



**SPECIAL FOCUS ON AMAZIGH LITERATURE: CRITICAL AND CLOSE
READING APPROACHES**

The Question of Generic Contiguities in Amazigh (Kabyle) Literature: The Novel (*ungal*) and The Short Story (*tullist*)

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Abstract

This article is dedicated to the study of the question of generic contiguities within Berber (Kabyle) literature. It is devoted more particularly to the study of the boundaries between novels (*ungal*) and short stories (*tullist*). I show that the identities of literary genres do not depend only on a norm coming from elsewhere (from the West in particular) but that they are also shaped by the context from within which they evolve and by the function assigned to these genres.

Keywords: Generic contiguities; Amazigh literature; *ungal*; novel; *tullist*; short story

The question of generic borders is a matter for all literatures. The debate driving it often results from a clash between the more normative discourse of critics, on the one hand, and the authors themselves, on the other, who do not necessarily accept the critics' criteria as the essential rubric for measuring their works. Indeed, often the most unexpected and sometimes the most majestic literary forms arise to support these authors' "rebellion" against established literary tradition and criticism. In the case of Kabyle literature, the generic denomination *ungal* is employed to designate the production of novels in the Kabyle language, but it sometimes brings together seemingly dissimilar writings. While one literary current applies criteria largely shared by the Western novel, the second borrows techniques from other genres,

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such as the *tullist* (“short story”). Thus, this article approaches the denomination of *ungal* (“novel”) in terms of its “real” functions; the intention is not to determine the validity of its various uses, but to follow the process of developing a new generic identity and the difficulties related to its institutionalization.

What Is Generic Contiguity?

Regarding the identity of emergent genres of Kabyle literature, Daniella Merolla notes that “new genres such as *ungal* (novel) and *amezgun* (theater) do not pose problems in terms of definition because they emerged within the context of the cultural response to European genres.”¹ However, it is necessary to put this proposition into perspective because the borrowing of a form – unless carried out in a purely memetic way – does not rule out problems of definition. This becomes more apparent when Kabyle novels are examined. This question arises out of the apparent inconsistency of works that feature the paratextual indication of “*ungal*” on the front cover, yet read textually far more like *tullisin*. A list of texts encouraging this appearance of *ungal* would include Brahim Tazaghart’s *Salas d Nuja*, Hocine Louni’s *Tfuk ur tfuk ara*, Belaid Hamdani’s *Nekk akkw d kem kem akw d nekk*, Laïfa Aït Boudaoud’s *Ccna n yibzaz*, Youcef Achouri’s *Ijeğğigen n ccwal*, and Omar Dahmoune’s *Bu-tqulhatin*. These texts present a typical case of generic contiguity, which is understood as “the adjacency of two classes of texts that in practice can be interpreted in the same textual space because they share one or more characteristics but that sociodiscursive representations distinguish first by denominations that make them autonomous and then by distinctive features specific to each class.”² This type of contiguity appears once a literary work’s borders are blurred, re-evaluated, or even contested. It implies a certain malleability of the generic categories resulting from texts that create this type of relation, represented as the “simultaneous presence established in the same text between two (or more) creative possibilities.”³ What follows in this article is an attempt to identify the elements of contiguity with the *tullist* genre so that the *ungal* may be defined through numerous actual instances of it.

Elements of Generic Contiguity: Simple or Fragmented Plot

The narrative structure of these *ungal* is the first element that problematizes their generic identity. Gilles Philippe emphasizes the primordial importance of the narrative element in defining the genre: “Whatever the chosen definition, the narrative character appears to be the first constituent element of the novel.”⁴ Above all, this is defined by the composition of the story and its plot, which is frequently complex. Nevertheless, several texts of the novels in question seem to favor simple plots, frequently focusing on the fate of

¹ Daniella Merolla, *De l’art de la narration tamazight (berbère), état des lieux et perspectives* (Paris/Louvain: Peeters, 2006), 104.

² Mohand Akli Salhi, unpublished text.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Philippe Gilles, *Le roman, des théories aux analyses* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 73.

one character, onto which no secondary or parallel plot is grafted. *Salas d Nuja*, for example, begins with the character Salas lying on a hospital bed and receiving terrible news that will end his boxing career. This incapacity plunges him into a deep confusion, which serves as a pretext for his friends to take him to the sea in an effort to remedy his situation. It is there that he meets and falls in love with Nuja, only to discover some time later that she has already been promised to his cousin. Clearly, the conquest of his beloved is central, and the plot revolves around it. Nevertheless, it drives very few events and does not generate many twists in the story; this is because the tension wanes when Nuja refuses to resign herself to this fate, and her father immediately yields to this decision. Moreover, the germ of a secondary plot reveals itself in Salas's quest since at times it is accompanied by the memory of his lost mother, though this association does not itself constitute a well-developed subject.

Tfuk ur tfuk ara/An unfinished ending is another *ungal* with a plot that is more or less commensurate with the previous text in terms of simplicity. *Tfuk ur tfuk ara* is the title of a diary kept regularly by the character Muḥ, a student at the University of Boumerdès. Muḥ's brother Yasin finds this diary in his brother's closet following the latter's death in the Boumerdès earthquake. The reading of it takes the form of an embedded narrative and reveals the daily life of Muḥ and those close to him, taking up a large part of the story since the plot does not unfold until halfway through as it reveals blossoming feelings between Muḥ and Lila. But fate soon comes to separate them due to the latter's serious illness, forcing her to continue her treatment abroad. The wait for her return accounts for the second part of the story, and it ends with Muḥ's death in the earthquake. This short-circuits the story (marking the end of the diary), providing the reason for the title given to it by Yasin: *Tfuk ur tfuk ara*. Meanwhile, the increase in the number of characters reveals the development of secondary plots. Indeed, it is customary for the main plot to be abandoned at times so as to give free rein to the stories of secondary characters or even for the main plot itself to consist of the parallel trajectory of several characters whose paths cross and converge in the story. In the case of *Tfuk ur tfuk ara*, this can be applied to the character of Σισα (an amateur singer who wants to start a career) whose singing aspirations meet with derision in the local village. Nevertheless, the developments that would have fleshed out this subplot to determine how it ends are missing. In contrast, for some texts it is the proliferation of secondary stories that seems to drastically fragment the narrative fabric. Nevertheless, any story still reveals a coherent whole, even if a number of secondary stories are grafted onto it and however disjointed and discontinuous the narrative perspective may be. However, in some texts, the profusion of (embedded) stories and stories about secondary characters can detract from the development of the main plot. This observation can be applied to a text such as *Nekk akw d kem, kem akw d nekk/Me and you, you and me*, which relates the story of three childhood friends Ḥemmu, Weeli, and Tanina. Upon reaching adolescence, Tanina is deemed mature enough to spend time with boys but finds herself cornered into housework. This separation allows for Ḥemmu's feelings for Tanina to reveal themselves, which suggests that this is the main plot of the story. But the story is filled with a variety of little stories about

Weeli and Hemmu, and added to this is the shift in attention added late in the story toward Tanina and Ğeefer's affliction due to being harshly treated by their stepmother. The plot then becomes fragmented into a plurality of small stories, competing with each other at times, and encroaching on each other without any one of them finding real substance regarding the story.

