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Lunja, the Female Trickster of the Kabyle / Amazigh Mythological Tradition

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ABSTRACT

The present paper examines one of the most famous female figures of the Kabyle/ Amazigh mythology, Lunja who has been invisible in the mainstream of academic concerns in Algeria and abroad. The few studies carried on the topic often portrayed her as a voiceless, submissive and an obedient beautiful young girl. We shall, however, try to "deconstruct" the prevailing fabricated image of this mythological character, Lunja, by emphasizing her various strategies of resistance and deviation of oppression. We shall also move beyond the previous approaches to history that narrates the relationship between Lunja and Teryel, her mother based solely on a dichotomy that has been described by the few studies since the old times. The objective is to show that Lunja's performativity of silence is a technique with which she bypasses the constraints of her traditional society in transgressing its well established norms through ac-

tions. In so doing, Lunja can be regarded then as a female trickster and a subversive figure, who constantly calls into question the established order for the sake of changing her status quo. The analysis is mainly based on ideas and concepts such as gender performativity, which are provided in Judith Butler's book entitled, Gender Trouble (1990). We also appropriate features and the image of Trickster according to Robert Pelton to show how the Kabyle/ Amazigh mythological figure Lunja constantly re-values the traditional norms and values through subversive actions that make her join the family of the female tricksters.

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Lunja, Trickster, Performativity, Subversive Identity*

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In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels, in sacred and magical rites, in man's religious fears and exaltations, this phantom of the trickster hunts the mythology of all age.

CARL JUSTAV JUNG

The present study addresses the different ways in which the relationship between history and gender are thought out as sources of tensions and interrogations. As Stuart Hall points out on the re-writing of history that: You could not understand the movement of modern feminism precisely without the recovery of the hidden histories.¹ Two questions highlight this perspective: first, how can a new knowledge of the past based on oral collective memory contribute to rehabilitate a "mythical female figure", which for political and other reasons, has been condemned to oblivion? Second, how can we decolonize a memory that has been institutionalized and manipulated by rewriting the past with new knowledge? As, Joseph Campbell points out in *The power of Myth* (1991), "*Mythology teaches you what's behind literature and the arts, it teaches you about your own life. It's a great, exciting, life-nourishing*".²

In the course of our study, we intend to retrieve this well known and forgotten mythical figure in the Kabyle and Berber mythology, which has been invisible in the mainstream of the Algerian academic concerns and studies. What follow, provides a new knowledge on the Berber mythology with which we are familiar and will underline the great significance of Lunja's resistance as well as her performances as a trickster in confronting the hegemonic forms and oppressive structures. Marilyn Jurich is right to note that: "*The trickster is an important figure in mythology; recognizing his personal traits and the patterns of his action conveys a more distinct awareness of how we may perceive more modern or "popular" tricksters and, also, understand the types of tricks they perform.*"³ The discursive representation of this female character in the Kabyle/ Amazigh culture and society in general as well as its connectedness to the changing attitudes towards women's representation and gender roles is a significant issue that both exposes and reflects the twenty-first century re-conceptualization of gender roles and the redefinition of the evolution of the notion of the woman. It will be argued that the way Lunja rejects the standards of the traditional society and how she adopts subversive and revolutionary practices that revisit and

¹ STUART HALL, *The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity*, Culture, Globalization and the World System, ed. Anthony D. King, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 35.

² CAMPBELL, BILL MOYERS, *The power of Myth* (1991), p. 18.

³ MARILYN JURICH, *The Female Trickster-Known as Trickstar As Exemplified by Two American Legendary Women, "Billy" Tipton and "Mother Jone"*, in «Journal of American Culture», 1999, p. 69.

re-evaluate her position vis-à-vis the established order of her traditional society merits more attention. The role she performs as a female trickster of the Kabyle/Amazigh mythology and society, though neglected by scholars, remains very important. Yet, before considering Lunja's performative actions and struggle to shake the foundation of her patriarchal society with its rigid codes, it is useful to begin with a review of literature on this subject matter.

Previous Studies on the Mythic Berber Women Lunja

Camille Lacoste-Dujardin and the German Leo Frobenius are among the few scholars who collected and studied the Kabyle folktales and mythological tradition along with their interest in the Kabyle society and, especially, the condition of women. Lacoste-Dujardin's works, for instance, focus on collecting the oral traditions and examining their structure with a particular attention to woman's role in the traditional society. Without reference to Lunja's resistance, the author examines only the representation of female monsters (Teryel) of the Kabyle/Amazigh mythology. Lacoste-Dujardin stresses mainly her monstrosity and the violent ways with which Teryel rebels against the patriarchal dominance⁴.

