They are the symbol of continuity and life. The people of the Sahara have been known for “strengthening bonds, consolidating their relationships, and spreading goodness and affection among themselves. They adopted Friday as a day for meeting and exchanging family visits ..., during which family problems are also resolved.”<sup>18</sup>

This is the motive through which folk heritage revolves largely around Saharan women and seeks to consolidate their status within the tribe or clan. Since most of the novels that have addressed southern Algeria have included women’s issues, we have attempted to focus on the presence of women in these novels and to reveal the features of their representation from the perspective of Algerian folk heritage.

The presence of women in fictional texts is just but clear evidence of the important status they enjoy within their society and among their clan. Their appearance in these texts has been prominent, allowing them to transmit to us numerous cultural elements, such as customs, traditions, values, and rituals practiced within the Saharan space, since they are its protectors on the one hand and, on the other, because they play an active role in raising many social and doctrinal issues according to the function assigned to them within the fictional text. This is due to the circle of inherited concepts surrounding women, customs and traditions and the conservative environment that governs everyone, all of which leaves an impact on the psyche of many writers when their pens write about that troubled Saharan space.

Through our critical approach to the selected narrative texts, which simulate the specificity of the southern Algerian region and belong to writers concerned with the South and the literature of the South, it became clear to us that their creative experience differed in its treatment of the theme of the desert and in its presentation of the lived reality of Saharan women. This varied according to each writer’s method of artistic and creative practice, personal experiences, previous cultural backgrounds, and view of reality stemming from intellectual premises and psychological depth, as well as the extent of their collision with this reality and its challenges and the human, social, and political issues it raises. Indeed, these narrative writings added another form to Algerian narrative writing, known for the theme of the desert and the specificity of women in the South.

### **3.2 The Making of the Status of Touati Women in the Rituals of Folk Heritage**

#### **A. Status of the Bound Widow in the Touati Ritual Scene**

In his novel *Tilka al-Mahabba*,<sup>19</sup> the novelist al-Habib al-Sayeh employs the ritual of the bound widow, performed by widowed women in the Touat region within the framework of



customs and traditions. According to what is commonly known among the people of the Sahara, the bound widow is “the woman whose husband has died. She is called the bound woman because she is bound in her house, that is, confined during her waiting period, and she does not leave until this period has been completed, as previously determined by Islamic law. This is in accordance with Almighty’s saying: ‘And those of you who die and leave wives behind them shall wait by themselves for four months and ten days.’<sup>20</sup> In reality, this ritual falls within the religious rites prescribed by Islam, namely, the waiting period of a widow, which is set at four months and ten days. Over time, however, this religious practice transformed into one of the inherited and circulating rituals within the folk heritage of the Touat region. This ritual is performed in a particular manner when the bound woman receives support and assistance from women, whether material or moral, during her waiting period.

The novelist al-Habib al-Sayeh describes this ritual through the character Najma in his novel *Tilka al-Mahabba*, as she submits willingly to this ritual and respects all its arrangements step by step, despite the negative image she bears as a woman governed by her instincts and desires. She is a prostitute who sells her honour to satisfy her desires and whims. “Her disappointed lovers, in their attempts to win her heart, sent her messages through female and male procurers and offered gifts as tokens of gratitude in the hope of gaining her favour.”<sup>21</sup> Najma is a playful woman who killed her husband to free herself from the bond of marriage. However, at the same time, she committed herself to performing the ritual of the bound widow, which reflects the extent of the authority of customs and traditions in this Saharan society, as well as the degree to which they control individuals, groups, and communities. “Najma had kept to her house with dignity and patience for four months and ten days, not leaving except, when necessary, at night.”<sup>22</sup>