Along the same lines, the novel *Ccna n yibzaz/The song of the cicadas* can be read as a social fresco with the story of the main character *Da Mbarek* serving as a pretext to describe the daily life of his village with its traditions and its troubles. The main thread of the story, based on *Da Mbarek's* desire to take a second wife (which caused the death of his first wife, *Kelttu*, after he set about his plan) is broken up by the profusion of the narrator's comments, which constantly tear apart the narrative fabric: sometimes to address the architecture of traditional Kabyle houses, sometimes to describe the proceedings of funeral wakes, and sometimes to foreground generational conflicts pitting the youngest against the village elders. The space provided for these digressions and descriptions is so extensive that the apparent main plot is relegated to the background. Indeed, many characters (*Buğemea*, *Awaṭṭani*, *Σmer*, etc.) make their entrance in a scattered way and lead to long digressions on their individual destinies and invariable ramblings of the ethnographic type. This can be said, for example, about the character of *Awaṭṭani* (formerly a butcher and then a businessman) whose appearance sets off a whole introductory discourse about the "aklan" caste of Kabyle society. It is only much further on, in the last pages of the text, that the narrative thread is taken up again with *Da Mbarek's* plan to propose to *Yamina* (whom his son *Yidir* loves), which leads to the death of *Kelttu* after neither of his children, *Yidir* or *Σli*, hears his calls of distress. In the end, the plot of this story only serves for the benefit of his social fresco, the painting of which is far more commanding than the "story" itself.

Beyond a doubt, *Bu-tqulhatin* raises the most questions as to its use of the *ungal* label on the front title page, despite bearing more in common with *tullisin*. It is presented like a collection of short stories, with two stories that are independent of each other. The first one takes up a motif popularly dealt with in the oral tradition: a father wants to prove the "disloyalty" of his son's friends by simulating a murder with a cut to a sheep's throat. His son's friends run off when he calls on them for help, whereas his father's friends respond to participate in the cover-up of the "murder." The events of this story thus present a moral in the manner of traditional oral prose by stressing the importance of knowing how to surround oneself with reliable people. A second story then starts with some anecdotes about a group of friends: *Amɣar*, *Čaqlala*, and *Bu-tqulhatin*. They are arranged in a sequence of short little stories with light and very anecdotal content that serves to relate *Bu-tqulhatin's* humorous character. There is no backstory provided to gather this all into a more complex, irreducible whole. This is undoubtedly what leads *Amar Ameziane* to claim that "*Omar Dahmoune's* writing struggles to produce the novelistic out of anecdotes."⁵

⁵ *Amar Ameziane*, "Bu Tqulhatin ou la situation aléatoire de l'édition d'ouvrage en kabyle," 2006, <http://www.depechedekabylie.com/culture/17140-bu-tqulhatin-ou-la-situation-aleatoire-de-ledition-douvrages-en-kabyle.html>.

These *ungal* make use of a plot, sometimes simple and narrow, sometimes fragmented, that is eclipsed by secondary narratives that bury the main thread. In sum, through the plots that are employed (in their construction and/or their outcome), the narrative system relating to the aforementioned texts embraces concision as a general rule, as do the *tullist*.

Reduction of the Characters' Psychological Depth

The construction and the staging of the character comprise an element specific to the novel. The characters in a novel are presented in detail, which makes it possible to see and explore their psychology in depth. Their presence in the text reveals an interiority that simultaneously serves history and the author's novelistic aims. The fact that these characters are described gradually means that the identities provided at the beginning of the story are not definitive. This is one of the major features specific to characters of a novel, according to Michel Erman,⁶ who takes up the notion of narrative identity from Paul Ricoeur.⁷ The latter divides the subject's identity into a permanent identity ("*idem-identity*"), which refers to character traits and temperament, and a variable identity ("*ipse-identity*"), which changes depending on the timeline and the character's relations to others. This *ipse-identity* that Ricoeur calls "narrative identity" is revealed through variable elements. Whether lively portraits, comments made by the narrator, or character realizations, these elements exhibit the way in which actions come to transform the characters. In short, this narrative identity is generally made visible by way of virtues or passions that are fused with the character in ways that denote specific meanings, such as rivalries or conflicts related to commitment (or lack thereof). The narrative identity testifies, therefore, "to the way in which the individual is dedicated to the world."⁸

The portrayals of characters in the *ungal* examined here are by no means devoid of physical or moral features. On the contrary, several descriptive fragments are slipped into the narrative fabric in order to offer a comprehensive view. However, the characters of a novel are not confined to a few descriptive details. Their psychological depth can only be constructed in terms of how they exist in a world that they represent, in which they act and/or react. Paradoxically, the texts in question here do not appear to favor the prolonged description of characters. Their profile remains flat and without depth, especially in texts with a frantic narrative pace that arrests the development of their narrative identity. Action is privileged in *Bu-tqulhatin/The prankster man*, with the succession of anecdotes about the characters of Muğend Crif, Muğend Amyar, and Muğend Areqzi, who are reduced to vehicles of pure action, despite a few descriptions of physical or moral features. This orientation can also be seen in *Nekk akw d kem, kem akw d nekk*, which revolves around the trio of characters Tanina, Weeli, and Hemmu. While some of Weeli and

⁶ Michel Erman, *Poétique du personnage de roman* (Paris: Ellipses, 2006), 103.

⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

⁸ Erman, *Poétique du personnage*, 105.

Hemmu's personality traits are revealed in order to introduce their humorous nature and interpersonal dynamics, with Tanina's character it is only with the description of the misery inflicted by her stepmother (who is forcing her to marry Salem Aerab) that the elements of a narrative identity emerge. Tanina's desire to break free from her stepmother's tyranny is one of the only moments in the story where we observe the impact of the weight of events on this character:

Tanina was forced to marry this paunchy president: the marriage of death. To reassure herself, she told herself inwardly: "I must fight. Women also have rights, we are all human after all. If she is forced to do so, a woman will kill herself long before they put the veil on her."⁹

Tfuk ur tfuk ara/ An unfinished ending taking up the reading of a diary as an embedded narrative, would have been the ideal opportunity to explore the characters' interiority since the role of the diary is by its very nature personal, if only in relation to its author (in this case, Muḥ). Yet the latter acts as an observer, describing the daily life of his inner circle: his parents Sliman and Ferruḡa in how they relate to their children, his younger brother Yasin and his increasingly regular attendance at the mosque, Σisa having come under fire from his village's inhabitants because of his passion for singing, etc. The way they are presented remains, however, at the level of a mere surface description (even with their character traits) since there is no way to access their internal substance, and this also applies to the diary's author. The development of Muḥ, who discloses his budding feelings for Linda after his failed romance with Zahiya, is cut short by death before it is possible to discover him fully. These *unqal* are thus expressly sparing in terms of the psychological dimension of their characters, with the focus put on their actions instead. Nevertheless, *Salas d Nuja/ Salas and Nuja* presents a noteworthy exception. Salas's life is marked by three devastating events: the loss of his mother, the injury that ended his career as an athlete, and his love for Nuja, who was already promised to his cousin. These different events (especially the first and the last) weighed on the identity of this character to such an extent that the different interior monologues throughout the text allow us to observe how his feelings for Nuja constantly awaken in him the memory of his lost mother:

