

VERBAL ARTS AND STORYTELLING IN MOULOUD FERAOUN'S *LA TERRE ET LE SANG* (1953)

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Abstract: The present article examines Mouloud Feraoun's second novel, *La terre et le sang* (1953), in order to explore the ways Feraoun fuses Kabyle cultural elements to exemplify the preponderance of his culture as a source of dialogical connections with the culture imposed by the French. The analysis of the novel is undertaken in the light of Ruth Finnegan's theoretical methods in her book *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (1992). Avoiding binary and evolutionary models, Finnegan explores the complexity and interrelatedness of narrative and culture. What makes her interdisciplinary approach particularly interesting and relevant to the present analysis of Feraoun's novel, is her emphasis on the exploration of the interrelatedness of a text and the cultural environment of its production. More precisely, Finnegan's theoretical insights concerning "functionalist and 'reflection' approach" can be said to fundamentally inform our understanding of the ways Feraoun transcribes, shapes and translates oral elements into a presentable written form. The essence of Finnegan's approach also consists in the emphasis on how art forms and oral traditions are closely related to society. Another important feature of her theoretical perspective consists in her rejection of explanations in terms of either individual personality or origins, which she replaces by synchronic and socially oriented questions. This may explain the ways in which Feraoun celebrates cultural diversity and the valuable richness of experience his text displays in building bridges between the oral – Kabyle – and the written – French – traditions.

Keywords: rehabilitation, identity construction, storytelling, cultural oral forms

Introduction

When I say that I am French, I give myself a label that the French do not accept, I speak in French [...] But who am I, good God? [...] What you can be sure of is that in my culture I am as French as you. But don't expect anything

else. I cannot reject your culture, but do not expect me to renounce myself, to admit your superiority, your racism, your lies, a century of hatred.¹

The above citation from Mouloud Feraoun's war diary, *Le journal (1955-1962)* explains the dual identity of an author who lived and wrote in time of conflict, namely the French colonization of Algeria. It also clarifies the writer's uncompromised position in rejecting his Kabyle cultural heritage and his mother tongue in favour of the colonizers' imposed language and culture. As in the case of many African authors of his generation, it is important to point out that his work displays a number of literary and foreign influences. Hence, any discussion on the source of inspiration for this creative Algerian author would naturally raise the subject of oral tradition as an important source of material for his writing. It is also particularly interesting to note that the effect of Feraoun's exposure to colonial education and Western literary tradition informs his literary texts through his systematic use of the French language and genre. However, the realistic representation of speech patterns that occur in the society he comes from helps him to "navigate the ancient waters"² and to restore the old form of Kabyle speech to create and shape his novels.

The present article examines the importance of cultural dialogue as reflected in Feraoun's second novel, *La terre et le sang* (1953). The work was written as an act of resistance exploring the ongoing cultural confrontation between foreign and indigenous traditions in colonial Algeria. Concentrating on this novel, I hope to show the ways in which the oral and the written cultures fully interact and intertwine in its text. The core of my study, henceforth, is descriptive and analytic, exploring the nature, meaning and context of the author's use of oral expressions in a written form. One of the prime interests of my textual analysis is to reveal and describe several literary devices employed by the author in writing about two different worlds, which are not mutually exclusive. The story tells of Amer-ou-Kaci, a young emigrant, who suffers from a loss of identity. He tries to regain it after his return home, having spent fifteen years in France. Once in his native village, he fails to reintegrate himself and ends his life in a tragic way. Through this character, Feraoun reveals his preoccupation with the clash between the old and the new, the impact of Westernization and the evils of colonialism.

¹ Mouloud Feraoun, *Le journal (1955-1962)* (Alger: ENAG, 1992) 82. Unless stated otherwise, all translations from French are by the author of the present article.

² Charles Smith and Chin Ce (eds.), *Oral Tradition in African Literature* (Oxford: African Books Collective, 2015) 56.

To explore the relatedness of the narrative and the Kabyle culture, I will try to provide answers to the following questions: How does Feraoun construct a different culture by capturing the collective memory of his people? How does he build a space for the negotiation of identity, imagined in a number of ways, through a number of metaphors, deployment of symbols, and the use of strategies that are expressive of Berber orality-based culture? How did he bring to the fore the rich pool of oral traditions inherited by his Berber culture to shape his creative project? How did he bring history, tradition, culture and literacy into their fullest intersections with French education? And finally, how does he interrelate the novel, a major Western literary genre, with traditional oral forms in order to assert – and subtly impose – his cultural identity, and to reject the colonialist appellation of his country as a “static empty cultural space,”³ without, at the same time, refusing everything that might be of value in his colonial education and his readings of Western master texts?