Within the same perspective, Sabrina Zerar in her "Female Monsters in Kabyle Myths and Folktales: their Nature and Functions" looks at the representation of the female monster in the Kabyle folktales, Teryel and explores the dialectic of power and resistance by stressing the negative aspects of Teryel, the Kabyle/Amazigh female monster, being looked at as an outcast, violent, and tyrant⁵. The author concludes that Teryel, according to oral monster tales, stands for the Kabyle woman who defies the patriarchal traditional society.

From a comparable angle, Henri Basset, in *Essais sur la littérature Berbères* (1920), examines her terrific physical appearance. The author shows a particular interest in Teryel as one of the well known female characters of oral tradition and who is often referred to as an ugly old woman, rejected by the society and perceived as the ogress which, in time of anger or hunger, devours her own children. However, she is also the one who rise up against the traditional laws of her community to become the non submissive female character of the Kabyle/Amazigh mythology that both children and young adults are taught to fear and despise⁶. The author makes a brief allusion to her daughter Lunja, as an icon of beauty, kindness and obedience

⁴ CAMILLE LACOSTE-DUJARDIN, *Le conte kabyle: étude ethnologique*, Bouchene, Alger 1991.

⁵ SABRINA ZERAR, *Female Monsters in Kabyle Myths and Folktales: their Nature and Functions*, in «El-Khitab», 10, January 2012, pp. 23-50.

⁶ HENRI BASSET, *Essai sur la littérature des Berbères*, Ancienne Maison Bastide, Alger 1920.

under the control of her imposing mother. Henri Basset shares the same point of view with Pierre Bourdieu, who explains, in *The Masculine Domination* (2001) that the symbolic violence done to women in the Kabyle context is with their consent. He mentions that the power the male enjoys is under the blessing of not only the Kabyle customary law but also the woman herself, through the image of the mother⁷. Furthermore, the oppressive discourse, in Foucault's words, applied exerts an unlimited power, turning them into "docile" or obedient subjects.

It appears from the above studies that the Kabyle feminine mythical figures are divided into two distinct categories. The first category of women, including Lunja, lead a passive existence and endeavour to keep the social and gender norms unchanged. The second one includes wicked and malevolent monsters (Teryl) whose main objective is to dominate the society through violence and tyranny. It is important to point out, however, that these critical studies are very limited since; on the one hand, they have considered the female monster Teryel and ignored the other female mythological figures. On other hand, they missed to study Lunja's struggle for liberation, her rebellion and the ways she engages in breaking of the gender rules within her society. All the mentioned scholars fail to go further in analysing the way Lunja's quest for self realisation and her rejecting of the traditional gender discourse. The present paper then, re-examines and re-defines the previous representations of Lunja, a well known female figure of the Kabyle/ Amazigh mythology.

Our revisionist analysis of this mythical figure is based on oral versions told by old women, aged between 50 and 90 years, issued from the villages situated in Kabylia, grouped around Tizi Ouzou, an eastern town of Algeria. These versions will be supported by reference to Judith Butler's notion of gender "performativity" that counters the discursive definition of the self and gender imposed on the woman as an 'object' rather than a 'subject'. In addition, Robert Pelton's perception of the Trickster figure will contribute to consolidate the theoretical framework to be applied to the oral narratives on Lunja, which we are collected through the old women's tales.

⁷ PIERRE BOURDIEU, *The Masculin Domination*, trans. Richard Nice, California, Stanford university press 2001.

Theoretical Framework

Judith Butler claims that gender is performative and is the result of individual choices. She explains that the gendered identity is imprisoned since it does not conform the existing stereotypes, which are “the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin”⁸. A woman’s being a subject to certain practices and empowerment is the result of the journey to self-realisation and intelligibility. This is the reason why the path to intelligibility and empowerment starts when the female is not respecting the discursive practices of the society that fixes gender roles. Therefore, it is when the form shifts from the norm looking for empowerment that the woman is looked at as a gendered body that does not respect the law⁹. She becomes a trickster, in Lewis Hyde’s words, “a boundary-crosser”¹⁰ character who dares to challenge the traditionally set rules in the society by disobeying and defying the conventional order. She represents the hidden “Shadow” oppressed, but present in the unconscious with its “nonsensical behaviour” converting “the meaningless into the meaningful”¹¹. The image of the trickster is often related to the male, and if there are any female tricksters either in literature, mythology or in history, they have been often ignored or overlooked. This is because female tricksters shake the traditionally established patriarchal vision of the world and question the male dominated society,¹² especially in traditional societies such as the Kabyle/ Amazigh one.