His childhood flashed before his eyes. He cried his eyes out the day after his mother's funeral. He became aware of what had happened, of the drama that had befallen him: a treasure of tenderness and love had just slipped from his tender hands forever.¹⁰

⁹ Belaïd Hamdani, *Nekk akw d kem, kem akw d nek*, (Tizi Ouzou, 1998), 67. Translated text: "Tanina temren fell-as ad tettwarcel d uselway bu-ueebbuḍ yeffyen yef yidmaren, rcel n temḍelt. Nettet deg wul-is teqqar mi tessedhuy ixef-is: "Ilaq-iyi ad nnaḡey. Ula d tameṭṭut yur-s izerfan, d alsuwen akk i nella. Neḡ ma ugaren-tt ad nneḡ iman-is send ad s-selsen asbur n teslit."

¹⁰ Brahim Tazaghart, *Salas d Nuja*, (Béjaia, 2004), 45. Translated text: "Gar wallen-is uḡalen-d wusan n temzi-s. Yettru armi yenzef azekka-nni n tenṭelt n yemma-s. Ifaq-d s wacu yeḡran, yuki-d d twaḡit i t-iḡuzan: agerruj n lḡenna d tayri yenser-as i lebda gar tfettusin-is tileqqaqin."

This obsessive memory intertwines with his fear of losing Nuja. To counter this possible loss (the love of a woman reminding him of his mother), Salas resolves to murder Teyeb, Nuja's fiancé:

He had never thought or believed that his mind could give way to ideas like the one fueling the nightmare that had woken him up that morning! He couldn't believe that the notion of a crime had crossed his mind. But he had thought about it. . . he had thought about it seriously. It was the only way out of this situation that he could see.¹¹

These developments make it possible to access Salas's emotional life by observing him reacting and changing in response to events. But within these *ungal*, this narrative identity does not take precedence over the description of actions. These authors appear to be more concerned with the latter, given that the personalities of the characters often remain fixed from the beginning to the end, as with a *tullist* or genres of oral Kabyle prose.

Reduction of the Discursive System

The discursive system takes on several functions in the novel. Far from serving merely to structure the story by allowing characters to communicate and express their thoughts, it expresses profound meanings of the text. In this respect, the novel is known for long discursive elements (dialogues, monologues, indirect discourse, etc.). The author makes use of these for dual purposes: to convey and describe the character. These discursive elements mirror the thoughts, states of mind, and opinions – in short, the interiority – of the characters. As Francis Berthelot notes, “If the eyes are the mirror of the soul, the word is that of the being, in all of its dimensions: social being, physical being, mental being, etc.”¹² The word is like a half-opened door that gives us access to the psychology of the characters and, consequently, contributes to their characterization.¹³ Whether these discursive elements appear constantly or occasionally, they help to reinforce this realistic illusion; but this is not their only function. They can also intervene at the narrative level and play a dramatic role. Nevertheless, in some *ungal*, the dialogues are developed in such a way that they only assume a cohesive function, ensuring the logical transition between the different levels of the text (narrative and descriptive). This is the case, for example, in Brahim Tazaghart's *Salas d Nuja/Salas and Nuja*, in which the discursive sequences – sometimes very long – are usually limited to the process of interaction between the different characters without contributing to the progression of the story. This also applies to *Tfuk ur tfuk ara/ An*

¹¹ Ibid., 97. Translated text: “Werğin yenwi, yumin ad d-fruxcent deg wallay-is tekta i d-yessemyin deg-s targit i t-id-yessakin sbeħ-nni s uduqques! Ur yumin ara deg-s i d-tefruri tekti n tme-nyiw. Maca ixemmem...ixemmem s tidet yer wannect-nni. D abrid-nni kan i iwala d sslak-is di tegnit-nni.”

¹² Francis Berthelot, *Parole et dialogue dans le roman* (Paris: Nathan, 2001), 205–206.

¹³ Catherine Durvy, *À la découverte du roman* (Paris: Ellipses 2002), 129.

unfinished ending, which features reduced dialogues that frequently interrupt the sequence of the narrative, without necessarily providing any real information to advance the story. Their presence is often limited to a function of confirmation, serving to authenticate insertions made by the narrator. Yet within this same text, the characters' speech serves as a space for critiquing traditions and mores. This can be seen in the following dialogue between Muḥ and Zisa about the latter's much-maligned passion for singing:

"You know that singing runs in my veins, I can't get rid of it. I like it. For the others, I'm not taking the best path. . . ."

"What do you care what other people think?"

"If it was just about me, I wouldn't care at all. But Ldjouher is involved. The amount of gossip is not to our advantage. When I ran into her this morning, she told me what the other women were saying about us. She's afraid that it will get out to her parents."¹⁴

In *Ccna n yibzaz*, the dialogues are rarely connected to the story itself since they generally serve as a vehicle for social discourse on generational conflicts, or the dichotomy of tradition and modernity, contributing to the social fresco that is the subject of the text. The use of dialogues in this way has considerable repercussions for the construction of characters. The narrator increases the number of stories and fragments them without the reader being able to clearly perceive the system of characters (hierarchy, relations, communication between the various characters, roles in the story, etc.). What results is a kind of "verticality" and a separation between the different characters, which make it difficult to reconstruct the relationships (on a horizontal level). It is as if the universe of the text separated them, giving the impression that the narrator acts as a simple observer for a portrait of manners.

These *ungal* therefore present a system that generally fits with a discursive economy. The characters' speech does not make consequential interventions in the plot since it does not affect how the story unfolds. In the majority of cases, this speech does not engage or disengage the characters in or from the action because it does not reveal the dramatic or ideological stakes of the story. This polyphony that Bakhtin identified as being specific to the novel, understood as the plurality of voices conveying several visions of the world and freeing itself from the voice of the narrator,¹⁵ seems to be absent from some texts.

¹⁴ Hocine Louni, *Tfuk ur tfuk ara*, (2013), 24–25. Translated text: "–Nekkini akken tezriḍ, ccna yezdey deg-i, mačči d ayen ara ssufey, rnu d ayen ḥemmlay. Wiyad ɣur-sen mačči deg ubrid yelhan i tedduy...

–D acu i ak-iruheḥ deg wiyad? Yegzem-as awal Muḥ.

–Lemmer d nekkini kan i yellan di temsalt ur iyi-d-teclie ara, acu tella Lɣuher si lɣiha. Awal n medden yettnerni akken ur nbeqqu ara. Tasebhit n wass-a mi akken i tt-mlaley tenna-yi-d yef wayen ttmeslayent tlawin fell-ay, tuggad awal ad yaweḍ yer yimawlan-is."