Among the key aspects of my approach are Feraoun’s construction of a ‘different’ reality, his narrative discourse and its role in the process of storytelling, and the ways in which he recasts French language to give it new forms, creating a text that is “dialogical” in its nature. The correlations of the new textual forms also function as a weapon against colonial oppression and generate a revolutionary discourse of cultural revalorization. In *La terre et le sang*, the recasting of the existing European and Berber literary forms into new dimensions is demonstrated, first and foremost, through the particular use of time and space.

Dislocating/ Repositioning Time and Space in the Narrative

Feraoun opens his novel addressing directly the reader, first to announce that the story is true and it happened somewhere in one of the villages in Kabylia, called Ighil-Nzman.⁴ Yet, the village appears to be situated between history and myth or between reality and imagination. The mythic time is clearly expressed in its description as “[a] small insignificant point, far away, beyond the splendid horizons, a wild, dark and unclean corner where pitiful human beings live, whom

³ This expression is quoted from Mouloud Feraoun, *L’anniversaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1972) 54: “La voix a été tracée par ceux qui ont rompu avec un *Orient de pacotille* pour décrire une humanité moins belle mais plus vraie, une terre moins chatoyante mais riche de sève nourricière, des hommes qui luttent et souffrent, et sont les répliques exactes de ce que nous voyons autour de nous.” Emphasis added.

⁴ Ighil-Nzman, the village appellation, can be translated as “une colline d’antan” (“A hill of yesteryear”).

one's imagination makes ugly to the point of appearing grotesque."⁵ To emphasize the unspecified and remote aspect of the setting, the narrator names it "Ighil-Nzman," the equivalent of "a trip to a very ancient and distant place." Hence, to get access to it, as its name suggests, one should make great efforts. To construct the past, the author creates the sense of the present moment while preserving the processes of continuity and discontinuity. He then invites his readers to listen and share knowledge, not only details about life's events which took place in Ighil-Nzman, but also to learn about what has been preserved about the history of his people and traditional society.

To attract the attention of his learners/readers, Feraoun uses oral forms to reflect on the village's past, which he then mixes with a modern tragic reality. Every action, thought, and emotion of the characters is inseparably connected with the life of the whole Kabyle community. In other words, Feraoun helps the reader to get access to knowledge by creating a timeless space reminiscent of a remote spiritual landscape or a mythic world, which he links to the present colonial reality. He delves into the content of oral tradition, particularly in order to create reality of the stories and cultural heroes, with the sense of surprise, suspense and wonder quite similar to the stories he used to listen to as a child. To achieve such a purpose, the author steps beyond naturalism to reclaim the 'voices' inspired by individual acts belonging to old times that offer elements of magic and the supernatural. He then depicts Ighil-Nzman in a way which dissolves considerations of time and space in order to create an alternative reality, using a narrative formula based on general time references rather than on specific dates. At the outset, the oral aspect of the novel is displayed in the description of the village, its situation at a distant place and the difficulty of access to the mythic and ancient space. This can be illustrated by the following passage:

We strive according to the weather, in the dust or mud, *we go up, we go up*, we zigzag madly above the precipices. We stop for a short rest, secure the wheels with wedges and fill the tank. Then *we go up, we go up* again. Usually, after passing the dangerous bends and narrow bridges, we finally arrive. We make a noisy and triumphant entrance to the village of Ighil-Nzman.⁶

⁵ "Un petit point insignifiant, loin, au-delà des splendide horizons, un coin sauvage, obscure et malpropre où se terraient des êtres connus, pitoyables, que l'imagination enlaidissaient jusqu'à les rendre grotesques." Mouloud Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* (1953) (Alger: Talankitit, 2002) 10.

⁶ "On s'engage selon le temps, dans la poussière ou la boue, on monte, on monte, on zigzague follement au-dessus des précipices. On s'arrête pour souffler, on calle les roues,

This passage illustrates the long-distant time and space and stresses movement rather than unity, the feature of oral stories. The persistence of repetition in the above passage, one of the important markers of oral style, serves to delight and stimulate the listener, and aims to establish a link between the reality and the oral world of imagination. As Ruth Finnegan points out, the aim of “the tale’s [...] travels in space and time” is “to create its life history.”⁷

Feraoun’s imaginative re-valuation of a remote past can be interpreted as a message to a foreigner, who needs to be provided with an appropriate code for deciphering the story in order to understand that world in the way its inhabitants perceive it. The same reader also needs to be initiated into the Kabyle cosmology to appreciate the Kabyle universe seen through an insider’s eyes. It can also be considered as a kind of strategy to represent Kabyle culture differently from accounts of Western ethnologists. In doing so, Feraoun debunks the ethnological discourse and “deconstructs,” in the Derridean sense, the assumption of the incapability of the colonized of self-representation except in the languages of the colonizer. It is from that remote and timeless setting that Feraoun conveys instructive messages, themes and a history of experience, an alternative story that creates, preserves and maintains the relationship between two traditions. The movement from a world to another through a connection of time and space, rather than their unity, is another characteristic of oral narrative. To reinforce this connection and interaction, Feraoun employs another element of oral tradition, displayed through his use of the French language.

