

IBRAHIM AL-KONI'S HYBRID AESTHETIC¹

Ziad Elmarsafy

University of York

190 As a Touareg arabophone writer of fictions where human and nonhuman compete for power and privilege, Ibrahim Al-Koni constitutes an important locus for the reconsideration of hybridity, not least with respect to the decentering of the human subject vis-à-vis nonhuman animals and spiritual entities. Al-Koni's works operate an important synthesis between the cultural space of the Abrahamic monotheisms and the Touareg spiritual cosmos. In his oeuvre, we are treated to tale upon tale of violent invasion and settlement but the actors are not (or very rarely) Western colonial powers versus indigenous Africans. Instead we have beings that are usually considered heterogeneous—human and nonhuman animals, deities and spirits, “inorganic” beings such as earth, heaven and the law (always called by its Touareg personal name, *Ānhi*²)—locked in a struggle for space and sovereignty. In what follows these aspects of his work will be examined with a view to better understanding his novels.

The hybridity operative Al-Koni's works functions less in Homi Bhabha's sense of the term—as a product of the fantasies and divisions within colonial discourse that enable postcolonial resistance—than a more primary sense. As Robert Young reminds us, the idea of hybridity was key to Gandhi's vision of an independent India, not least with respect to the importance of the spiritual in the formation of postcolonial identity (Young 325-33, 337-51, cf. 348-49). This notion returns in Ashis Nandy's later formulation of the intimate enemy: a deliberate admixture of cultures, norms, languages and beliefs that gives rise to a cultural whole far greater than the sum of its parts. The term “intimate enemy” could well describe the relationship between the multifarious orders that populate Al-Koni's novels. Nandy's and Young's formulation of hybridity provides a useful framework for thinking about Al-Koni, as well as an at least a partial solution to a dilemma that has long preoccupied postcolonial cultures;

namely the differing paces of history in different places, the lack of simultaneity and diverse speeds at which the world's societies move through their histories:

How can the modernity of the west and its conceptual and political apparatus be resisted in terms other than the advocacy of a return to tradition, to a largely pre-modern and fantasized past?...For Nandy, the answer lies in a dialectical view of modernity, in the creation of a counter-modernity through the transformative potential of the transculturations of gender and hybridity, creating new traditions that will not be a return to an imaginary pure, indigenous knowledge, but a repertoire drawn from a dialectical mixture of classical and folk knowledges, the pure and the mixed, the high and the low, the masculine and the feminine: modernity hybridized.

(Young 345; cf. Nandy 104-07)

Hybridity might therefore be described as a strategy of resistance on terms other than those set by the powers that be, and a proposal of alternative modernities—or contemporaneities—that develop at their own pace rather than following the shots called by globalisation. Al-Koni's narration of the Touareg as an indigenous nomadic population besieged from without by competing national and colonial interests and from within by harsh environmental conditions, internecine war and grinding poverty, and informed by discourses of reason, religion and magic, fit in very well with the notion of hybridized modernity described above.

191

Al-Koni's dedication to this sort of hybridity starts with the stuff of which stories are made, namely language. Indeed, given the obsession with linguistic purity that obtains among the Touareg—the “Kel Awal”, the “people of the word”—and the near contempt in which writing is held, Al-Koni's project as a writer might be deemed downright heretical.³ The transculturation⁴ of the Touareg universe into Al-Koni's highly abstract written Arabic breaks all the rules of both cultural spaces, but seems to do so, paradoxically, by remaining faithful to the principles of both: the Touareg world is rendered in full detail, and Al-Koni's Arabic, for all its difficulty, is flawless. The final product is, and is not, both Touareg and Arabic.

Taking this hybrid idiom as a point of departure, we will trace the operation of three different sorts of hybridity chez Al-Koni. The first is the one that obtains from the interaction between the human and the spiritual worlds, followed by the one that obtains from the interaction between the human and the nonhuman animal, and finally the intertextual, generic hybridity that constitutes the fabric of Al-Koni's novels. The listing and separation of these three categories is artificial, as is the order in which I will treat them; in what follows it should be remembered that all three orders of hybridity operate simultaneously.