¹⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Esthétique et théorie du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

Space as an Adjunct to Action

Space is one of the fundamental elements of novelistic writing. In this regard, Gérard Genette wrote that “it is even easier to conceive of a pure description of any narrative element than the opposite, because the most neutral designation of the elements and circumstances of a process can already pass for the beginnings of a description.”¹⁶ The novelistic space provides a place for the characters, contains their actions, and creates a specific atmosphere. Nevertheless, the distinction of the novelistic space does not lie merely within the scope of the developments in the text but in its capacity to be “a representation invested with subjectivity.”¹⁷ Indeed, although spatial descriptions mark several pauses in the narrative, this is not their main function. As noted by Catherine Durvye, “the description of the places as well as of objects is never a useless enclave; it always fulfills a function because it helps to clarify and enrich the sense of the narrative.”¹⁸ For example, novelists sometimes resort to description in order to justify the harmony that they establish between nature and the hero’s feelings. The description of spaces in the novel is provided with an explanatory and/or symbolic value that marks a break with the descriptive piece that is purely ornamental. Space comes to explain the characters, announces an action, and more or less contains it. As such, it is the material figure of action because “the drama is inscribed on faces and in places before it constitutes the progression of an adventure.”¹⁹ The description of the space becomes the thread that leads to the novelistic action.

In some *ungal*, the sometimes-accelerated rhythm of the narration makes it possible to see its repercussions for the spatial indications, the descriptions of which become very rare, as in *Ijeğğigen n ccwal*. With a few exceptions, the spaces in this text are limited to their referential dimension, marking their presence by their sole toponymic value. In other texts, when the description lends itself to it, spaces take the form of clearly distinguishable descriptive fragments. They are most frequently used to present the places that will harbor the action or to set the scene. This ornamental function applies to many spatial descriptions in the text *Tfuk ur tfuk ara/ An unfinished ending*, such as this space surrounded by nature, not far from the village:

He lit a cigarette once the door was closed and went behind the village where his friends were. A place covered in flowers and greenery. The fountain that the women draw water from every morning is further down. Its water flows freely into the stream that descends to the river surrounded on all sides by a forest that adorns it: the undergrowth of holm oaks, ashes, elms. . . . It was even more beautiful because of the yellow color

¹⁶ Gérard Genette, “Frontières du récit,” *Recherches sémiologiques: l’analyse structurale du récit*, *Communications* 8 (1966): 156.

¹⁷ Paul Aron, Denis Saint-Jacques, and Alain Viala, *Le dictionnaire du littéraire* (Paris, PUF, 2002), 192.

¹⁸ Durvye, *À la découverte*, 118.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

of the Scotch broom and the heather that brightened the shadows when its flowers bloomed.²⁰

The ornamental function prevails in the majority of the spatial constructions found in these *ungal*. Nevertheless, there is an abundance of descriptions in *Ccna n yibzaz* (descriptions of the village, the fountain, etc.) compared to other texts. But most frequently, they serve – as do all the other elements previously mentioned – the objectives of that social fresco that seems to be the purpose of the story. These descriptions take the form of a painting, which deprive them of any possible dynamics and thus further support the purpose of this fresco:

His – not their, because the only thing the old woman has here are duties, and nothing belongs to her – house had also aged a lot. Time had worn away the esparto mats, the coarse wool blankets, the framework beams, the plaster on the walls. . . . And the smell of spices mingled with the smell of manure.

As in all the old houses, the loom, the kitchen, and the stable were all integrated into the overall home, with the loft over the stable. . . . Use was made of every little space.²¹

At times, the descriptions focus on the interactional dynamics between spaces and time (by describing their development) or even between spaces and characters. In *Tfuk ur tfuk ara/ An unfinished ending*, this is the case with the description of Muh's room, where the character took refuge when, as the absence of his beloved Lila weighed increasingly on him, every corner of the university reminded him of her. This space ultimately awakened in him the same memory:

He got into bed, lying on his back and using his arms as a pillow. The first thing he saw facing him was a painting hanging in the middle of the wall. It was a portrait in oils of a girl, standing in profile, amidst flowers coated in gold by the reflections from the rays of the sunset she was contemplating. She held a bouquet of flowers, gazing at this semi-circle of the

²⁰ Hocine Louni, op.cit, 12–13. Translated text: “Akken i d-yemdel tawwurt yecceel-d igirru, iteddu deffir taddart yer umkan anda ttiyman yimeddukkal-is. D yiwen n umkan yefsan s yijeğğigen d tgez-zewt. Tala ansi d-ttagment tlawin yal tasebhit tella d akessar. Aman-is ttazzalen mebla aneħbus deg terga yettadren alma d iizer i wumi, si yal tama, tezzi tezgi n yisekla i tt-icebbħen, akerruc, aslen, almu...Ula d azezzu yerna-as ccbaha s tewrey n yijeğğigen-is, yer tama n uxlenğ yessimlulen imula mi d-ftin yijeğğigen-is...”

²¹ Laïfa Ait Boudaoud, *Ccna n yibzaz=Le chant des cigales*, (Alger: Casbah, 1999), 7. Translated text: “Axxam nsen ula d netta icab. (Nsen? Ines, mačči nsen. Di tmurt nney tametħut ur tseı wara ayla). Axxam-is iban-d yeqdem. Uzan-t wussan. Uzan yigertyal n lħelfa, uzan yielawen n taħuħ, uzan tigejda d yisulas n ssqef, uzan ula d leħyuħ n ttabya...Akken ad tkecmeħ yer uxxam n Da M'barek ad k-id-tewwet rriħa n leeħur d tin n leħbar. Akka meħħa ixxamen n zik. Deg-sen kullec: amħiq n usewwi, adaynin, taerict s nnig n udaynin, ikufan ideg ttağğan awren d tazart d zzit, amħiq n użetta, amħiq n yiħes...Ulac tamkant iferyen.”

burning sun as it set. It was the painting that Lila had given him for his last birthday.²²

The space thus acquires an emotional charge through the feelings, memories, and reactions that it elicits in the characters. Similar passages appear in the *ungal* entitled *Salas d Nuja*, particularly in the description of the sea with which the character of *Salas* seems to fuse: “He looked at the horizon. The sea was so peaceful, and he felt that it was calling to him with a voice he could not dampen. He dived.”²³

There is not an abundance of such spatial descriptions in these *ungal*. And space usually only serves a purely descriptive function, beyond any symbolic implication. With a few exceptions, it gives the impression of being detached from the narrative’s other modalities, particularly that of the character.