### **B. Mourning Rituals in Touat**

The fictional text *Tilka al-Mahabba* presents to us certain manifestations of the mourning ritual in southern Algeria, particularly in the Touat region. It sheds light on the widow, represented by the character of Najma, the bound widow, who performed all the mourning rituals recognised within the customs and traditions of the Touat region. The bound widow must not display happiness, apply any adornment to her face or body, speak excessively, or speak to a man outside the circle of her unmarriageable kin because she becomes the focus of attention among the members of the clan. The narrator describes the social situation during mourning as follows: “News reached her that her envious woman had assigned someone to observe her affairs and count her lapses. They had arranged for someone in her house to spy on her, to see whether she laughed, showed joy or happiness, let down her hair... or bathed more than once within seven days.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, a woman in her waiting period is forbidden to laugh, display any happiness, or concern herself with her beauty because she is under constant surveillance by society. She must respect the waiting period and observe all the rituals imposed upon her, such as refraining from movement during the three days of mourning. By movement here is meant to leave the marital home. She must display her grief before those present. The religious student also hands her white strip, torn with his teeth from her husband’s shroud before he is washed, in



preparation for binding her waiting period. The narrator describes all these rituals in his statement: “She did not move, Najma, during the three days of condolence, nor did she weep or shed a tear ... nor did she hold a lamentation for that husband of hers ... Thus, masses of sorrow thickened around her ... The religious student had handed her a white strip from the shroud, torn with his teeth before the corpse was washed, in preparation for binding her waiting period.”<sup>24</sup>

The bound widow continues to pass through these popular rituals inherited from the ancestors until the evening of the day on which her waiting period ends. She then has one hundred thirty bowls of wheat porridge, known as *belmabrouk*, with mutton taken out to the *zawiya* near the house. The narrator says in his text, “When the evening marking the end of that waiting period arrived, Najma ordered that one hundred and thirty bowls of wheat porridge, known as *belmabrouk*, with sheep meat, be taken out to the nearby *zawiya*, corresponding to the days of her waiting period, which, once she had completed, she rose at dawn to prepare herself for the *loh*.”<sup>25</sup> All these rituals and practices make death and the waiting period of the bound widow an obligatory ritual within the clan. Otherwise, the bound widow would be deemed negligent in her duty toward customs, traditions, and conventions.

### **C. The Ritual of Loh, or Release from the Bond**

There is another ritual performed by the bound widow after the release of her bond in the Touat region of the Sahara, namely, the celebration of the woman’s *loh* after the end of her waiting period, “the *loh* from grief.” The narrator describes the background of this ritual, saying, “She rose, Najma, at dawn to prepare herself for the *loh*, and entered a basin of water heated by the enslaved woman with Sudanese charcoal, who then attended to every joint and every sensitive part of her body ...”<sup>26</sup> Najma did not content herself with bathing; rather, she went on to choose the finest clothes and the most beautiful perfumes. The narrator says, “She dried herself and brought out the finest garments from Tlemcen that her merchant husband had given her in preparation for her celebration of the *loh*.”<sup>27</sup> She then received her beloved women friends from among the widows and waited until all the unmarried girls had left. They then proceeded under the care of an elderly woman to “virgin land, where they circled a place three times, then dug a hole in it. The old woman stood over it and said: This is the hole of grief, in which Najma’s evil shall be buried.”<sup>28</sup>

This hole in the ritual of the *loh* is where the widow’s evil and her grief over her husband are buried. It therefore refers us to the symbolism of the widow’s beginning of a new era and the closing of the old one and thus to her readiness for another new married life. Any violation of this ritual, according to their beliefs, would bring upon the widow all manner of troubles, calamities, and ordeals in her life. Therefore, these social rituals and ceremonies must be performed as customs and traditions have been prescribed because they “aim to grant the individual a distinction and a pass for transition through the levels of the social hierarchy and constitute the enactment of rites and practices agreed upon by human groups in their lives.”<sup>29</sup>

### **D. The Clothing of the Bound Widow after the Release of the Bond**

The bound widow in the Sahara has her own special clothing after the end of the waiting period, to which she must adhere, namely, the *lihaf*. This is stated by the narrator: “When she



reached the hole, Najma sat in it. Afterward, the elder woman came, covered her with the *lihaf*, loosened her hair, and dressed her in the beautiful clothes she had prepared.”<sup>30</sup>

The *lihaf* is an ancient traditional garment in Tuareg and Saharan culture. The wearing of the *lihaf*, or *malhafa*, is often accompanied by certain traditional ornaments, which give the garment a distinctive touch of Saharan Amazigh authenticity.