THE HUMAN-SPIRITUAL HYBRID

In his *La Pensée du roman* Thomas Pavel describes the novel as the genre that accompanies the concept of the individual, understood as a social and ethical category,

in the world. In order to construct his framework, Pavel relies on Louis Dumont's account of the birth of the individual. Dumont locates the birth of the latter in India, at the moment when early ascetics gave up the rights and duties that came with being part of a hierarchical society in order to devote themselves to the contemplation and adoration of a tutelary deity, who, in turn, provides them with everything that society might have. Dumont calls this individual the "extra-worldly" individual (*l'individu-hors-du-monde*) and argues that the history of modern individualism parallels the gradual insertion of this extra-social bubble into the fabric of society (Dumont 35-81). The genre that narrates this process is, Pavel argues, the novel, which finds its origins in a cultural space that has come to terms with the notion of individual freedom in relation to, rather than away from, divine presences and forces. This re-orientation of individuality leads to what Pavel calls the axiological question underlying the genre of the novel: Can the individual inhabit the world, ethically and morally speaking? (Pavel 46-49).

- 192 So it is with Al-Koni. In a recent interview, he identifies writing with two aspects of individual identity outlined by Dumont: ascesis and the sacred. In order for writing to occur, Al-Koni claims, the writer must sacrifice his life; a sacrifice without which writing becomes impossible: "il faut que l'écrivain sacrifie, dans le vrai sens du terme, sa vie: sinon il lui sera impossible de vivre sa vie de créateur. Toute créativité suppose une ascèse, une sorte de monachisme" ("Le 'discours' du désert" 100). In other words, the writer's voice will only emerge insofar as he is an *individu-hors-du-monde*; "Objectivement parlant, il n'y a pas d'autres alternatives: soit la vie de ce monde, soit la vie spirituelle de la créativité" ("Discours" 100). As he excludes himself from "ce monde", Al-Koni travels to another: "Tout lecteur de mon œuvre s'aperçoit vite que le désert dont je parle est synonyme du monde, qu'il est une allégorie du monde" ("Discours" 101). Now conceived as a setting for the sacred and the concomitant inquiry into norms and values that then informs the writer's spiritual and creative orientation, the desert operates as an enchanted space capable of divine habitation:

Le grand Sahara n'a pas connu le monothéisme. Je pense, cependant, que Dieu y est présent plus que dans beaucoup d'autres déserts. Car là où se trouve la nature, Dieu est présent. Je me suis toujours intéressé au problème de l'unité de la création et même de l'unité de la création et du créateur. Dieu, l'homme et l'animal se trouvent unis dans un seul corps qui s'appelle le Sahara. C'est pourquoi, quand nous tuons un *waddān* (mouflon) nous portons atteinte à nous-mêmes. ("Discours" 98)

Al-Koni's description hints at an equation between a pan-theistic perspective and the Sufi concept of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*).⁵ In another interview Al-Koni explains that, as a child, this fusion of the many elements that make up the Sahara was, for him, synonymous with God insofar as it constituted the unity of being, and that this unity was the key to his personal and creative freedom:

Derrière cette fusion, dans mon enfance déjà, j'ai cherché *Dieu* et par cette notion, avec mon petit entendement, très tôt déjà j'ai compris *l'unité de l'être*. Ensuite, j'ai découvert dans ce rituel cosmique le sens de la *liberté*...Et tous mes romans, mes nouvelles, mes

essais et mes aphorismes...constituent la tentative de mettre en mots ce grand mystère: Dieu, l'unité de l'être et la liberté. (Fähndrich 157-58)

A proper reading of Al-Koni must thus account for this “mystery” in all of its forms, be it in the relationship between the human beings and *jinn*, and humans and animals, or all of these creatures and God. Such a reading will also take into account the move whereby Al-Koni collapses the transcendental beginnings of writing and individuality onto a plane of immanence—the Sahara—that contains the human, the nonhuman and the divine.