Simplicity of the Temporal Structure and Narrative Speed

As has been observed thus far, these *ungal* are characterized by an economy of narration, by the brevity and concision of the events. The latter is further reinforced by a simplified temporal structure that is not strewn with narrative anachronies that distort the temporal inscription of the events with journeys into the characters’ past or projections into their future. Nevertheless, although anachronies are rare in *ungal* like *Nekk akk d kem, kem akk d nekk/Me and you, you and me, Tfuk ur tfuk ara*, and *Bu-tqulhatin/The prankster man*, making the narration quite linear and thus presenting a rather simple temporal structure, it appears that it is precisely at the level of the time granted to the narration of events that the elements of generic contiguity with *tullist* occur. This makes it possible to address the narrative speed and to reveal the rhythm of the story. Summary, which corresponds to a movement of acceleration insofar as a long period is presented in a brief and concise manner, is a mode that some of these authors use several times within the same text. Some actions are narrated in an accelerated manner and some episodes that could generate more pronounced interest and engagement are touched on quickly or passed over in silence. This is the case for *Ijeġġigen n ccwal/The flowers of misfortune* as it presents the businessman Si Rabeḥ taking the fall for Deḥman for the murder of one of his workers. Convinced of his innocence, Deḥman manages to escape law enforcement following his appearance in court. To throw off his opponents, he stops a car that, as luck would have it, belongs to none other than Sekkura (Si Rabeḥ’s daughter). Herself a lawyer, she resigns herself to making sure he escapes and the two end up with feelings for each other. She

²² Hocine Louni, op.cit, 58. Translated text: “Mi yezzel yef umetreh tinegnit yessumet ifassen-is, tayawsa tamezwarut i t-id-iqublen yef lhiḍ d talwiḥt ieelqen di tlemmast-is. Tettwasuney deg-s s ssiya n zzit yiwet n teqcict tefka-d s yidis, tbedd di tlemmast n yijeġġigen yedfin s ddheb skud tafat n uyelluy n yiṭij i tettwali tewwet-d deg-sen. Gar yifassen-is tejmee-d tameqqunt n yijeġġigen, tettwali di tzeġnet n yiṭij turriyṭ yef yiri n uyelluy. D talwiḥt i as-d-tehda Lila deg umuli-ines aneggaru.”

²³ Brahim Tazaghart, op.cit, 39. Translated text: “Yefka tamuylis yer sdat; lebher yerked nezzeh. Iḥulfa amzun yessawal-as-d, s tayeḥt i wumi ur yezmir ad yeseuzzeg. Iyemmes.”

discovers his story and, by extension, learns about her father's involvement in the case. When she confronts her father, he demands that she take Si ʕli as a husband. She then rebels and manages to escape, marrying Deḥman in secret. The police officers then unexpectedly get a hold of Deḥman. But the pace of the narrative is so accelerated that this episode is glossed over by way of ellipsis, which "shows that something has happened without the narrative mentioning it."²⁴ After this, Sekkura starts to look for Deḥman and their reunion doesn't take long, as the two characters are brought back together quickly:

The search had exhausted her. She had never felt so tired. She isolated herself in a corner to rest and started to cry. She cried to the point of exhaustion. She didn't find Dehman and going back home was impossible. She'd found herself alone in the middle of nowhere. But she had no regrets, for deep down she still had hope that she'd see Dehman again, even if only on the last day of her life. She got caught up in her thoughts, with her heart reminding her of all her sorrows until she felt a hand on her shoulder. She turned around. It was none other than him, Dehman.²⁵

The text *Ijeḡḡigen n ccwal/The flowers of misfortune* regularly resorts to the mode of summary, which marks an acceleration of the narrated actions. As such, the tensions that have built up around the conflict between father and daughter in searching for the fugitive Deḥman are quickly resolved, first with the release of the autopsy report providing new information from the coroner that exonerates Deḥman, and, second, with Sekkura's sudden reconciliation with her father. The same observation applies to the text *Nekk akw d kem, kem akkw d nekk*, where many actions are recounted for the sake of brevity. This work is about two siblings, Tanina and Ğeefer, who have suffered under the tyranny of their stepmother. The brother, having already left home, sets out to help organize his sister's elopement with the help of his two friends Weeli and Ḥemmu. The events follow each other non-stop and accelerate:

On top of the hill over the village, they thought about and agreed on the following: Waali was going to keep watch while the other two went to look for her. This is what they did. When Hemmou threw rocks at Tanina's window, she looked up several times. They waved at her. Seeing them, she understood what they were up to. She jumped up and ran towards him. The four of them fled far from the village to Hemmou's hut so as to spend the night there.²⁶

²⁴ Vincent Jouve, *La poétique du roman* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2001), 37.

²⁵ Youcef Achouri, *Ijeḡḡigen n ccwal* (Alger : Baghdadi, 2009), 64. Translated text: "Teeya deg unadi, ṭḥulfa s eeggu werḡin teeya am wass-n. Tuḃal teṭtef yiwet n teymert testeefa tettru. Tettru armi d-bedden yigudar s ixef-is. Deḥman ur t-temlal, s axxam ur tezmir ad d-tuḃal. Tbedd deg lewḥid tegra-d deg ttelt lxali. Lameena ur tendim ara, acku deg wul-is mazal tessarem ad temlil d Deḥman. Yas ad d-yagar yiwen n wass deg tudert-is. Teḃreq deg ttexmim, yejmee-itent-id akk wul-is. Armi ṭḥulfa d yiwen n ufus yers-d yef tayet-is. Mi tezzi yer deffri tufa-t d netta, d Deḥman."

²⁶ Belaïd Hamdani, op.cit, 59. Translated text: "Yef tizi-a anda rran taddart seddaw, sikkiden ttemcawaren armi tt-fran akka. Weeli ad i eas fell-asen ma d sin-nni niḡen ad tt-id-awin. Akken

Within these texts, the tensions arise and disappear right away. This can be observed in *Bu-tqulhatin*, which, as mentioned above, is composed of a series of small stories, presented in succession, each with a plot that immediately resolves to give way to the next. Suspense is thus abandoned in favor of a rapid and/or sudden conclusion. In short, the concision – in the development of the plot, the characters, the spaces – and the rapidity of the narrative rhythm clearly recall the universe of *tullist*. The choice to design the *ungal* in such a way inevitably demonstrates a case of generic contiguity, with these texts borrowing numerous procedures from the short story form and sometimes even from oral prose, as demonstrated, for example, by the linearity of narration, the successive and rigorous sequence of action, and the reduced psychological depth of the characters.

The questions raised by the textualities of the *ungal* discussed in the analysis above serve as a prime example of the need to discuss the relationships established between generic designations and the texts that bear them. To immediately exclude these texts from the *ungal* category would deprive it of a good part of its corpus and thus of the elements that have participated in the history of the genre. It would also involve formulating a symptomatic interpretation that would disregard the real causes for the multiplicity of approaches to the *ungal* that these texts offer. This methodological approach is all the more ineffective in the context of a genre that is still in the making, with its contours still far from being established as manifest facts. Let us proceed on the assumption that the genre admits transformation in time and space. The discussions about the genre and the relations of belonging will be considered starting with what is suggested by the corpus, with the results above leading to reflections on the properties of the *ungal* and the nature of the texts that overlap with it.