Formulaic Style and Subversion of the French Language

Though ancient Berber writings do exist in Algeria, Feraoun comes from a society where, prior to colonization, the principal mode of literary transmission was oral. Most of the Berber art forms and stories were transmitted by the spoken word rather than in written form. Hence, the use of storytelling was an essential part of their tradition and way of life. But more than a century of colonization (1830-1962) has left its considerable traces in Feraoun’s works. As many Algerian writers of his generation, the author faces the choice of writing in the language of the colonizer and attempts to reconcile his two cultures – the world of his education

on remplit le réservoir. Puis on monte, on monte encore. Ordinairement, après avoir passée les virages dangereux et les ponts étroits, on arrive enfin. On fait une entrée bruyante et triomphale au village d’Ighil-Nzman.” Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 3. Emphasis in the English translation added.

⁷ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 28.

and the traditional oral world of his society. He becomes a kind of cultural mediator, who interprets the past from a non-Western perspective and thus shares with his readers across generations the knowledge of his culture. Feraoun's second novel becomes a means of transmitting ancient knowledge, wisdom and attitudes of an oral society. The author is gifted by a deep moral sensibility and strongly committed to the preservation and celebration of the Berber culture. Foregrounding his identity, he denounces, through language, colonial oppression and injustice.

La terre et le sang is replete with Kabyle words without translation. Feraoun inserts more than fifty untranslated words. For instance, words like "tharoumith," "toub," "mechmel," "ouada," "achou," "achhal," "ilha," "thakhaounith,"⁸ among many others, are used across the narrative. By inserting these Kabyle words without providing their equivalent in French, the author shows his position of an "in-between" as regards the two cultures, to paraphrase Bhabha.⁹ He demonstrates the awareness of the influence of his French education on his work and, rather than refusing it, he accommodates to it, understands and then distorts it. He distorts the paradigms of Western heritage, as he fashions an identity by turning French into a language that carries a different meaning, which combines the two cultures. In other words, he transforms the French language 'to bear' its new context. He makes it 'bear the burden' of Kabyle experience.

Thus, Feraoun imposes the imprint of his mother tongue on his adopted one. At the basic level, he does so by introducing vocabulary items, particularly idiomatic expressions, which he combines with the French syntax. He alters the paradigmatic norms of French and proves the "supplementarity and hybridity of cultural translation and linguistic filiation."¹⁰ He then illustrates how language with its power, and writing with its signification of authority, have been wrested from the dominant culture.

⁸ The meaning of these Kabyle words is as follows: "tharoumith" – "French woman" (4, 27, 32); "toub" – "red earth" (9, 67); "mechmel" – "bare land" (15); "ouada" – "offering" (76); "achou" – "what do you mean?" (110); "achhal" – "how much?" (110); "ilha" – "nice" (111) and "thakhaounith" – "religious woman" (200).

⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 4ff. Through this concept, Bhabha suggests the possibility of shaping an interstitial space of cultural encounter in which the colonizer and the colonized negotiate, producing hybridity in culture. Its creation contributes to the subversion of colonial domination by deconstructing essentialist identity and binary opposition of the colonizer and colonized.

¹⁰ Douglas Angel A. Aragon II, "The Bikolano Sensibility in Merlinda Bobis's *White Turtle*," *Researchers World: Journal of Art, Science and Commerce* 8, no. 1 (2017): 81.

More significantly, Feraoun's way of using the French language is meant to establish his 'double' identity, because the more we read his literary texts, the more they reveal and even certify the way the author verbalizes some situations in order to bring to the fore his Kabyle/Berber identity. Hence, *La terre et le sang* is full of Kabyle idiomatic expressions, which the author writes in French. They are mainly used to pass moral judgments on the characters. For illustration: "ils mangent Tamazirt," "ce sont vraiment des têtes," "il ne faut pas chanter qu'on a de l'argent," followed by the old saying "les rêves sortent," "madame s'est pas lavée ce mois," "les cheveux d'enfer," "Dieu lui donne sa part," "Dieu lui garde ses péchés," "Le sang de Rabah revient dans celui de sa fille. Oui, il revient dans notre terre."¹¹ These expressions carry the imprint of Kabyle culture. They lack meaning if translated into French or English directly word by word. They are meaningful only for the reader who is aware of and takes into consideration the cultural context in which these expressions are used. Hence, Ruth Finnegan is right in asserting that: "Language translation is social rather than technical. The translator must first be immersed in the culture of the source language. No attempt to translate with the aid of special dictionaries can help in oral translation, as the putative translator must have 'lived' oral performances in the source culture."¹²