In her work on Touareg cosmologies Hélène Claude-Hawad draws attention to the fundamental division of the universe into two spheres: the visible and the invisible; the former being the home of the human, the latter the home of the “spiritual”. Each sphere has its inhabitants and its epistemologies. The two frequently interact but the process is hardly ever peaceful or easy. In order to make sense of all this, Touareg society depends on those who can shuttle back and forth between the two orders. The most important figure of this “in-between” space (what Claude-Hawad calls the “entre-deux”) is the Sufi:

193

Le soufi, personnage de “l'entre-deux” dont le portrait spécifique s'articule parfaitement aux figures structurellement nécessaires à la cosmogonie touarègue, endosse un rôle de médiateur entre Dieu et les hommes chez lesquels il joue par excellence le rôle de conciliateur. (Claudot-Hawad 118)

The Touareg Sufi is therefore something more than a mere mystic; s/he (usually he) is a strong reminder of Dumont's otherworldly individual, always moving on the edge of society in order to proclaim the importance of individuality, thereby constituting an anti-hierarchical, oppositional political force. The hybrid trajectory of the Touareg Sufi and his oscillation between the world of the spirits (*jinn*) and the world of humanity is the setting for one of Al-Koni's recent novels, *Marāthī Ūlīs*. The title can be translated by “The Elegies of Ulysses (Ūlīs)”, while the subtitle, *Al-Murīd*, carries a strong Sufi connotation. In other words the novel centres on one of these personages of the “entre-deux”, a Sufi. From the outset, Al-Koni makes it clear that we are in a hybrid space: the protagonist is born in the valley of the spirits, which is also called the valley of *awal*. Now, *awal* means, as Ibrahim Al-Koni kindly points out to the reader, speech, chatter, language. The Touareg call themselves “Kel Awal”, the people of the word; their identity is bound by the Tamasheq language. In designating the valley inhabited by the *jinn* as “Wādī Awal” (the valley of the word), Al-Koni is using something that could be called a misnomer were it not part of a deliberately composed literary text. For the usual term for the spirits, or the *jinn*, would be *esuf* (the darkness, the invisible, the spiritual), and the valley of the *jinn* would normally be called “Wādī *Esuf*”. By using the term used for human beings in the toponym “Wādī Awal” Al-Koni underlines his protagonist's hybridity, who is part of the visible universe but constantly communing, and doing battle, with the *jinn*. Once we take into account the fact that Ūlīs is none other than Al-Koni himself,

and that *Marāthi Ūlis* is a fictional autobiography of sorts, it becomes clear that the novel is a manifesto for a new understanding of the hybrid character of the writer and writing: a self and an activity that straddle and invalidate the distinction between the human and the spiritual. Rather than speaking of a human commerce with the spiritual, Al-Koni underlines the continuities between the two regions whereby each haunts and depends on the other.

HUMAN-ANIMAL HYBRIDS

Nor is this haunting limited to human beings and *jinn*: the human and nonhuman animal are bound, nay haunted by, their symbiosis in Al-Koni's universe. In a novella entitled "The Trap" ["Al-Fakhkh"], the protagonist Ikhawkh is haunted by a dream in which he hears a voice repeatedly accusing him of killing its mother
194 ("Al-Fakhkh" 41). In the event, the "voice" belongs to a waddān, whose mother the protagonist had indeed killed. The novella meanders with the protagonist's movement until he himself is finally punished by dying in a trap similar to that with which he killed his accuser's mother. A similar fate befalls the protagonist of *The Bleeding of the Stone* [Nazīf Al-Hajar]: An unwitting Touareg, Asūf, leads the extremely carnivorous tourist Qābil Ādam (i.e. Cain, son of Adam)⁶ on a carnivorous rampage in the Fezzan. Qābil effectively wipes out the animal populations of the desert, and keeps pushing Asūf to tell him where the waddān is found. Asūf, having betrayed his animal kindred, finds himself trapped in the remains of a temple that is the home of the "sacred waddān" with which he becomes identified. In the last scene of the novel the flesh-crazed Qābil, now described as a cannibal due to his ravenous need for meat,⁷ crucifies and kills Asūf as he would an animal, spilling his blood over the stones of the temple. This act fulfills an ancient Touareg prophecy that salvation will come when the stones of the temple of the sacred waddān bleed: as Asūf's blood spills over the Tifināgh inscriptions the rain starts, the drought ends and, the reader understands, a life cycle starts anew. In placing the text of the prophecy underneath Asūf's crucifixion, Al-Koni implies that *he* is in fact the sacred waddān in question.