An Attempt to Define the *Ungal*

Given that the novelistic production in the Kabyle language does not offer a homogeneous corpus in terms of genericity, the definition of the *ungal* follows two divergent paths in terms of criticism. The first is more normative and enlists references and “requirements” that fit with the Western conception of the novel, both at the formal level and in terms of plot development. Nasseridine Aït Ouali expands on this theme:

The novel and the short story are the products of a creative form of writing that calls upon the imagination and dreams. Simply rejecting the world in which we live and/or condemning what goes on there isn't enough to make a literary work. It's necessary to dream and to imagine another different, possible, or utopian world. It is the universality of

nnan, akken i tedra. Tanina tđal-d mi yewwet Həmmu yer ttaq s yibeeəayen atas n tikkal, syin akkin wehhan-as twala-ten-id tennamek-iten tuyal tjelleb-d tuzzel ɣur-s, dya rewlən di kuz yid-sen yer utemmu n Həmmu yeffyen atas i taddart anda rnan iđ-nni.”

writing that allows readers to share this dream, if only for the time that they are reading.²⁷

Aït Ouali sees that because some *ungal* do not illustrate this notion of the story, together with some of the texts being what he deems as too short, there is “a real confusion of genres in Kabyle literature of Amazigh expression.”²⁸ But this “universality of writing” that Aït Ouali evokes is in fact only the manifestation of Western (viz, French) literary categories having been imposed on the literary world by the strong domination of the space to which they belong.²⁹ The novelistic model can only be globalized as a theoretical model by relativizing some “spontaneous reflexes” and some “literary habits” that would consider some generic “deviations” as heresy.³⁰ Rather, as Pascale Casanova notes in relation to the development of her explanatory model of how the world of letters functions, it is preferable to consider establishing tools that can recognize the legitimacy of other literatures that often do not operate according to the same logic of this dominant space. She emphasizes that “these tools should, as much as possible, seek to avoid critical ethnocentrism, or the systematic search for the same that often characterizes the critique of central spaces.”³¹ The spirit of these reflections can be seen in Mohand Akli Salhi (second critical line of approach), where a clear evolution takes shape in his treatment of this issue. After having raised questions about the generic identity of some texts and possibly reading them as *tullisin*,³² he decides on the matter in a work of unpublished research, notably with respect to theoretical orientation in treating these types of cases. He affirms that these generic contiguities represent “neither a confusion of genres, nor an editorial anomaly” but rather a natural consequence of cultures undergoing transformation.³³ Zahir Meksem also addresses the variations in the generic identifications, vacillating between *ungal* and *tullist*, that had been proposed to him for his work entitled *Tabrat n uezekka*. Although the front cover clearly indicates its identity as an *ungal*, the author’s note at the beginning of the text leaves an opening for a possible reading of the text as a *tullist*: “We can consider this text as a novel because, in terms of several characteristics, it goes beyond the short story. We can consider it as a novella because it has a short form and is based on a succession of events.”³⁴ At the very least, the presence of this type of questioning indicates

²⁷ Nasseridine Ait Ouali, *L’écriture romanesque kabyle d’expression berbère* (Tizi Ouzou: l’Odyssee, 2015), 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), XV.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, XIV.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See remarks concerning the works by Aït Boudaoud (*Ccna n yibzaz*), Dahmoune (*Bu-tqulhatin*), and Tazaghart (*Salas d Nujja*). Mohand Akli Salhi, “Regard sur les conditions d’existence du roman kabyle” *Studi Magrebini*, Vol. IV, (Naples, 2006), 125.

³³ Salhi Mohand Akli, unpublished text.

³⁴ Zahir Meksem, *Tabrat n uezekka* (Béjaia: Tira, 2015), 6. Translation into French by the author. “Adris-a nezmer, ahah, ad t-nwali d ungal acku deg waṭas n tulmisin-is yeffel i tullist; nezmer ad t-nwali d tullist acku wezzil ibedd s tuget yef umazrar n tedyanin.”

that while we may know a great deal about the novel (if only synchronously) we still know very little about the identity of the *ungal*. But how, then, to define the *ungal*?

It is important to first consider the status of the genre's name. It is in the *Amawal* (1980) that the *ungal* takes its place as a generic equivalent of "novel" for the first time. This is a glossary that was created by Mouloud Mammeri and a group of Kabyle students between 1970 and 1975,³⁵ designed to account for new (modern and technical) realities in a context where the Amazigh (Kabyle) language was clandestinely entering a phase of development, which was characterized in part by a great deal of work on lexical creation. It can therefore be noted that at the time when the *Amawal* was made public, there was no talk yet of novels written in the Kabyle language. This denomination was thus not created in relation to texts documented in the Kabyle language but rather a Western literary reality that also had a basis in Algeria, particularly in the French language. As such, the *ungal* denomination was devoid of history since it responded to a generic category that did not have yet an "official" existence in Kabyle. And it didn't participate in the history of the novel in Kabyle as a "nominal definition of the genre" until authors, critics, and editors used it and applied it to texts.³⁶

The task of defining this genre is further complicated by the absence of any etymological indications in the *Amawal* that would shed light on reasons that would support making connections between "*ungal*," from the root *NGL*, and "novel." However, this root has been attested in several Berber dialects, with one of its most recurrent meanings, as noted by Mohand Akli Haddadou, falling within the semantic field of "darkness."³⁷ Although it is possible to proceed with a reconstruction that would equate this dark side denoted by the root "*NGL*" to the novel's consistently fraught character, conveying as it does a crisis situation that the protagonists of the narrative must grapple with, the connection is a difficult one to make. Moreover, there are other attested meanings for this root in several Amazigh dialects. For example, Salhi reports that in Tamasheq (spoken by the Tuareg of the Ahaggar), the term *Tângalt* designates "words that have a hidden meaning (parable, apologue)."³⁸ This author has also identified the same term in the Tuareg languages of Niger, with the meaning related to "enigmatic words, words that have a hidden meaning (speaking by veiling one's speech with metaphors/litotes/euphemisms/innuendos (a way of speaking that is considered refined, a sign of good education . . . /insinuation, allusion)."³⁹ Moreover, the term "*ungal*" is attested in this form in Kabyle, as revealed by a joust, reported by Mammeri in *Poèmes kabyles anciens*, between Yousef Ou Kaci and Moh At Lmessoud with the latter wanting to be initiated into poetry and addressing the former with this line:

³⁵ Salem Chaker, "Mouloud Mammeri (1917–1989)," *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 51 (1989): 153.

³⁶ Schaeffer, Jean-Marie, *Qu'est-ce qu'un genre littéraire?* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 65.

³⁷ Mohand Akli Haddadou, *Dictionnaire des racines berbères communes* (Alger: HCA, 2006/2007), 142.

³⁸ Mohand Akli Salhi, *Asegzawal amezzyan n tsekla* (Tizi Ouzou: l'Odyssee, 2017), 100.

³⁹ Karl-Gottfried Prasse, Ghoubéid Alojaly and Mohamed Ghebouane, *Dictionnaire Touareg-Français (Niger): M-Z* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2003), 100.