Furthermore, in showing his people's way of thinking, Feraoun also inserts other spoken phrases, which in direct translation have no meaning in French. For instance, to show her temperance, the character Chabha says: "Je suis large comme une pleine."¹³ Other idiomatic expressions follow: "C'est lui qui voit les cœurs"¹⁴ and "Tassadit est une femme de tête."¹⁵ All of these sentences are double-voiced. The free indirect speech communicating characters' thoughts becomes more and more inflected by the Kabyle speech patterns. It is in the range of forms of double-

¹¹ Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 97, 166, 167, 211, 133, 126. "[I]ls mangent Tamazirt" means that the couple were so poor that they were forced to sell their piece of land; "il ne faut pas chanter qu'on a de l'argent" is an old Kabyle saying, which means that you should never tell what is important to others; "les rêves sortent" means the dream becomes true; "madame s'est pas lavée ce mois" means that the woman is pregnant; "les cheveux d'enfer" is an old saying often used to describe wicked old women; "Dieu lui donne sa part" is the prayer addressed to God to prevent a woman from infertility; "Dieu lui garde ses péchés" is to say, if a person offends, only God can judge them; "Le sang de Rabah revient dans celui de sa fille. Oui, il revient dans notre terre" means that family thread (lineage) is not interrupted.

¹² Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and Verbal Arts* 180.

¹³ "I do not care about people's gossip." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 128.

¹⁴ "Only God can know what kind of person you are." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 67.

¹⁵ "She dominates her husband." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 208.

voiced discourse that Feraoun speaks from within his people and his different characters speak from within him. The language is sometimes as crude as its user: “son ventre est pourri de bile, un foie de poule et des mains rigides. Dieu a bien fait d’avoir privé l’âne de ses cornes,”¹⁶ says Slimane angrily. All these sayings show that Feraoun uses language of his conversational source (“oral modes”) and as spontaneous speech.

The author’s purpose in using such verbal expressions is not only to preserve the authenticity of Kabyle folk speech, but also to cherish its special quality and stress its fresh, attractive novelty. Feraoun’s dialogues are characterized by the interplay of multiple voices enabled by oral narrative techniques. He uses literary potentialities of his linguistic heritage to create a new identity. In doing so, he succeeds to free himself from a blind imitation and shows the limits of French in conveying his Kabyle experience. Moreover, to present the wisdom of the ancestors he uses two interlocutors: Ramdane and the Marabout diviner Si Mahfoud.¹⁷ As a result, the French language becomes a mere envelope containing the form of ideas and the moving Kabyle speech of the author. Moreover, hardly any of the author’s novels do not employ proverbs as literary devices derived from Kabyle oral culture. Apart from serving as a means of cultural preservation, they also facilitate, through familiar images and sayings, readers’ access to Feraoun’s novels.

The Use of Proverbs and Rural Images

The most obvious marker of oral culture displayed in *La terre et le sang* are proverbs. Kabyle society values individuals who are skilful in handling proverbs and respects most those who are persuasive in their speech. They are called “ihadaden pa awal,” meaning “well-versed orators.” Members of Kabyle community ascribe a great importance to proverbs as a source of moral education and warning against societal evils. Using proverbs, mothers tell their children what is expected of them in the family and the community. Proverbs explain to children the meaning of responsibility through reciprocity, the significance of honesty and loyalty through mutuality and respect, and the importance of faith and compassion through inner strength and self-control. They also point out the importance of harmony in communal life and of the consideration for others. Through proverbs, children and adults are warned against greed and limited self-interests.¹⁸

¹⁶ Phrases used to criticize bad behaviour of a person. Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 83.

¹⁷ Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 78.

¹⁸ Makilam, *La magie des femmes Kabyles et l’unité de la société traditionnelle* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996) 222.

As a member of the Kabyle community, Feraoun peppers his narrative with proverbs and sayings, which contain simple but clear messages and moral teachings. All of them derive from the 'Kabyle lore' to flavour his borrowed French language. *La terre et le sang* contains some proverbs which are used to suit the socio-cultural context intended by the author. Feraoun refers, for example, to life as follows: "existence is a perpetual kick."¹⁹ He describes people's lack of gratitude using an old Kabyle saying: "Those who raise nephews prepare their necks for snakes."²⁰ Another proverb describes Kabyle people's belief in God: "God's designs are impenetrable."²¹ It is noteworthy that Feraoun uses proverbs and maxims not only as figures of speech, but also to convey the morality or the social insight they contain. Some proverbs are directly translated from the local stock of proverbs into French. For instance: "When we sow good, we also reap it." or "Those who believe in God are never disappointed."²² All these proverbs enrich the French language by the oral resources of Kabylean proverbial lore, Kabyle old dictums and thought patterns. In addition to proverbs, *La terre et le sang* can be read as a historical novel, morality tale and above all a great literary work rehabilitating the author's Berber cultural heritage and moral values and making them familiar to the world.