For the ritual of release from the bond to be completed, the old woman, Hassouna, removes the strip from her and holds it out to her, whereupon she gives it to one of those who had dug the hole. She removes her silver ring and hands it to the second woman and gives her silver bracelet to the third of those present, keeping only her cloak. She then stands and calls out the names of children. Since she had no children, three boys from among the orphaned children of her friends approached her and gave her slippers, a kerchief, and a handkerchief.<sup>31</sup>

Afterward came the ritual of emancipation from the previous married life. Najma stood and performed two *raks* ‘as in gratitude to God. She then gathered the comb and everything she had worn on the day of the funeral, threw everything into the hole of grief, and said, “I have left in you anxiety and regret.”<sup>32</sup> Here, all the rituals associated with the release of the bond were completed. The women then greeted her with ululations; the drum was beaten for her, and all the women present said: praise be to God for your safe release.

The narrator has produced an expressive mosaic tableau of the customs and traditions followed while also revealing with complete clarity the life of the Saharan woman, her psyche, and the extent of her submission to the customs of the region in which she was raised. The worlds of magic, sorcery, and superstition dominated the Saharan woman so that these practices became necessary in determining her present and future destiny. Superstitious thinking dominated Saharan mentalities, owing to the pattern of life and its simple and naïve mode of living.

#### **4. Birth Rituals and Ceremonies in Touat**

Birth rituals are social customs practiced in all human societies. In Saharan society, however, the narrator describes the manifestations of women’s suffering during the moments of labor and childbirth, since it is among the most difficult natural functions performed by women to integrate more fully into the family. The birth of a son represents the first step toward the married girl’s stability within her new family. “The son alone enables her to benefit throughout her life from the law of motherhood ... therefore, the birth of this son is considered the true beginning of her stable marital and family life.”<sup>33</sup>

The reader of *Mamlakat al-Zaywan* finds that the narrator has shown an exaggerated concern with employing the local dimension in his fictional text. He is among the distinctive voices in the narrative fictional experience that conveys and observes the social changes experienced by the Saharan region and its surroundings. He inevitably sheds further light on the sociological character of Touati women, embodied in the customs, traditions, and conventions practiced daily and repeatedly in their lives, reflecting their psychological and intellectual background.



From these backgrounds, we turn to the mother figure in the novel, who embodies the Saharan woman present in her intellectual and psychological simplicity. Nothing of importance preoccupied her except being granted a male child to satisfy her husband and family, to spare herself at the same time from gossip and to secure her husband's inheritance from her father. Through this character, the narrator evokes in his novel the rituals of childbirth and the ensuing customs, conventions, and rites practised upon both the mother and the newborn.

#### **A. Anthropological Dimensions of the Labour Pit in Touat**

A pit is dug for the woman about to give birth, called the "labour pit." This pit is associated with the Saharan woman in particular, owing to her connection with the world of the desert, distinguished by sand, which constitutes part of that world. This pit has a profound anthropological dimension, for the newborn is received by the embrace of the pit before the embrace of his mother, as although Saharan nature were warning the newborn of the harshness and roughness that he would experience and live within.

"When the muscles of my mother's womb contracted and cast me into this tearful existence... the first thing I tried to do was to begin by crying out. However, what I can recall of that first moment ... is that I almost swam in that sandy pit."<sup>34</sup>

Here, birth takes place, which is "the first transformation that occurs in the human being, whereby he moves from the world before life to the world of life and emerges from the maternal membrane into the cultural membrane."<sup>35</sup> The moments of birth are followed by the ritual of how the newborn is received into the family and how he is prepared for what is to come. The first act of reception is the cutting of the umbilical cord that connects the mother to her child and that, immediately after birth, no longer has any biological significance. Here, the separation between mother and child takes place, as expressed by the narrator in the voice of the newborn: "I felt the razor in the hand of Aisha Mubaraka, daughter of Balla, as it cut my navel and separated me from my mother, after I had spent with her a friendship lasting nine months."<sup>36</sup>

The newborn was the focus of the entire family's attention because he was the fruit of a full seven years of waiting. The mother had been afflicted by the anxiety of premature miscarriage or the loss of pregnancy during its first months, which made her fear that this pregnancy would not be completed. However, the mother's joy in her newborn came at the moment of his crying and the announcement of his arrival. Aunt Nafousa linked this phenomenon, namely, the mother's inability to carry a pregnancy to term, to magic and the envious eye, claiming that "the wives of my paternal uncles had bewitched my mother and written for her an amulet in tabular script, with the religious student Ayqash."<sup>37</sup> All these claims and superstitions found fertile ground in the mother's psyche.