From a sociological perspective, in his work *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*, Pierre Bourdieu studies the Kabyle society looking at three main elements: the meaning of “The code of honour” or “Nif”, the house and the parents. He explains that the sacred, or the “hurma”, represents the taboo and all that must be protected, “la maison, la femme, les fusils”¹³, that is the house, the woman and the guns. Bourdieu writes that the Kabyle woman is never looked at as an independent individual; rather she is associated with the “Nif” or the honour of the family. She is the holder of the village or the tribe’s reputation. In his distinction between the masculine and the feminine, Bourdieu claims that the feminine or the woman, in its vulnerability, is the impure force and the symbol wickedness that can trick man. She is the twisted

⁸ JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and London: Routledge 1999, p. XXIX.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ LEWIS HYDE, *Trickster makes this world: Mischief, Myth and Art*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1989, p. 11.

¹¹ ROBERT PELTON, *The Trickster in West Africa. A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*, University of California, Berkley 1980, p. 228.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ PIERRE BOURDIEU, *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*, Seuil, Paris 2000, p. 47.

naked that must be kept out of the public around the house and the garden. Her role is limited to maintaining the house, the family, cooking and satisfying the sexual needs of the husband. She is the life giver represented in the wet or the water. It is a distinction between the good and the bad, the protector and the weak, the pure and the evil, the public and the domestic, the silent and the loud, the masculine virile that depends on the feminine passive¹⁴. The woman is expected to be silent and submissive to guarantee the continuation of the “Nif”.

Challenging and Disempowering the Mother's Oppressive Authority

The myth of Lunja tells the story of the daughter of Teryel, the ogress in the Kabyle/ Amazigh Mythology. She is often described as being a beautiful young girl with a white skin, olive like eyes, and long black and bright hair. She lives in isolation and leads a life in passivity and silence. She becomes a sort of prisoner in her family house, which is also the house of the Teryel, the ogress that no one can come near. Henri Basset explains that Teryel, the mother, is often referred to, as mentioned earlier, as an ugly old woman, rejected by the society. She is the ogress who very often devours her own children. However, she is also the one who rebels against the traditional laws of her community to become the non submissive female character that both children and young adults are taught to fear and despise¹⁵. Being born to Teryel, who is looked at as the woman who rejected the rules of the Kabyle society and rejects patriarchy, Lunja is educated to meet the expectations of that very society and learn how to be obedient, passive and fear the symbolic power of the mother. In most of the accounts, Lunja is made up to be a representative of the beautiful, distant and passive female desired by the society, raised to be an embodiment of the perfect female. In this case, silence and submissiveness are among the criteria that she, as a Kabyle woman, should be endowed with.

However, Lunja uses silence not only to meet the expectations of the Kabyle society, but also to prepare the process of her self-realisation. Her silence becomes a subversive strategy that allows her to transform her life of a subaltern and her own destiny. Butler claims that it is “between free will and determination” that lies “construction”¹⁶. It is the “*regulatory practices*” that define the internal coherence of the

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 52.

¹⁵ HENRI BASSET, *Contes merveilleux. Essai sur la littérature des Berbères*, Ancienne Maison Bastide Alger 1920, p. 11.

¹⁶ JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York 1999, p. 12.

subject”¹⁷ and constitute the self and the identity. Living under certain circumstances, especially under the male dominated society, women are expected to be silent. The woman uses discursive practices that would allow her to make her voice heard. In her essay entitled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Gayatri Spivak uses the concept of the Subaltern to describe characters or subjects whose voices are absent or not heard in a colonial context¹⁸. However, and as a result of her own education and social practices, the woman is, in fact, forced to subalternity or silence as a sign of respect towards their husbands and the rules of their community and their mothers who therefore become “reproducers” and a source of oppression. This silence is often looked at as negative, as a form of incompleteness, a disability or an absence and the result of a process of silencing. It is an outcome of the circumstances of social imposed practices. In the case of Lunja, silence becomes a performed modality chosen or “an active act of saying, telling or voicing”. Therefore; it is taken as a system of communication in the same way language is¹⁹.