Social Organization and Archaeological Knowledge

The traditional Kabyle community, as mentioned previously, has a complex cosmology and a system of beliefs, which Feraoun explores for creative inspiration. Rituals and ceremonies like marriage and burial rites are daily occurrences among the Kabyles, and festivals in the community are occasions of cheerfulness and celebration, during which ritual sacrifices are offered by the community members in order to control and dominate the natural forces around them.²³ Reading Feraoun's novel, we notice the pervasive use of traditional images drawn largely from the general environment of traditional life and Kabyle cosmology. For instance, Kamouma, Amer's mother, is compared to "an old oak."²⁴ Like that defiant and strong tree, Kamouma faces all kinds of privations she is meeting during her miserable life. Her skinny legs are like "oak logs,"²⁴

¹⁹ "L'existence est une ruade perpétuelle." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 59.

²⁰ "Ceux qui élèvent des neveux dressent des serpents pour leurs cous." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 71.

²¹ "Les desseins de Dieu sont impénétrables." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 129.

²² "Quand on sème le bien, on le récolte." "Celui qui attend Dieu n'est jamais déçu." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 77.

²³ Feraoun describes how life is organized in Ighil Nzman. Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 95-7.

²⁴ "un vieux chêne," "des bûches de chênes." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 13, 127.

which means that though she is old and undernourished, she can still face the hardships of her tempestuous life. Furthermore, the same character is compared to “a dry pitted reed,”²⁵ which implies that she has lost nearly all her teeth. The same image of “reed” renders the way people, in the traditional Kabyle society, preserve their figs. They are collected at the end of summer and put on platforms made of reed to dry. Then they are put in “ikoufen,”²⁶ square decorated clay jars, to be conserved and used in winter. Another image taken from the Kabyle environment is that of “the bluish mud coming out of houses.”²⁷ Such an image refers to simple traditional housing without sewage. Other images are associated with the villagers’ activities: for instance, the image of “the hen grabbing the ditch”²⁸ reflects a part of the Kabyle way of life – the domestication of animals. Feraoun also refers to the difficulty of life in Ighil-Nzman marked by the harshness of some traditions in comparing Salem’s life to a burned and “carbonized oak.”²⁹ Slimane, says the narrator, was an old oak, half charred. The common denominator of all the above images is that they combine aspects of nature with those of Kabyle culture. As Ruth Finnegan points out: “It is near-impossible to interpret imagery without knowledge of the social and literary context.”³⁰

The other oral feature, commonly mentioned in Feraoun’s second novel, is the use of archaeological knowledge. Using this element as a technique in the novel amounts to reconciling an ‘old world,’ or pre-colonial reality, with the present colonial reality of the 1950s. In doing so, Feraoun re-examines colonial historical discourse and interrupts it, using long-silenced voices from his culture. In Ruth Finnegan’s words, his novel is “set in its wider social and economic context for full understanding, including how it is produced, transmitted and supported.”³¹ Feraoun inserts the previously silenced voices of the Algerians using modified French syntax, which gives the language of his novel a Kabyle ring. His style reproduces the rhythms and sentence patterns of Kabyle speech, rural images, analogies and proverbs which come directly from oral traditions, as Christiane Achour notes: “The language of the novelist, like that of Taos Amrouche, but with more rustic simplicity, feeds on old wise sayings, proverbs, and popular images.”³²

²⁵ “un roseau félé.” Feraoun *La terre et le sang* 5.

²⁶ The old way of storing food in these jars included, apart from figs, also wheat or barley.

²⁷ “Ces fanges bleuâtres qui sortent des maisons.” Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 5.

²⁸ “La poule qui gratte la rigole.” Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 118.

²⁹ “était un vieux chêne à moitié carbonisé.” Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 118.

³⁰ Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts* 165.

³¹ Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts* 106.

³² “La langue du romancier, comme celle de Taos Amrouche, mais avec plus de bonhomie rustique, se nourrit de la vieille sagesse des dictons, des proverbes, des images recherchées.” Christiane Achour, *Abécédaires en devenir. Idéologie coloniale et langue Française en Algérie* (Alger: ENAP, 1985) 14.

The Process of Storytelling in the Novel

Although Feraoun attended colonial schools, his socialization process started around his family's cooking fires after the evening meals, when everyone assembled to listen to and participate in storytelling. He grew up with tales about human beings personified as animals and animated trees, nature and spirits, which constitute the majority of the Kabyle/Berber oral stories. As a child, Feraoun was greatly influenced by the tales that his aunts (Khalti and Nana), used to tell in the evening sitting around the *kanoun* or fireplace. In his first novel, *Le fils du pauvre* (1950), the author describes a traditional way of telling stories and riddles and the arrangement of the audience. The narrators – his aunts – were sitting at the ends of the semi-circle of listeners and every narration of theirs started by a traditional formula, “machaho tlem chaho atidba rabi amousarou...” or “Once upon a time.” This formula used to capture the attention of the audience, establishing a close link between the speaker and the listeners. Fouroulou Menrad, the autobiographic narrator of *Le fils du pauvre*, describes his early immersion in a story's world:

When sleep fails to come, we tell stories while Nana works.