#### **B. Postpartum Confinement and Its Consequences for Touati Women**

The postpartum period is an important stage in the life of the mother and the newborn. After childbirth, the mother moves to another stage, namely, caring for her child according to customs and traditions inherited from earlier mothers and grandmothers, such as cleaning the child, breastfeeding him, and preserving his health. In his fictional text, the narrator details



these customs through the narrator's voice, describing how the mother helps her child, such as opening his eyes so that he may see what is around him. He says, "When I was in my mother's lap and had not opened my eyes, my mother took a little duck fat\* ... then placed the inside of the fingertip of her right index finger in that fat ... and gently rubbed my eyes with it, after which they opened."<sup>38</sup>

After that comes the ritual of the mother applying kohl to her child's eyes to grant him clear sight and purity of the eyes: "My mother seized the opportunity of my tears gurgling, hoping they would adhere to the kohl, and stretched her hand towards the tadara\* ... She drew from it a smooth kohl stick made of henna ... and plunged it into the hollow of a small kohl bottle ..."<sup>39</sup>

The mother's concern for her child is innate, whereas the concern of the whole family for the boy was due to the extent of the male's importance in the family. Among the people of Touat, the newborn is regarded as "a source of livelihood and reassurance regarding the family's property and honour."<sup>40</sup> He is the protector of property after his father, unlike the female, whose arrival is considered a misfortune, because she is deprived of inheritance according to the customs and conventions of Touat. The narrator tells us of the arrival of his sister and of the family's resentment at her birth: "It was also part of her ill fortune that, in the third pregnancy, my sister Marimou was born. Although the girl was not welcomed in our ksour at that time, because she does not inherit what has been made inalienable from the inheritance."<sup>41</sup> This would weaken the family, cause it to collapse, and make it lose its inheritance, while the only saviour is the male. He is always received with celebration and welcome, accompanied by joy and good tidings. The birth of a male in the Touati family is regarded as a great event. Such societies, in their customs, prefer males over females, which refers us to the depth of the mental thinking of the inhabitants of the desert, especially the people of Touat. Custom marginalises and humiliates the female from birth to death and glorifies the male because he is the protector of the inheritance and the family estate. Consequently, we discern male domination over the course of folk heritage in the Touat region.

"My aunt Nafousa, my father's sister, feared for me and for her brother that our share of those salt flats, gardens, and foggaras would be lost ..."<sup>42</sup>

## **5. Conclusion**

The Saharan novel has succeeded in transmitting popular cultural heritage while preserving it from disappearance and extinction. Desert space, with all its details and its cultural inheritance of a sociological and anthropological character, has also contributed to the creation of a new and contemporary narrative discourse, namely, the narrative of desert literature. The Saharan novel has succeeded in describing the status of women under inherited customs and traditions, prompting the reader to seek the truth of their position within Saharan society and the extent of their marginalisation and subjection to wretched customs and conventions that have transformed their dreams into nightmares, such as the issue of not seeking marriage with a girl who has no right to inherit like a male, merely because she is



female. This gender distinction has led the Touati family to continue wronging the girl while elevating the status of the male and preserving his rights.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Walid Khaldi, *Worlds of the Sahara and Manifestations of Memory in the Novels of Jamila Talebawi: A Study*, introduction (Algeria: Dar Khayal for Publishing and Translation, 2024), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Abdelhamid Bousmaha, *Folk Heritage in the Novels of Abdelhamid Benhedouga* (Algeria: Dar al-Sabil for Publishing and Distribution, 2008), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Idris Qarqoua, *Heritage in Algerian Theatre: A Study of Forms and Contents*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Algeria: Maktabat al-Rashad for Printing and Distribution, 2009), 30.