Indeed, through her silence, Lunja is a subaltern that cannot speak, but acts. She uses silence as a tactic of the trickster to go beyond the mother’s tyranny and her attempt to tame her. Though, she observes silences, she succeeds to “transmute” her desires until the right time. The passivity of Lunja and her being the medium and the instrument that bears the cultural meaning dictated by masculine discourse makes her-self and, especially the feminine body, which according to Judith Butler, is “a profane void”, an element that is used to reduce the subject to a fallen state, deception attached to cultural connotations such as sin, a metaphor of hell and the eternal fixed feminine self²⁰. However and because of the secrecy and the sacredness attached to the female body in the society, there is a necessity to move beyond its constraints and deconstruct the relationship between being a female and certain set of assumptions and roles. Being is related to the behaviour, interests and personal choices and not extra-personal elements imposed by the society.

Lunja, imprisoned in the domestic sphere, lives with her mother and rarely sees or comes in contact with men from the outside world. She is assigned to a confined space (the forest). She is forced to be obedient and docile. The oral tale reports that it is the prince who started looking for Lunja because he heard about her legendary beauty and lovable nature, considering marrying her as a challenge since she is the daughter of the ogress. When seeing the prince for the first time at the threshold,

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 23.

¹⁸ GAYATRI SPIVAK, *Can the Subaltern Speak. Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Eds, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia University Press, New York 1994.

¹⁹ XAVIER GUILLAUME, ELISABETH SCHWEIGER, *Silence as Doing*, Routledge, London 2018.

²⁰ JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York 1999.

she unexpectedly warns him that her mother is the ogress and that he has to go before she comes back home. She says: "Go away my mother is the ogress! She will devour! You should leave!". By doing so, she dares to contradict her upbringings being kept away from the society. The prince refuses to leave and explains that he is willing to face her mother to be with her. Lunja not only lets him into the house but also gives him food and hides him from her mother. She is able to juggle or cope with the presence of her mother and the stranger. Robert Pelton explains that every society "knows its trickster-figure, whether non-implacably, or rebelliously, has brought forth its visible form as he deals on every plane of being and juggle every manner relationship"²¹. He adds that "the trickster can change forms as easily as he can tell lies"²²?

In fact, and contrary to what expected from a "good" submissive girl, Lunja, also as female trickster, decides not tell the truth. Here keeping silent and changing the focus of the discussion is her first step in deviating from the norms and starting to create her own space of thought without her mother having power over her. Her strength is shown through her rebellious acts against the Kabyle society and the redefinition of herself and her body in relation to others. She is even selfless as she thinks more about the needs and the security of the others than her own. At the time Teryel is home and as she says "Axxam iw Yɛmar", "There is something in my house!" referring to the presence of a stranger. Lunja, ironically, replies: "A naɣ a yemma! wa akmi diɣamden kmini d Teryel!" meaning "Oh mother! Who can dare to come near you! You are the ogress!". Obviously, Teryel seems convinced by her daughter's answer since even Lunja will not dare to hide or even lie to her mother.

Astonishingly, Lunja decides to hide the presence of the prince at home, knowing her mother "the monster" smells strangers' presence, putting her life in danger. She challenges her mother's intelligence by playing tricks to her. She pretends that the smell of the man "arihani n urgaz" is no more than the smell of a beggar who was passing by that day, and that she gave him alms. In another version, she justifies the strange smell by the fact that hunters passing by and hit a bird that fell in the yard of the house and she cooked it, and this happened three times. In the three times, she uses the same justifications, without hesitation. By resisting the urgent need or the tendency to tell, Lunja empowers herself and starts to have her own breathing space where the mother cannot interfere. It is the beginning of the break of the maternal bound.

Butler explains what she calls "regulatory practices" that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms. Lunja, like a trickster, dares

²¹ ROBERT PELTON, *The Trickster in West Africa. A study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*, University of California, Berkley 1980, p. 227.