I have to say that these stories drew me closely toward my aunts [...]. During storytelling she [Khalti, the other aunt] and I were in another world. From the whole cloth, she knew how to create an imaginary realm over which we were rulers. I became judge and benefactor of the poor orphan who wanted to marry a princess; all powerful, I witnessed the triumph of little M'Quidech,³³ who overcame the Ogress; I whispered wise answers to Hechaïchi, who tries to escape the chambers of the bloodthirsty sultan. [...] The story flows from Khalti's mouth and I drink it avidly.³⁴

Oral stories were used to educate children in the culture by teaching them ethical principles and moral values, and anchoring in them the feeling of belonging to the group. In addition to this, the stories also provided recreation and entertainment. The influence of oral tradition on Feraoun continued when he was a schoolboy. During the holidays, he and some of his friends enjoyed playing the flute and singing in the summer nights. He listened to some of his friends reciting stories and poems of the famous Kabyle bard, Si Mohand ou-Mhand,³⁵ whose

³³ M'Quidech is the name given to one of the tricksters in Berber mythology.

³⁴ Mouloud Feraoun, *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad Kabyle Schoolteacher* (1954), trans. Lucy R. McNair (Charlottesville, VA and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005) 39.

³⁵ Si Mohand ou-Mhand was a very popular Kabyle wandering poet (1840-1905).

inspiration is clearly recognizable in his novels. Feraoun collected and translated into French some of Si Mohand's poems under the title *Les Isefra: poèmes de Si Mohand-ou-Mhand* (1969).

In *La terre et le sang*, both dialogue and plot structure demonstrate the call-and-response pattern. In the opening page, for instance, the author addressing the reader asks: "How to suppose, in fact, that in Ighil-Nezman, a French woman from Paris, can live in seclusion?"³⁶ Other examples follow all along the narrative. For instance, after his return from France, the narrator asks, referring to Amer-Oukaci: "What will he do now?"³⁷ This is followed by another question: "Did or didn't he return, bring in money?"³⁸ The two excerpts may be read as containing several "calls" to which the following parts provide "responses." Furthermore, they create scenes commenting on the previous ones, as in the case of "la Parisienne who amazed the whole village."³⁹ Many parts of the narrative can be interpreted as commentaries or responses to the preceding ones.

Moreover, the storytelling technique also informs the overall structure of the novel by means of stories-within-stories. The sense of significant correspondence between the storyteller and the audience lies in the mingling of the story of Amer ou Kaci and the history of immigration and exile, as well as the personalized historical moments. The novel also offers fragments of the author's personal experience and thoughts. The author favours the voice of wisdom – that of Ramdane – to carry the reader beyond Amer's illusions. Ramdane's voice reflects the full value and reality of the Kabyle society. Inviting the participation of the audience, the novel sets the scenes by introducing the characters and outlining the conflict. In doing so, it uses a language that is vibrant and full of images and symbols. However, what attracts the reader the most is the conclusion of the story, which emphasizes a moral statement that warns against anti-social behaviour and remedies social evils.

Another feature of the novel grounded in the paradigm of storytelling is Amer's circular passage through a series of adventures, which start with his departure from his village, Ighil-Nzman, to France, continue by the events of his nomadic life in Europe, and close by his decision to return to his homeland. The quest for and the return to his origins, and his efforts to reintegrate himself in his native village, all correspond to the pattern of Kabyle storytelling. Amer resembles

³⁶ "Comment supposer, en effet, qu'a Ighil-Nezman, puisse vivre cloîtrée une Française de Paris?" Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 3.

³⁷ "Que fera-t-il maintenant?" Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 8.

³⁸ "le revenant a-t-il, oui ou non, rapporté de l'argent?" Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 9.

³⁹ "La Parisienne qui mit en émoi tout le village." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 3.

the hero of Kabyle oral folk tales since he makes a circular journey in crossing the sea to France and then returning to his birthplace. The second stage of the narrative includes Amer's withdrawal from home and travel to France where he loses his entire sense of identity. The theme of Amer's withdrawal from home is further intensified by the account of his life in a completely alien environment. Like folktale heroes, Amer views life outside his village as chaotic and discovers that people he has come across during his journey to France tend to behave differently from the villagers of Ighil-Nzman. But unlike the heroes of folktales, though gaining lucidity as a result of his journey, Amer is unable to reintegrate himself into his community. His quest results in a rupture: he wilfully goes beyond the safe limits of his community and pays for it heavily. His attitude is that of a young man exposed to Western values and uprooted, after returning to his native village, from the traditions of his home. He is crushed in the clash with his native community and ends tragically because of his inability to conform to its standards. He neither respects the values of his community nor participates in their preservation. Rather, he transgresses 'the code of honour' and becomes socially maladjusted, out of tune with his native culture. His love affair with Chabha, his uncle's wife, does not conform to the conventions of his community, which stigmatizes him, because he disobeys its customs. Amer's conflict is caused by social circumstances, which change his intentions and prevent him from reaching his objectives.