Al-Tibr is remarkable for the fact that its protagonist is not a human being but the dappled camel that is the pride and joy of its owner Ukhayyed. Ukhayyed's attachment to this animal tropes the excessive human attachment to the things of this world, which passion leads to the sin of "shirk", or idolatry, associating minor deities with the one true God.⁸ When the camel falls ill, Ukhayyed's world starts disintegrating until he is left with no alternative but to sacrifice himself for the sake of his prized animal *and* in order to re-constitute his existence. In all of these cases, Al-Koni is driven by the aforementioned identification and continuity between the human and the animal: the camel's sickness "infects" its owner's world, both physically and metaphysically, morally and ethically. Similarly, Asūf's weak resistance in the face of Qābil's desire for the flesh of the waddān triggers catastrophic changes in the desert

environment and death on a genocidal scale. This is a fictional world governed by the laws not only of the human but of the human-animal hybrid.

Al-Koni's human-animal hybridity demarcates a space in which the traditional Western division between nature and culture, or indeed between human and non-human, is no longer applicable. Instead what we have are continuities and assumptions of identity and interiority that differ radically from those proposed by a post-Cartesian universe. In order to better understand the laws of Al-Koni's world, we might turn to Philippe Descola, whose *Par delà nature et culture* proposes an important re-writing of the nature versus culture "story", whereby the modern (Western) subject finds him- or herself inscribed in a place outside the animal order in a world wherein nature and culture are firmly opposed to each other (despite the scientific and intellectual history of evolution) (Descola 91-131). For Descola, it is this configuration, rather than the supposedly "primitive" one associated with peoples and social groups that maintain strong identifications with animals, that is exotic.⁸ Descola advances a definition of identity as a linear combination of interiority and physicality that enables a perspective whereby the nonhuman animal can be identified with the human. In a clever reversal of Rimbaud, Descola describes a system that enables the other to become an "I" ("l'autre est un 'je'").⁹ The four ontologies that make up this system are constituted through the truth table that pits resemblance and difference against interiority and physicality: similar interiorities and differing physicalities yield animism, similar physicalities and interiorities yield totemism, differing physicalities and interiorities yield analogism, while different interiorities with similar physicalities yield naturalism (Descola 176).

195

Within this framework, it is Descola's definition of animism—"l'imputation par les humains à des non-humains d'une intériorité identique à la leur" (183)—that has the most direct bearing on Al-Koni's fiction. In an animist cosmology, nonhuman function as disguised humans, with the animal's body operating as a cover for an anthropomorphic "person" (the Malaysian Chewong speak of the body as a "cape" hiding a person; see Descola 186). Furthermore, a number of para-literary constructs—Makuna and Wari' mythologies for example—scribe human intention to such nonhuman animals as jaguars and peccaries, so that

C'est le jaguar et le pécar... qui se perçoivent eux-mêmes comme accomplissant des gestes identiques à ceux des humains, qui s'imaginent de bonne foi comme partageant avec ces derniers le même système technique, la même existence sociale, les mêmes croyances et aspirations. (Descola 188)

This notion of the nonhuman animal as a disguised human is probably best illustrated by the moment in *Al-Tibr* where a camel is described as a man in disguise (*Al-Tibr* 92).