²² Ivi, p. 224.

to “cross and confuse the distinction” to become “the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence and duplicity, contradiction and paradox”²³. She is an outlaw defying the expectations and shaking tradition. Her silence is a regulatory practice that she adopts constitute her identity; govern the notion of gender, and the culturally intelligible notions of identity to generate coherent selves²⁴. Lunja chooses silence not to show her submissiveness but as a discursive strategy to build her own agency as a young woman willing to break free of the control of the mother. Like a trickster, she opts for her “desire in opposition to the cultural cosmic order”²⁵.

Having no access to Lunja’s thoughts, the traditional mother is unable to, at least, guess, expect or have power over her own daughter’s plans or ideas. Lunja referring to silence is the result of her loneliness and her rejection of her mother’s plan to make of Lunja the submissive daughter desired by the society and the male, something that Teryel does not enjoy. She does not just resist her mother’s power but also creates her own secure space where she feels safe. Being known as the silent submissive turns out that her silence is louder than words. Lunja understands that her thoughts may not please her mother and the society around her. It is silence as doing not just as a meaning. Like a good girl, we rarely hear Lunja taking the floor or making her voice heard around her mother. The action of lying becomes a “habit” with repetition, in Butler’s words, “*gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of the acts*”²⁶. It is the repeated action that allows the acceptance of the new self. Lunja resists the fear and the temptation to tell the truth and tricks her mother telling her that “She is the ogress and nobody would dare to face her!” With repetition, she does not find it difficult to lie to protect the prince hiding at home. She manages her fear, overshadows her mother and resists the double oppression.

Later and before sleeping, she, maliciously, asks her mother, “*Mother, when do you fall asleep!*” or “*How can I know that you are sleeping?*” Teryel answers: “*it is by the time you hear monsters screams in my stomach*”²⁷. Lunja pretends sleeping, waiting the right moment to let the prince leave. When the time comes, it is Lunja who deliberately plans their escape and accompanies him. In other versions, the prince

²³ LEWIS HYDE, *Trickster makes this world: Mischief, Myth and Art*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1989, p. 12.

²⁴ JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York 1999, pp. 23-24.

²⁵ ROBERT PELTON, *The Trickster in West Africa. A study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*, University of California, Berkley 1980, p. 226.

²⁶ JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York 1999, p. 179.

²⁷ MAUREEN MURDOCK, *The Heroine’s Journey*, Boston, Shambhala, 1990, p. 36.

refuses to leave unless she leaves with him and this justifies her decisions to accompany him. In both the versions heard, Lunja does not show any resistance or rejects the suggestion of the unknown man. She chooses to leave. The dissatisfaction with the world launches a search for her own value in society pushes the female hero, in this case Lunja, to start a journey to a new life. Maureen Murdock explains that “it is no wonder that a woman rejects the feminine in favor of masculine, which seems to value her independence and success”. In other words, and because the woman knows that the public sphere is masculine, her desire to separate from feminine to face the public imposes her own way of doing things. Murdock adds: “Many daughters distance themselves from their mothers because of the mother’s inability to support their daughter’s individuation and success.” In other words, the mother is the most important agent that keeps certain standards of femininity, the lack of support creates distance between the daughter and mother, which is the case of Lunja and Teryel.

Butler writes that gender is “performative” and not “performed”. The difference lies in the fact that whenever one says gender is performed this means that we are acting in such way because of our gender, that is sex. In other words, it is our sex that determines our behaviour, thinking and view of the world. Consequently, if you are born a female there are certain codes of behaviour that are associated with the fact of being a woman. To say gender is “performative” means that it is the code of behaviour you adapted that determines your gender. At this point, ‘performers’ supposed ‘natural’ identities do not correspond with the signs produced within the performance and the subject is not exactly what we would expect. In the case of Lunja, she is not silent because she is a woman but she uses silence to deviate from the norms which create a performative identity and results in “a gender trouble” for not being able “to conform to the hegemonic performances”²⁸. Butler theorises gender as performative arranging that “gender is the repeated stylization of the body as a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame work that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being”²⁹.