The Open-ended Structure of the Narrative

In addition to social and moral identity contrasted with Western values, Feraoun's novel is also characterized by an open-ended narrative structure, which offers the reader a possibility to step outside the world of the narrative. The author neither provides a conventional ending as in a Western novel nor answers questions, but maintains the suspense concerning the death of the two main characters Amer ou Kaci and Slimane. He maintains the continuity of narrative voice (approaching readers as listeners) but simultaneously effects its liberation. In doing so, he, in my view, succeeds in resolving the tensions between orality and literature in the quest for the restoration of the "self" as an integral personality. In this respect, the influence of oral tradition appears important. It functions as a broad foundation to create a new tradition that combines oral and written modes, and opens new horizons of literary achievement. What directs the reader to the traditional process of storytelling is the ending of the story. Instead of providing a rounded-off ending or a final resolution, the author makes the action continue beyond the narrative. By its open-ended structure, the reader is invited to think of many possibilities of

shaping the end of the story. Feraoun leaves the thread concerning Amer's death suspended. The reader does not know exactly if it is Slimane who takes his revenge following the will of his brother Ali, or if the revenge is caused by Amer's infidelity. This type of mobile construct in the narrative is inspired by the open structures of Kabyle oral forms in which the reader participates in finding possible and imagined conclusions. Therefore, Amer's tragic death can be interpreted in many ways: First, it means that no one can escape his fate. Amer falls exactly into the same trap as that which André sets for Rabah ou Hamouche. Secondly, Amer's tragedy signifies his failure to reintegrate into his community. As he becomes alienated and unable to reintegrate he kills himself, since the Western values he accepted lead to his destruction. Thirdly, Amer's death can also imply victory in a sense: the hero finds in it a harmony and peace denied to him from the moment he left his homeland. The closing chapter of the novel resembles an epilogue where Amer's death is described as a passage towards peace, reconciliation, and reconnection with the earth: "It is the stones and the earth itself that kill him."⁴⁰ The return to his final resting place can be seen as the ultimate source of peace and harmony, which Amer found so deceptive during his life. It is a place where all his conflicts vanish. The deaths of Amer and Slimane can also be viewed as the final merging of their souls. Death brings Amer's awareness of guilt to an end, while Slimane is granted grace and peace by his return to his beloved land. His quest for identity and self-restoration proceeds beyond the limits of the narrative. It represents a continuous possibility of the restoration of the self and its communion with the earth.

The open ending of the novel thus points to a spiritual renewal and is again oral in its structure. As in folktales, the death of Amer has a complex meaning and a cultural function. It can be read as a mnemonic aid and an injunction to observe rules of correct behaviour. Amer's misconduct, his transgression of cultural limits, leads to his death. This is another example of Feraoun's appeal to his own folkloric and oral traditions. Like most folktales, which "function as the educational system and instruments of both self-control and for the control of others,"⁴¹ Amer's story gives advice to the readers-listeners, because such a death, like in a folktale or a dilemma story, is indirectly didactic; it is the outcome of the protagonist's clash with the code of honour. Amer's failure is caused by his separation from Kabyle moral codes and his disregard of the village norms. Therefore, the narrative voice incites the reader to respect the norms of behaviour that uphold and preserve the

⁴⁰ "Ce sont les pierres et la terre-même qui le tuent." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 220.

⁴¹ 'D. Bamidele, "Oral Dynamics of *Things Fall Apart*," Smith and Che, eds., *Oral Tradition in African Literature* 55.

social order. Worth mentioning is also the way Feraoun links the Kabyle folklore to Western folktales by a reference to the fairy tale of Cinderella, whose heroine is displaced from her cultural context and transferred to the "Kingdom of Ighil-Nzman."⁴²

The Use of Folktales in the Novel

The last discussed oral element in Feraoun's novel is the folktale. The author combines folktale with legend in the figure of Marabout Si Mahfoud, whose character initiates the legendary structure and acts as a recurrent motif and metaphor. Si Mahfoud tells the story of a poor farmer, a victim of the Sultan's jealousy. The latter orders the former to teach the Koran to a camel. Terrified by the tyranny of the Sultan and the impossibility of the task, the farmer is overwhelmed with sorrow and despair. One day, on his way home, he meets a dervish who gives him the following advice: "Be patient, don't be afraid of the Sultan. Only God can change your life." The dervish asks the farmer to wait for three years during which the Sultan or the camel may pass away. He does not have to worry because only God is capable of everything. In fact, a short time after the Sultan dies and the poor peasant can live on peacefully with the camel. This narrative does not merely strengthen the novel's legendary and mythic quality, but also allows the reader to transcend realism and enter the realm of the fantastic. The narrator captures some aspects of the magic reality of the story, which Si Mahfoud uses as a guide to others, as well as a tool to preserve moral values. As a result, the story is didactic, because one of the functions of folktales is to teach moral values. The following passage illustrates the point: "This, my son, is an anecdote that can serve as a teaching to all the impatient, the restless who seek to penetrate the unfathomable instead of letting themselves live and have faith in God. [...] Do not torment yourself any longer and stop disturbing the dead."⁴³ The legend also provides a close link between the present world and that of the dead ancestors.