Al-Koni's fiction thus surpasses standard epistemologies based on the opposition between rational human and ostensibly irrational nonhuman animals. In order to better understand the value and operation of Al-Koni's new epistemology, I would

like to invoke Stanley Cavell's argument about the "Kantian settlement with skepticism" and the extent to which the world can be known. In his *In Search of the Ordinary* (1988), Cavell claims that ever since Kant, Western philosophy has been stuck in a mode that enables certain epistemologies at the cost of other ways of knowing: we can know the world, but only on condition that we give up any knowledge of the thing in itself:

To settle with skepticism...to assure us that we do know the existence of the world, or rather, that what we understand as knowledge is of the world, the price Kant asks us to pay is to cede any claim to know the thing in itself, to grant that human knowledge is not of things as they are in themselves (things as things, Heidegger will come to say).
(Cavell 31)

196

So the world can be known, but not things in themselves, or other minds in themselves.¹⁰ Mind reading is impossible, as is communion with the nonhuman or inanimate. Taking a detour through Wittgenstein, Cavell shows how the resulting condition of "skeptical terror about the independent existence of other minds" becomes a hallmark of post-Enlightenment modernity; a hallmark that leaves us wondering about just what counts as knowledge: the encounter with the animal "makes us wonder what we conceive knowledge to be" (qtd. in Wolfe, "Shadow" 3).¹¹ If we extend this mode of enquiry to Ibrahim Al-Koni's fictional universe, we find that the reader is treated to something like a solution to the problem of skeptical terror via the deployment of non-human characters. The way in which human and nonhuman animals interact in Al-Koni's fiction are markers that enable an ethics and epistemology that seeks to overcome the Kantian impasse: here nonhuman things-in-themselves can be known, but that knowledge comes at the price of the more generalized "rational" knowledge of the world. The system of values that operates concurrently with such knowledge undermines Cavell's post-Kantian skeptical outlook in favour of forms of gnosis that re-situate the individual human at some distance from the centre of the universe. Al-Koni's readers will remark that it is easy to lose the plot of his novels: there is not much "rational" knowledge but there is, on the other hand, a great deal of gnosis (*'irfān, basīrah*). Far from being an alienated or "fallen" condition, this is, in fact, as it should be: in order for the human to *be* at all, s/he must be situated in a zone that communicates, however strenuously, with the nonhuman. Al-Koni's deployment of the human-animal hybrid bears witness to literature's power of address and response vis-à-vis the (im)possibilities set forth by modernity's rationalist outlook.

HYBRIDITY AND THE LAW OF THE TEXT

Al-Koni's texts consistently foreground the importance of the law in the life of his characters: time and again his readers are confronted with maxims, aphorisms and sentences (what he refers to as *mutūn*), either as part of a novel, its epigraph or as an

independent publication. Such is Al-Koni's dedication to this practice that he does not hesitate to cite himself as one of its masters (*Marāthi Ūlis* 117).

One of the more striking instances comes in *Anūbis*. The title refers to the ancient Egyptian God of the dead, the one who introduces the dead into the other world, before their trial at the hands of Osiris. In Egyptian mythology, therefore, Anūbis stands before the law, marking the boundary of its place. In Al-Koni's idiom, however, Anūbis becomes Anūbī, a Tamasheq term meaning either "orphan", a man without a father, but more significantly, "someone": we are all fatherless orphans. Al-Koni maps this equivalence of existence and fatherlessness onto the Touareg ontology that identifies the earth with the mother and heaven with the father. If our father is (in) heaven, then our relationship with him is not so far removed from the relationship to the tutelary deity of Dumont's extra-worldly individual. Insofar as we are all "Anūbī", we also embody the law of the individual. This law is further complicated by a key tragic detail in the plot of the novel, namely that Anūbī crosses the desert only to kill his father by accident. The novel ends with the enunciation of the Oedipal law: all sons are destined to kill their fathers: "We must kill the father in order to seek the father. We must kill the father in order to find the father" (*Anūbis* 206). There follows an important supplement entitled "The Sayings of Anūbis", a collection of maxims and aphorisms that sum up and extend the plot of the novel, as if the novel only existed to enable the extraction of these formulations of Touareg norms and values.