Lunja’s Performance of Transgressive Acts

It is during the night that Lunja decides to leave the house to keep the prince safe. Before crossing the threshold, she spits on her pillow and during the whole night, it is this saliva who answers Teryel, whenever she wants to check on her daughter, saying “Sleep mother I am by your side”. Apparently, Lunja has learned a

²⁸ Ivi, p. 51.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 53.

good deal from her mother, whom it is said is a great witch with great magical powers, and that she uses against her planning her freedom. When waking up, Teryel discovers that Lunja has left while she was sleeping. She starts shouting so loud that her daughter hears her. Despite that, Lunja does not decide to go back home. She starts outcries: "Lunja my own daughter betrays me. Lunja goes beyond my control". Lunja's rebellious act can be related to her refusal of the Kabyle traditional norms, which holds her in a kind of cage from which she escapes. This action is among the most disgraceful, especially coming from a non married young woman. It threatens the notion of the "Nif" or the honour of the home. Even though hated and rejected by the Kabyle society, Teryel, through the power of Motherhood and the "Maternal Body" has an emblematic authority. Such a rejection is also stressed in Judith Butler's performativity, which bypasses the binary model of masculinity and femininity and claims that some of us follow the traditional script, whereas many reject, revise or adapt gender messages in "the creation of the alternative" or a different way of performing femininity and masculinity. Lunja performs her desires to be free from the family and social established order by daring to go against her mother's orders and by engaging herself in a love affair with an unknown man. In doing so, she succeeds to follow her individual perspective. The family house seems like a prison and leaving it means to break the walls of confinement that her mother forced her to. Indifferent to her anger and ferocity, she does not really hesitate to flee far away from her family with the prince.

Lunja's Bravery and perseverance

Elise Birch, in *Learning to Be: An Arts-Based Hermeneutic Understanding of My Heroine's Journey*, states that the heroine during her journey to self-realisation seeks qualities of "decisiveness, courage, discipline, and power".³⁰ Lunja faces different trials and nevertheless and without thinking of what the society would bring towards her, or even what her mother would do, as if she has not done anything wrong, she truly ignores her society's oppressive norms and its established order. Indeed, Lunja's act gives her a new identity instead of being the guilty woman who abandons her mother to go with a stranger. She turns to a self-reliant and confident character. She is no longer the Lunja that her mother controls. She chooses her identity and way of life by following her new way and assuming her actions. This decision implies her rejection of the Kabyle codes and indicates her confidence and ability to define

³⁰ ELISE BIRCH, *Learning to Be: An Arts-Based Hermeneutic Understanding of My Heroine's Journey*, Master of Arts in Art Therapy, Herron School of Art and Design Indiana University 2019, p. 11.

her own identity without claiming heroism. It is also Lunja's way to withdraw from the Kabyle laws and established order. She creates her own "Space" and chooses to quit her oppressive mother as a "strategy of survival"³¹

Lunja, though remains silence, she succeeds to break the imposed family and social norms and to go to create her own space for liberation. The action illustrates that she assumes her choices and rejects those dictated by her society. Her action becomes a way or a 'silent language' that allows her to move on³². Lunja, like a trickster can be regarded as "the spirit of the doorway leading out, and of the crossroad at the edge of town". She is, in Lewis Hyde's words, "The spirit of the road at dusk, the one who runs from one town to another and belongs to neither"³³. She is a brave woman, who takes the decision to leave the space of confinement; the house. Despite the difficulties, obstacles met on her way, her mother's threats, Lunja continues her way leading to her destiny. Teryel follows her saying "Lunja, my daughter, God will deceive you, the way you deceived me". This does not stop Lunja from continuing. This family space seems to be a closed place that oppresses her while the distant and unknown spaces become the world that allows her deliverance.

Lunja's Quest for Liberation and Self-realization.

It is the image that mothers draw about themselves and about woman that make their daughters live the guilt and "castration anxiety". The ideal or "the conventional woman" is a sheer matrix fabricated by the patriarchy to identically shape women whose core essence is asserting male dominance. It is a constant barrage of home-maker-nurturer-mother images that, and without denouncing the gendered discourse, transforms the woman into an eternal struggle and sorrow. Leaving the domestic allows re-imagining and re-writing the self. This does emphasize Lunja's established authority. It puts her in the position of control since she takes the initiative to transform the fragmented world of obedience and "angelic" absence to wholeness. It is an identity or a performative gender identity that is the result of choice and not the result of social obligations. Her indifference and her outward vision create such insouciance.

Lunja who faces a world governed by the limitations imposed by society decides to leave home following her wishes allows her to breathe freedom that she could not

³¹ Ivi, p. 178.

³² LEWIS HYDE, *Trickster makes this world: Mischief, Myth and Art*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1989, p. 81.