Feraoun uses another folktale to show the wisdom of ancestors. Si Mahfoud tells the story of a Sheikh and the Sultan to his visitors. In this case, the tale is used as a piece of advice to Slimane. More importantly, the novel as a whole has features of a folktale, because it aims to teach a moral lesson. According to Ruth Finnegan, oral narratives

⁴² Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 88.

⁴³ "Voilà, mon fils, une anecdote qui peut servir d'enseignement à tous les impatientes, les inquiets qui cherchent à pénétrer l'insondable au lieu de se laisser vivre et de se reposer en Dieu." Feraoun, *La terre et le sang* 80.

can be used for upholding political authority or for attacking it, for passing on tradition [...]. There is also the part played by oral forms (and written ones too) in the creation or maintenance of identity and the validation of experience. The claim – whether in every sense justified or not – that something is ‘old’ or ‘traditional’ may carry great weight. They can function as a “paradigm for understanding the community and for determining and developing individual behaviour and personality in that community.”⁴⁴

In *La terre et le sang*, the society as well as the ancient order do not decay. Instead of disintegrating, they consolidate themselves. The traditional way of life practised by the villagers is strong, durable, and closely knit.

Conclusion

The present analysis of Feraoun’s second novel shows how the author creates a cultural dialogue by the rehabilitation of his Berber cultural heritage, expressed in a borrowed French language. The strength of Feraoun’s *La terre et le sang* lies in its strong allegiance to orality and the popular traditions of the folktale. The novel reproduces the rhythms and sentence patterns of Kabyle speech, rural images, analogies and maxims, which directly come from oral tradition. Feraoun’s evocations of cultural traditions serve two purposes: first, they oppose the French allegations that Kabyle people are uncivilized; second, they highlight the significance of oral tradition.

Importantly, the novel uses French within cultural oral markers, localized within the Kabyle culture. The novel also uses the storytelling mode typical of folk tradition. Various forms of oral traditions have an important place in the Kabyle community. The author uses them as a way to enrich his narrative, to give it form and structure, and to imbue them with meaning. Oral tradition influences the idiosyncratic use of French, as well as the images, symbols and proverbs, including the morality they preach, and vision they express. All these aspects are assigned a function in the narrative. As a result, the hold that oral tradition exerts on Feraoun is so strong that although he is greatly influenced by Western writers, there is sufficient evidence of his use of traditional African material. He deploys diverse means of Kabyle oral traditions and uses them imaginatively to draw attention to his traditional society. The above analysis of Feraoun’s novel has demonstrated the ways in which it combines ‘cultural oral elements’ and literary techniques.

⁴⁴ Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts* 121.

In addition to a number of anthropological details of Kabyle customs and society, storytelling and folktales also feature prominently in the novel. Apart from the novel's title and the name of the village, which stands for a mythic time and place, the writer uses other oral features in order to preserve oral history, communal beliefs, social values and the wisdom of ancestors. He also reproduces a communal participatory experience, style and structure of African storytelling, which he transfers to the reader-listener with whom he converses, commenting on, demonstrating and illustrating Kabyle culture. Through storytelling, the narrator creates a medium to educate, an account of past deeds, beliefs, wit and wisdom, morals and myths. Far from being a mere source of entertainment, old stories help to sharpen the readers' creativity and imagination, direct their behaviour, train their intellect in order to regulate their emotions, and suggest to them a sense of identity and belonging. In sum, Feraoun's link to Kabyle oral tradition can be compared to that of "a snail to its shell. Even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind."⁴⁵ Moreover, like traditional oral narratives, *La terre et le sang* contains philosophical ideas, epistemological constructs, cultural codes and worldviews that are fundamental to the identity of the Kabyle people, which the author has successfully rehabilitated, recreating a distinct form of thought and knowledge out of experience rooted in a specific cultural context.

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⁴⁵ Kudakwashe Tuwe, "The African Oral Tradition Paradigm of Storytelling as a Methodological Framework: Employment Experiences for African Communities in New Zealand," *Proceedings of the 38th AFSAAP Conference: 21st Century Tensions and Transformation in Africa, Deakin University, 28th-30th October 2015* (February 2016), <https://www.ecald.com/assets/Resources/Assets/Tuwe-African-Storytelling-Research-Method.pdf>.

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