197

The form of the novel that ends with the formulation of these universalist maxims is strongly reminiscent of a key Touareg ritual: the pronouncement of the *enni*, the aphorism, at the end of a conversation. As Casajus puts it, the point of the aphorism is to anchor the conversation, to give it a point of arrival and a centre of gravity: "conduire vers son point d'orgue une parole déjà ouverte...ou du moins [prendre] acte en la ponctuant de jalons réguliers de ce qu'elle s'acheminait vers l'apaisante conclusion d'une vérité indiscutable" (*Gens de parole* 35). The aim is to bring a particular situation to a universal truth, or to bring the latter to bear on the former. The style of the *enni* is not, however, particularly lucid. If anything it holds fast to the mysterious language of the sacred with its veiled expressions; the style that in Tamasheq is called *tangält*. The importance of *tangält*—ironic, veiled or dual discourse—is such that it is often used as a synonym for Tamasheq; the linguistic shadow zone where only native speakers may tread (Casajus, *Gens de parole* 40) and which "pénombreuse sans être obscure, voile tout en laissant deviner, comme l'élégante qui n'ourle sa paupière d'une ombre de koheul que pour mieux en souligner le contour" (Casajus, *Gens de parole* 45). There is therefore a cautious use of language in the *enni*. Resorting to universal aphorisms to end a conversation is one way of dissolving one's responsibility into a general, anonymous collectivity that ratifies the speaker's enunciation.

And yet this practice is performed in an altered form by Al-Koni, who presents it in *written* rather than oral form. When it comes to the transmission of a sacred law, the passage from the oral to the written is never innocent; for scripture only functions through the primacy of the oral. This translation, or transculturation, of an oral

practice that subtends Tamasheq discursive cartography into an Arabic form and style that capture the aristocratic elegance of the *tangält* locution constitutes the last horizon of hybridity at work in Al-Koni's text. The sacred oral law finds its place in the form of the novel. Al-Koni thus re-inscribes the sacred in the world.

The question of the purpose behind this literary activity and the origins of this style still imposes itself. What, after all, is the point of writing novel after novel to re-assess the mythological foundations and sacred parameters of the Touareg universe time and again? The answer may lie in the generic hybridity of these novels, and the declarations implicit in the form as well as the content of Al-Koni's *oeuvre*. Some twenty years ago Jean Bessière gave an insightful reading of the generic hybridity that we find in the works of such writers as Calvino, Claude Simon and Botho Strauss, by describing it as the device that bears witness to the community, the contiguity, of all discourse:

198

Les mixtes et les hybrides littéraires contemporains, romanesques et plus largement littéraires--croisement de genres, jeux de l'intertextualité--font de l'œuvre le lieu et le témoignage de l'interdiscursivité. Ce lieu et ce témoignage importent moins en eux-mêmes que par ce qu'ils disent d'une *intelligibilité commune*. (Bessière 127)

Al-Koni's accomplishment inheres precisely in his having extended the boundaries of this intelligibility as far as they will go while maintaining the coherence of the written whole. It is precisely this intelligibility, this translatability, of discourses and languages, of beings and entities hitherto deemed heterogeneous and mutually incomprehensible, that makes Al-Koni's use of hybridity so far-reaching. The very limited historical markers operative in his novels speaks to a different understanding of modernity, unencumbered by the opposition between folksy indigenous parameters and the values of globalization. The repeated invocation of the jinn and the ascetic as beings to be taken seriously, ones whose presence is part and parcel of hybrid postcoloniality, militates against the standard narratives of secular modernism. Last, but not least, the placing, on one and the same level of being in the desert, not only of the individual and the world, not only of human and nonhuman animals and jinn, but of the very letter of the law and of those who live by it, augurs in favour of an aesthetic that, fully and without compromise, rethinks the place of the transcendent within the immanent.