³³ Ivi, p. 11.

find within the her family's background, which she sees as disturbing and incompatible with her desires. Leaving that oppressive milieu contributes to her evolution, transformation, and her revolutionary change of identity. Lunja becomes an independent character as she creates "a world within a world" to shape the self and the identity. She struggles for recognition within the Kabyle patriarchal context that is represented as a space of fixed identities. Lunja engages in her long journey leaving the family house to become a different person. In this way, the movement from the domestic to the public is accompanied by a spiritual journey in her consciousness that transforms to a woman, who shifts from a state of victimization to the state of recognition. In this context, Simone De Beauvoir writes that "*for many women the roads to transcendence are blocked: because they do nothing, they fail to make themselves anything*"³⁴. Therefore, unsatisfied by the realities of the domestic, Lunja, in Nietzsche's words, is the doer, and it is the doing that makes the being³⁵.

The subject is recognized through the action taken. With her mobility, Lunja shows bravery, endurance, leadership without disguising in male outfits, camouflage or even claiming masculine privileges. She is doing her gender. As a woman who decides to take part in the public and be recognized as a full human being, she has to deny her "femininity" and most importantly, the assumptions related to this notion. Lunja decides to depart as she chooses mobility and be the transformer looking for the real meaning of life. She moves out seeking liberation and freedom, regardless of the possible barriers that she will face or even consequences of her act. Escaping the house and the life with her mother let her cross the borderline of the past life imposed on her to choose the life that she wants. The "performance" or the "sequence of acts" reject the existence of a norm that she has to identify with to build "the internal coherence of the subject"³⁶.

It is important to add that Lunja shows a surprising "insouciance" vis-à-vis the mother and her own entourage. She only cares about the ways to have access to her own self and see herself in the mirror instead of the reflection of her mother. As a daughter, who needs to separate herself from what Melanie Klein calls the concept of "the archaic maternal superego". Realizing whom she means, putting an end to "the devastating power of the mother on her daughter, preventing her to follow her own path and get out of that guilt, imprisoning her in a destructive relationship"³⁷. It is a denial of the self from Teryel, the mother, who and despite being an unconventional non conformist, teaches her daughter to be an "angel in the house", like

³⁴ SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR, *The Second Sex*, Trans. H.M. Parshley, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1984, p. 265.

³⁵ KEITH ANSELL-PEARSON, ed, *Fredrick Nietzsche On The Genealogy Of Morality*, Trans Carol Diethe, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

³⁶ JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* cit., p. 23.

³⁷ ISMAHAN SOUKEYNA DIOP, *African Mythology, Femininity, and Maternity*, palgrave, Daker 2019, p. 18.

any Kabyle traditional mother. In other words, Lunja's departure is her only solution to get rid of her mother's oppression. In her view, being a different woman allows her to stay alive and opens the door to new chances in life.

Besides, her quest for freedom and her desire to end her confinement convert her to a "free woman," "not like other women". Her freedom is achieved by dis-empowering mother's also symbolic power. If the woman goes out of the control of her family, she brings "dishonor", "social death" and "exil"³⁸. She becomes an "outcast" and "passes the boundaries of the established order" or the rigid norms. The prince desires Lunja as she is the most beautiful and nicest of all the girls around the kingdom. He desires her and decides to risk his life for her. However, it is not clear if Lunja falls really in love with the prince or she actually uses him as a way to escape the control of her mother. It is more of an affair rather than a traditional love relationship that leads to marriage. She overturns the norms and transforms the focus from the prince in her favor. She becomes the one guiding the prince and helping him running from her own mother prison. She crosses the boundaries and reverses the roles, very often reserved to men, and takes control of the situation. She creates an open opportunity to self-fulfillment, as the prince fades to the background and loses his outward appearance.