A dada Yusef ay ungal
Dadda Youcef master of symbols⁴⁰

The translation Mammeri provides of the word “symbol” as being equivalent to *ungal* is accompanied by a note in which he further explains the choice for this translation by making comparisons with the meanings provided by the same root in Tamasheq: “In Tamasheq, ‘tangalt’ designates a word that has symbolic meaning (in French: symbole, allusion).”⁴¹ Now that the etymological elements have been identified, it remains to establish correspondences between the choice of this root and the generic form of “novel.” There are answers to be found in some of Mammeri’s comments about the role of the novelist.⁴² The fact that Mammeri only produced novels in French in no way diminishes the value of his considerations, which provide one of the first keys to establishing a connection between this denomination and the *ungal*. It is, thus, that it is stated about the novelistic creation and its essence:

In my opinion, events need a space to decant, a space of internalization, within myself, so that they take on another value, another dimension, which can become truly novelistic. . . .

I believe that the novel, by what you could call lying, since there’s the invention of a story that does not exist, that is not true – by lying, in my opinion, it gets to the bottom of a number of things, goes a little more towards the essential, thanks to this inventing. Novelists are obliged to invent; it’s their job, of course, but they always invent in keeping with a truth that to me is more profound.⁴³

The essence of the novel, in Mammeri’s view, lies in this capacity to give a literary – and thus fictional – form to events, a kind of point of departure that allows the novelist to “launch . . . into doing something else.”⁴⁴ The writing of a novel implies a creative activity that calls on the transformation of realities into fiction with the aim of eliciting certain truths: “The story a novel tells didn’t happen anywhere in the way it is told. But it is by no means a paradox to say that the art is the very infidelity – and by that I mean the distance that artists introduce between their creation and the lived reality. All art is mediation.”⁴⁵ The novel thus stands as a kind of bridge between reality and fiction, as an intermediate form between the real and this creative activity that draws on the former by “symbolizing” it. This is an idea that Ameziane likewise

⁴⁰ Mouloud Mammeri, *Poèmes kabyles* (Paris: François Maspéro, 1980), 132.

⁴¹ Ibid. Translated text: “S tmacəyt ‘tangalt’ d ameslay i d-yewwi bnamem s lmaena (s tefransist: symbol, allusion)”.

⁴² Mouloud Mammeri, “ALGERIE Mouloud Mammeri : Le rôle du romancier.” Remarks collected by Chris Kutschera, *The Middle East Magazine*, February 1984, <http://www.chris-kutschera.com/http://www.ayamun.com/juillet2007.htm#Section2>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Mouloud Mammeri *entretien avec Tahar Djaout, la cité du soleil*, (Algiers: Laphomic, 1987), 35.

addresses: “writing a novel is more demanding than writing a simple account because while the latter is content to focus on events, the former requires accounting for the complexity of the world.”⁴⁶ In other words, the novel is a “symbolic” representation of this world that penetrates to the heart of a reality, a truth. Based on this premise, the denomination of *ungal* then more readily corresponds to a criterion of content.

In addition, gaps can sometimes develop between the reasons leading to this semantic extension of the term *ungal* to designate this new literary reality and the uses and meanings that critics, novelists, and publishers give to it. Writing the term *ungal* on the cover of Rachid Aliche’s *Asfel* represents an important historical point for Kabyle literature which, by naming a new literary reality, confirms its existence and introduces a new path within this very literature. But the attribution of this name elicits questions from the author who invented it. Indeed, Mammeri notes some hesitation in the preface to *Asfel*: “The account (but is it really one?) that Rachid Aliche offers today is in prose; to my knowledge, it is the first of its kind, in any case of this magnitude.”⁴⁷ But two years will suffice for Mammeri to suggest another reading of this same text, in a more affirmative tone, by confirming that it is an *ungal*, in the preface that he wrote for Said Sadi’s *Askuti*: “The form of these two novels differs but for us Amazighs, their value is the same, their meaning is the same: we write in Tamazight and read in this same language.”⁴⁸ These two prefaces are indicative of Mammeri’s two different stances regarding the generic nature of the *ungal* and, more importantly, regarding its purpose. Hesitation can be seen in the preface to *Asfel*, a text that is unique because of the many breaks it makes with the Kabyle oral tradition, both in its narrative structure and in the construction of characters, themes, etc., because it is an account of the mind, constructed prior to the character’s psychology. Somewhat reservedly, Mammeri qualifies this text as an “account,” clearly indicating that the author had already noted *Asfel*’s originality in relation to the literary tradition. And in this hesitation can be gauged all the complexity accompanying the birth and institutionalization of a “new” genre that has crossed borders. However, in his preface to Sadi’s *Askuti*, Mammeri returns to *Asfel* with a far more assertive tone, noting that while formal disparities seem to set the two texts apart, their point of convergence is the special trait of belonging to a type of production that is written and read in Tamazight.⁴⁹ And in this sense, it is remarkable to note that the word “book” is frequently substituted for *ungal*/novel in the

⁴⁶ Ameziane, “Bu Tqulhatin.”

⁴⁷ Mouloud Mammeri, “Préface/Preface”, in Rachid Aliche, *Asfel*, (Paris: Fédérop, 1981), 9.

⁴⁸ Mouloud Mammeri, “Tazwart/Introduction”, in Said Sadi, *Askuti*, (Paris: Asalu, 1991), 17–18. Author’s translation into French: “Di talya mxallafen sin wungalen-a, maca yur-nney s Imaziyen abayur yiwen, lmaena yiwet: la nettaru tamziyt, la tt-neqqar”

⁴⁹ Mélanie Bourlet also makes this observation about the Fulani novel, pointing out that “the word ‘novel’ is indicative, in fact, of a certain ambition in the writing, and of the importance given to the book object. Moreover, the back covers more frequently mention the summary of the ‘book’ (Ton-ngd deftere) than ‘the novel.’” Mélanie Bourlet, “L’acte d’écrire: sur la performativité de l’écriture littéraire en pulaar,” *Journal des africanistes, Écrits hors champs*, t. 83, Booklet 1 (Paris: Société des africanistes, 2013), 115.

discourse of many novelists who write in the Kabyle language. One only needs read, for example, what Amar Mezdad stated in one of his interviews: “To bring a book into the world, there is, as Epictetus said, ‘that which depends on us,’ and this must be done: studying a language, having the will to write, possessing a certain gift, bearing an unpleasant solitude, impinging on leisure time and family life.”⁵⁰ The same observation can likewise be applied to Djamel Benaouf’s comments about his *Timlilit n tyermiwin*: “So it was on January 12, 2000, the Amazigh new year (and is that a coincidence?) that I made the first draft of the book. . . . For my novel, the idea had taken seed in my mind in the early 80s, but I was somewhat apprehensive about writing, and I didn’t feel up to writing a book, much less developing a novel!”⁵¹ By situating his undertaking at the beginning of the 1980s, Benaouf returns his work to this context that called for the production of a written literature and thus of books, which itself represented a real challenge, both for political reasons but also due to the exclusively oral essence of the Kabyle language and literature at that time. This importance that Benaouf attributes to writing is representative of the ambitious nature and the challenge of simply producing books in the Kabyle language, independently of any particular aesthetic investment such as the writing of a novel, which, according to this same author, calls for a more elaborate form of writing.