NOTES

1. This article owes a great deal to discussions with the other scholars present at the Université de Paris III's conference on hybridity (June 3-4, 2009). I am especially grateful to Jean Bessière and Emmanuelle Recoing for several exchanges on the work of Philippe Descola and Jane Elliott for some introducing me to the work of Cary Wolfe.
2. Al-Koni uses the terms *Ānhī*, a personal name, and *al-nāmūs* interchangeably to indicate the body of law, now lost, that regulates the life of the Touareg. In his work Al-Koni glosses the principles of *Ānhī* in terms that combine the personal and impersonal aspects of the law, as well as its fixed and

its variable, aleatory dimensions. I will return to the hybrid operation of the law in Al-Koni's fiction below.

3. Dominique Casajus, *Gens de parole* 23-24, 161-62. The primacy of the oral over the written in the register of the sacred is not, of course, specific to the Touareg: see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture?* 7-9, 50-51, 130-31.
4. The term is borrowed from Fernando Ortiz via David Attwell, who spells out its implications as follows: "Transculturation... suggests multiple processes, a dialogue in both directions and, most importantly, processes of cultural destruction followed by reconstruction on entirely new terms... The 'counterpoint' provided by such a [transcultured] world stands in direct opposition to myths of essentialism and uniformity in both colonial and nativist forms of self-representation" (*Rewriting Modernity* 18-19).
5. Ferial Ghazoul has offered an incisive reading of Sufi elements in the work of several Maghrebi novelists, including Al-Koni's *Nazif Al-Hajar*. See "Al-Riwāya Al-Sūfiyya fi-l-Adab Al-Maghāribi" 32-36.
6. In many respects Qabil Adam's character exemplifies the ultra virile, carno-phallogocentric super-subject described by Derrida: "La force virile du mâle adulte, père, mari ou frère... appartient au schème qui domine le concept de sujet. Celui-ci ne se veut pas seulement maître et sujet actif de la nature. Dans nos cultures, il accepte le sacrifice et mange de la chair... dans nos contrées, qui aurait quelque chance de devenir un chef d'état, et d'accéder ainsi 'à la tête' en se déclarant publiquement, et donc exemplairement, végétarien?" ("Il faut bien manger' ou le calcul du sujet" 295).
7. Though striking, the passage from carnivore to cannibal is not entirely unique to this novel—similar comparisons are made in *Al-Tibr* and are hinted at in Al-Koni's aforementioned interview. The question of the carnivorous and the cannibal appears frequently in recent postcolonial fiction. See the readings presented by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 168-183.
8. Quite apart from the remarkable plot and structure of *Al-Tibr*, Touareg literary practice often invokes the identification of camel with (male) man. Dominique Casajus describes extensively how the Kel Ferwan Touaregs live in close proximity with their animals, as well as the affinities that link the sexes to their animals—women to goats and men to camels. Moreover, in a number of Touareg texts, the identification between men and camels is almost total, recalling a Jahili-style attachment of the poet to his camel, who moves, eats and even seduces females in parallel with its owner (*La Tente dans la solitude* 87-88, 98-104). The parallels between Touareg and Jahili poetic production, as well as the legend of the invention of poetry by "Amerolqis" (i.e. Imru' Al-Qays) are treated in further detail in Casajus, *Gens de parole* 88-89.
9. "Envisagés du point de vue d'un hypothétique historien des sciences jivaro ou chinois, Aristote, Descartes ou Newton n'apparaîtraient pas tant comme des révélateurs de l'objectivité distinctive des non-humains et des lois qui les régissent que comme les architectes d'une anthropologie naturaliste tout à fait exotique au regard des choix opérés par le reste de l'humanité pour distribuer les entités dans le monde et y établir discontinuités et hiérarchies" (Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* 98-99).
10. Or, as Cary Wolfe puts it, "We gain knowledge, but only to lose the world" ("Introduction: Exposures," *Philosophy and Animal Life* 5). Wolfe has extensively traced the consequences of this state of affairs with respect to the human and the animal in his work. See notably his "In the Shadow of Wittgenstein's Lion: Language, Ethics and the Question of the Animal" 1-11.
11. Cavell, quoted in Wolfe, "Shadow" 3. The second phrase comes from a letter written by Stanley Cavell to Vicki Hearne in the context of the encounter between humans and horses: "It is something about horses (what makes them crazy, what makes them nervous, what makes them shy) that sooner makes us wonder what we conceive knowledge to be" (*Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name* 114).