<sup>4</sup> Fawzi al-Antil, *What Is Folklore? Studies in Folk Heritage*, 2nd ed. (Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Masira; Madbouli Bookshop, 1987), 15.

\* Thoms is regarded as the actual founder of the English Folklore Society. He worked to prepare the conditions that alone made the successful establishment of this society possible, through his efforts to arouse interest in ancient customs and beliefs by publishing them so that they would be accessible to people and could be discussed. See Fawzi al-Antil, *What Is Folklore?*, 15–16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> See Muhammad al-Jawhari, *Western Folklore: Research and Studies*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Cairo, Egypt: Centre for Social Research and Studies, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, 2000), 54.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Antil, *What Is Folklore?*, 44.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>11</sup> Hamza Abdelwahab and Abdelhamid Azzouzi, “Expression through Folk Heritage in the Contemporary Algerian Poem: *Hizia* as a Model,” *Al-Nass* 10, no. 2 (2024): 445.

<sup>12</sup> Said Yaqtin, *Speech and Report: An Introduction to Arab Narrative*, 1st ed. (Casablanca, Morocco: Arab Cultural Centre, 1977), 47.

<sup>13</sup> Abdelhamid Bourayou et al., *Folk Heritage and Issues of the Nation*, quoted in Karima Nouadiria and Souad Zeddou, “Folk Heritage: Concept and Divisions,” *Milaf Journal for Research and Studies*, Abdelhafid Boussof University Centre, Mila, no. 5 (2017): 865.

<sup>14</sup> Nasir al-Balqouti, *Statements on Folk Heritage* (Tunisia: Tibr al-Zaman, 2005), 20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

<sup>17</sup> Fawzia Zangoufi and Samir Guerid, “The Sociology of Algerian Cultural Heritage in Light of Contemporary Developments in Folk Heritage,” *Society, Education, Work* 8, no. 1 (2023): 7.

<sup>18</sup> Abdelhamid Bakri, *A Brief Account of the History of Touat and Its Notables*, quoted in Naima Bencherif, “Cultural Diversity in Popular Folklore in Adrar: A Cultural Critical Approach” (PhD diss., Cultural Criticism, Mouloud Mammeri University, Tizi Ouzou, Algeria, 2022), 124.

<sup>19</sup> Lahbib Sayeh, *Tilka al-Mahabba* (Algeria: ANEP Publications, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Qur’an 2:234.

<sup>21</sup> Sayeh, *Tilka al-Mahabba*, 61.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>29</sup> Bencherif, “Cultural Diversity in Popular Folklore in Adrar,” 229.

<sup>30</sup> Sayeh, *Tilka al-Mahabba*, 67.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, adapted.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>33</sup> Bousmaha, *Folk Heritage in the Novels of Abdelhamid Benhedouga*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Hadj Ahmed al-Siddiq al-Ziwani, *Mamlakat al-Zaywan*, 1st ed. (Amman: Dar Fada’at, 2015), 31.



<sup>35</sup> Ammar Bentouba, "Rituals and Representations of Collective Identity in al-Siddiq Hadj Ahmed's Novel *Mamlakat al-Zaywan*: An Anthropological Approach," *Al-Nass*, Djillali Liabes University, Sidi Bel Abbes, Algeria, 12, no. 1 (2017): 30.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Ziwani, *Mamlakat al-Zaywan*, 33.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

\* A leather bottle with a cover made of the same leather. See Hadj Ahmed al-Siddiq al-Ziwani's explanation in *Mamlakat al-Zaywan*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Ziwani, *Mamlakat al-Zaywan*, 37.

\* *Tadara*: a traditional pouch with a pyramidal cover, used for various local purposes.

<sup>39</sup> Hadj Ahmed al-Siddiq al-Ziwani, *Mamlakat al-Zaywan*, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Bousmaha, *Folk Heritage in the Novels of Abdelhamid Benhedouga*, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Ziwani, *Mamlakat al-Zaywan*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

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