These remarks invite us to reflect on the very function this writing serves. In this context of a transition to writing, the *ungal* involved an intentional act that consisted of producing writing in the Kabyle language. This could possibly explain the varied uses of the reference to *ungal*, implying a relationship to texts that would appear to be problematic. In fact, the elements of generic contiguity with *tullist*, as noted in the preceding analysis, should not be interpreted as a simple manifestation of an authorial poetics, since the ways in which the name *ungal* is used attest to other instances of contiguity with the tale and with theater. This is confirmed by the observations made by Salhi, who points out the paratextual reference to “ungal” to qualify different types of texts such as the dramatic works by Mohand Aït Ighil, the text *Timetti d wedrim* by Sofiane Aoudia (oscillating between the poetics of the tale and the theater);⁵² to this can be added Akli Kebaili’s *Imetți n Bab Idurar* and Hmed Nekkar’s *Alluca di tmura n tirma*,⁵³ which enters into the realm of children’s literature. The diversity of these uses reinforces the assimilation in some instances of the paratextual usage of the term *ungal* to the “book” object, with it representing first and foremost the achievement of a literary writing project. This represents a departure from the threshold of textuality and the formal elements for a representation of the *ungal* in its “materiality” – in other words, as a literary work that

⁵⁰ Amar Mezdad, “La littérature amazighe se cherche encore mais un jour.” Remarks collected by Dahbia Abrous, *La dépêche de Kabylie*, May 25, 2008, <https://www.depechedekabylie.com/evenement/55943-la-litterature-amazighe-se-cherche-encore-mais-un-jour/>.

⁵¹ Djamel Benaouf, “Rencontre à la croisée des chemins.” Remarks collected by Seïd Maamar, *La voix de l’Oranie*, March 22, 2003, <http://www.ayamun.com/juillet2012.htm#section2>.

⁵² Mohand Akli Salhi, *Études de littérature kabyle* (Algiers: Enag, 2011), 93.

⁵³ Published in 2016, the textuality and layout of this text (accompanied by children’s drawings) could lead it to be classified as children’s literature.

is written and read in Kabyle, to revisit Mammeri's comments. Nevertheless, these remarks should not lead to the hasty conclusion that a consciousness of the genre is completely absent or, to put it differently, to suggest that the *ungal* is perceived not as an object responding to certain generic aesthetics, but only as a product of writing. Indeed, this remark cannot be applied indiscriminately to all novelistic production in the Kabyle language, since the trajectory that generic denominations follow through their uses can involve a variety of paths. As Schaeffer notes, "The functional diversity of generic denominations appears in particular starting from the moment when a differentiation is made between generic identifications that are the work of the writers themselves and those that are because of critics, theorists, and, more generally, anonymous linguistic usage."⁵⁴ In fact, as Schaeffer has observed, generic denominations involve different modes of existence that are not governed by the same influences or assume the same functions. Whereas the paratextual indication inscribed on the cover assumes more of a "metatextual" status that serves to announce a category of reading, a critic will want to take an approach that is more normative and prescriptive. Schaeffer likewise notes that it is not rare for novelists to reinterpret the criteria for a generic identification so as to make their works align with a given generic category when the simple fact of belonging to it helps to assert the text's "literary value."

Consequently, the assimilation of *ungal* to "book" represents just one of the contracts that this denomination enters into since the discourse of some novelists and critics certainly reveals principles of an aesthetic nature. Reflections on the *ungal* started to emerge in the 2000s. The choice to write in the Kabyle language and the designation of a text as an *ungal*/novel (by the author, the publisher, or the critic) have resulted in the delimitation of corpus.⁵⁵ Mezdad has expressed himself on several occasions in this regard. The definition that he has formulated for the *ungal*/novel is based on a set of formal criteria: the narration of events, the depiction of portraits and mores, the representation of the real, and a documentary quality.⁵⁶ Emphasizing these elements marked a shift in the definitions of the *ungal* observed up to that point because they are textual in nature. In addition, the identity of the *ungal* is often defined in comparison with the oral tradition, which did not allow for many of this genre's characteristics. This observation is made by Salhi, who, in considering the corpus of the *ungal*, notes its distinction (in terms of style, structure, and language) from the oral tradition.⁵⁷ This can also be seen in a statement Mezdad makes about his second *ungal*, *Tagrest uryu*:

It was easy to create this book. Adept as I am at bricolage, in the sense given to it by the father of structuralism, Lévi-Strauss, who has nothing to do with the one who made blue jeans, I begin by selecting debris and

⁵⁴ Schaeffer, *Qu'est-ce*, 127–28.

⁵⁵ Salhi, *Études de littérature*, 82.

⁵⁶ Mezdad, "La littérature amazighe."

⁵⁷ Mohand Akli Salhi, "Les voies de modernisation de la prose Kabyle," *Actes du colloque international. Tamazight face aux défis de la modernité* (2000): 249.

residual fragments so as to make an original coherent whole, which in this case is a novel.⁵⁸

Presenting his text as an “original whole” is tantamount to seeing in it several marks of rupture in relation to an established literary tradition, namely oral Kabyle prose.

The content of these *ungal* has also been discussed; it is devoted to depicting “regular existence” with its conflicts and its share of both the good and the bad. Mezdad adds:

From now on, the novel in the Kabyle language is, just like everywhere else, a form of writing that features characters. . . . authors simply want to write and create in their language, which in this case is Kabyle, to describe Kabyle and Algerian society; no more, no less. If the term socio-logical writing existed, it would be more appropriate.⁵⁹

The characters of the *ungal* must face the issues of their time. The idea of writing in Kabyle is redundant, but with the *ungal*, authors write to speak of their society, to describe it, to “symbolize” it – as per the etymology of this denomination – through the existence of novelistic characters.

The use of the denomination *ungal* is thus subject to various controls carried out by the authors, editors, critics, etc. As a result, this designation makes several contracts resulting from the various interpretations and uses it has produced. The data observed does not make it possible to organize these different contracts into a strictly evolutionary dynamic since they have more or less accompanied the publications of the *ungal* from its beginnings up to this day, when the equation of it with a book or a genre different from the oral one still prevails in some texts. The study of generic contiguities indicates that the identity of genres – not least in the case of the *ungal* – has accompanied the history of Kabyle society. The varied use of the term expands its generic boundaries to contain any literary work written in Kabyle language. These frontiers that are pushed and blurred in fact serve only as an indication of the space from which the authors express themselves and of the social status of the literature to which this genre is attached. Kabyle literature’s entry into the world of the written word has been progressive and for a long time the space in which it is evolving was characterized by orality. This is why the *ungal* has a symbolic dimension, holding this genre in some instances to the function of producing a text that is not oral and that is written in Kabyle, resulting in a plurality of generic notions to which it contributes. Additionally, the definition of this genre can only be established in a contextual way, far from a strict logic of filiation.

⁵⁸ Mezdad, “La littérature amazighe.”

⁵⁹ Ibid.