WORKS CITED

- Al-Koni, Ibrahim. *Anūbīs*. Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2002.
- _____. "Al-Fakhkh." *Diwān al-Nathr al-Barrī*. Beirut: Dar al-Tanwīr and Dar Tassili, 1991. 39-73.
- _____. *Marāthī 'Ūlīs*. Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2004.
- _____. *Nazīf Al-Hajar*. Beirut: Dar al-Tanwīr and Dar Tassili, 1992.
- _____. *Al-Tibr*. Limassol, Cyprus and Beirut: Dar al-Tanwīr and Dar Tassili, 1992.
- _____. "Le 'discours' du désert: Témoignage." *La poésie de l'espace dans la littérature arabe moderne*. Ed. Boutros Hallaq, Robin Ostle and Stefan Wild. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002. 95-102.
- 200** Attwell, David. *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*. Athens, OH and Scottsville, South Africa: Ohio UP and U of KwaZulu-Natal P, 2005.
- Bessière, Jean. "Hybrides romanesques, interdiscursivité et intelligibilité commune. Claude Simon, Italo Calvino, Botho Strauss." *Hybrides romanesques. Fiction (1960-1985)*. Ed. Jean Bessière. Paris: PU de France, 1988. 127-43.
- Cantwell Smith, Wilfred. *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*. London: SCM Press, 1993.
- Casajus, Dominique. *Gens de parole. Langage, poésie et politique en pays touareg*. Paris: La Découverte, 2000.
- _____. *La Tente dans la solitude: La société et les morts chez les Touaregs Kel Ferwan*. Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge UP and Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1987.
- Cavell, Stanley. *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Claudot-Hawad, Hélène. *'Eperonner le monde': Nomadisme, cosmos et politique chez les Touaregs*. Paris: Edisud, 2001.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Jean-Luc Nancy. "'Il faut bien manger' ou le calcul du sujet." *Points de suspensions: Entretiens*. Ed. Elisabeth Weber. Paris: Galilée, 1992. 269-301.
- Descola, Philippe. *Par-delà nature et culture*. Paris: Gallimard, 2005.
- Dumont, Louis. *Essais sur l'individualisme*. Paris: Seuil, 1983.
- Fähndrich, Hartmut. "Ibrahim al-Koni: Le désert e(s)t la vie." *Feuxcroisés* 4 (2002): 157-67.
- Ghazoul, Ferial. "Al-Riwāya Al-Sūfiyya fī-l-Adab Al-Maghāribī [The Sufi Novel in

Maghrebi Literature].” *Alif* 17 (1997): 28-53.

Hearne, Vicki. *Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name*. 1994. New York: Skyhorse, 2007.

Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983.

Pavel, Thomas. *La Pensée du roman*. Paris: Gallimard, 2003.

Wolfe, Cary. “In the Shadow of Wittgenstein’s Lion: Language, Ethics and the Question of the Animal.” *Zoologies: The Question of the Animal*. Ed. Cary Wolfe. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. 1-57.

_____. “Introduction: Exposures.” *Philosophy and Animal Life*. Ed. Stanley Cavell, 2008. 1-41.

Young, Robert. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001.