It is true that and as Murdock states, in her work *The Heroine's Journey*, that the female hero or the woman's quest for identity begins with the "Separation from the Feminine", this happens when a young girl or woman decides to separate her identity from her mother and depart either physically or psychologically in a spiritual quest. Nevertheless, at some point, she faces the interior "conflict between wanting a freer life than their mother and wanting their mother's love and approval". Lunja does not seek her mother's approval when she decides to leave, it is after that she is away that she request's her mother's blessing, without over thinking her decision. This initial rejection of the primary feminine energy in Lunja's life marks the beginning of the female hero's journey and, symbolically and physically, leads to the separation from the feminine obstacle that resides in the traditional mother that would not allow the journey.³⁹

In her quest for change, traditionally regarded as only a male activity, Lunja nicely talks to the elements of nature like the river and the plants asking them to help her move away from her mother saying "A yacif budi tamentt, jiyi adɛadiy! Yemma d Teryel I tecc!", "Oh River of butter and honey, let me pass! My mother the ogress will devour me!". Lunja through her figurative language is able to balance her actions and turns down the disorder that may cause with the already established order. Pelton claims that the trickster is able "to marry disorder and transformation

³⁸ PIERRE BOUDIEU, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*, Seuil, Paris 2000, p. 45.

³⁹ MAUREEN MURDOCK, *The Heroine's Journey*, Boston, Shambhala, 1990, pp. 17, 23-25.

and social order, foolishness and wisdom, history and timelessness”⁴⁰. These series of trials are supposed to stop her in her journey, but that does not occur anywhere in the story, which is a kind of a curse that would make them look ugly and hideous for life. Because the river does not allow Teryel to pass, Lunja and the prince, called in some instances Joseph, Yusef, continue their road. Teryel says “*Ruḥ adig rebbi Yusef tuggicct, kem d affarah!*” Lunja sadly replies “*A neḥ a yemma iyi dnid! Ad ndella d tmura medden!*”, “*Oh Mother, is this really what you wish, I will be dishonoured in strange lands!*”. Teryel, by then says “*Ruḥ kemini d ittij, Yusef d aggur!*”, “*Go! You are the sun and Joseph the moon!*”. Lunja paves her way challenging the culturally constructed model to become an independent adult woman. For ones, the deviation from the social norms allows to celebrate her own desire to be free. She becomes the “ravenous”, “outsider” and “uncontrollable”. She discards the stereotypical female values and artificial gender roles designed by the patriarchy to spotlight on her own self. The trickster figure becomes a way to reflect and consider the world “as an active subject”⁴¹. In this perspective, Butler says that gender is “a free artifice” since there is “a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders”. It is not “the effect” of institutions or practices only, but it is also the “effects” of our choices, behaviour and interests. Thus, it is performance that makes women.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of Lunja, the mythical figure of the Kabyle/ Berber mythology, reveals that she acts as a trickster to liberate herself from the family and social oppressive norms. In so doing, she succeeds to go beyond the borders imposed by her society, to build a new identity and to fulfil her desires as a released woman. This female mythological figure manages to perform her role in a creative way to impose herself in her society. Lunja, thus, overturns “les idées reçues” concerning the passive and submissive female heroine in contrast to the mobile and swift male hero of the Kabyle/Amazigh Mythological tradition. Though the Kabyle society is known by its harsh laws and the individuals’ limitation of freedom, Lunja manages to construct her own “the idea of gender”. Hiding the presence of the man in the family house proves not her bravery to face the tyranny of her mother but also expresses her choice of rebellion. Her movement from the domestic to the public sphere is part of the performance that creates her subjectivity. Moving to the public

⁴⁰ ROBERT PELTON, *The Trickster in West Africa. A study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* cit., p. 226.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 257.

allows an interaction that subjectivities are formed with. The result is that subject is a free-floating artifice and Lunja's gender identity depends on her choices, views, considerations and her chosen way of life and not the pre-existing norms that define her. In sum, Lunja tricks both her mother and the Kabyle society by transgressing the norms like the trickster. She follows her own way and decides to move beyond the social established codes. The "becoming" of Lunja transforms her from the submissive woman of the Kabyle/ Amazigh mythology to a trickster. She becomes then almost a kind of "*Trickstar*" in the words of Marilyn Jurich without falling in the trap of using her body as a source of power. Her performances bring about the fall of the traditional restrictions and social norms of the society by using cleverness and tricks, which allows her disempowering the traditional institution of motherhood with its symbolic power and control. She puts end to her fears, submissiveness and passivity. She, therefore, moves from the state of a woman, the symbol of obedience to that of rebellious figure, who subverts the mechanisms of conformity and submission through her defiant actions. In other words, she transforms herself from the dominated Kabyle woman to a free and responsible one. She frees herself from the status of the silent young girl to become, in Robert Pelton's words, "the trickster-transformer-culture-hero" of the Kabyle/ Amazigh mythology.

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