

# Changes and Resistances in Mountain Environments Case of Djebel Gueriou (Algeria)

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## Abstract

This reflection focuses on the density and the nature of the interactions of the components of a mountain Berber environment called Chaoui, or agro-pastoralists. It is interested in the functioning of the latter, even in the scope and limit of an ecosystem, driven by an anthroposystem that structures a constraining biomorphological or morpho-bio-cenotic framework. Its articulation has historically produced socio-economic units that are well singled out in their spatiality.

**Key words** : changes, resistances, mountain environment, agro-pastoralists, Jebel Guérioun, Algeria, singularity, socio-economic units

## PROLOGUE

Food refuge for the populations of the bordering plains, repressed during the war of independence, the Djebel GUERIOUN, a mountain area of some 200 km<sup>2</sup>, continues to undergo very contrasting changes.

Territory of agro-pastoralists of the Chaoui ethnic group, the Djebel GUERIOUN, land of public status, has enabled an entire local society to develop a system of subsistence articulated around a breeding essentially of small ruminants intended for the economic exchange, and an agriculture of cereals - pulses, backed by vegetable gardens.

The independence of the country upsets this very family socio-economic system by the collectivization of the means of production, the creation of a basic infrastructure, and the establishment of a two-headed management, represented by the appointment of a management of the exploitation, and a president elected by the workers. But this economic interventionism of production only lasted about ten years.

The means of production were then redistributed individually or to small groups of workers. A decade later, a political movement, of religious essence, proclaiming the return to the sources (sic) obliges the populations to flee their lands and to settle in the secure urban agglomerations.

This period (1990-2000) emptied Djebel GUERIOUN of its indigenous populations. Finally, this period of unstable security situation is coming to an end, and the return of the populations to their spaces, more than 20 years later, is still pending. But regular observation of these places suggests a timid resumption of breeding activity by a few isolated groups or individuals.

## PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK

From an abrupt space with clearly marked altimetric differences (600-1744m), this environment covers some 200 km<sup>2</sup>. Its hydrographic network, highlighted by certain insidious anthropogenic actions (deforestation, clearing, overgrazing, etc.), provides the insider with a historiography of visible stigmata on its spatio-genesis. With a dry semi-arid climate (408 mm/year and 16°C on average), subject to cold north-westerly winds, from November to February, punctuated by a few frosts (-5°C in January), and not exceeding 16 days during the period under consideration, and from March to August with hot winds from the South-East (40°C in August), these physical phenomena have sculpted an ecosystem which is intrinsically austere in its striking features.

## THE SOCIETY-TERRITORY RELATIONSHIP

In its socio-spatiality, this environment is signified by the eponymous "Ule'd Qa'sem" territorially dominant tribe. Semiotically and semantically, this «Ule'd Qa'sem» means the threads of rupture, of ethnic partition, imposed by an

endemic conflict, and permanently bringing into play the survival of social fractions, in the modern sense of class struggles, in the within the mother tribe, ancestral, the SEGNA tribe, this latter, by successive fractionations in its extended reproduction, similar to the scissiparity in the vegetable kingdom, generated various social fractions, «eponymized» as follows:

- Ule'd Qa'sem
- Ule'd Mes'ad
- Ule'd Sa'si
- Ule'd Jehich
- Bara'nia tribe (allochthonous)

These elementary units, apart from the Jehich, under the demographic weight, will in turn become, through the history of the tribes. The burden of this, is borne by demography, the multitude, the number of individuals, of working age and defending ethnic interests, will be decisive in the erection of the «social tribal». It is through this digital law, the number that will determine the importance and quality of land appropriation. Thus the historical territorial division will operate according to this social variable. The Ule'd Qa'sem tribe will take possession of the fertile and water-rich lands on the slopes of the North West. Whereas Ule'd Mes'ad will settle on the eastern slopes, adjacent to an important silvicultural area. Ule'd Sa'si will occupy the southern slope of the territory, an area with low economic potential, but valued by extensive livestock farming resulting from subsistence farming. Finally what remains of the territory will return to the last two tribes, to Ule'd Jehich and the Bara'nia tribe.

This social hierarchy, geographically inscribed in tribal history, is the outcome of the struggle of man against man for survival.

## **POTENTIALITIES OF DJEBEL GUERIOUN**

Due to its territorial particularity, a limiting factor *stricto sensu*, all mining operations, existing potentialities, so as not to break the precarious balance in place, already weakened by irrational social activities, this environment nevertheless conceals certain productive resources.

## **THE AGRICULTURE - LIVESTOCK COMBINATION**

### **Agriculture**

the first activity must avoid an intensive development of commercial agriculture, linked to the solicitations of the market. But restrict this to organic products typical of the terroirs, arboriculture adapted to the local ecology, or even agro-ecology, limited to basins and terraces that can give productions sought after for their qualities, if certain agro-pedological conditions are observed. . Perennial, multifunctional fodder (fight against soil erosion, livestock feed, etc.) can be planted on soils with slopes of less than 16%. The creation of nurseries to develop local ecotypes is a necessity to support the agricultural system in its sustainability. Agriculture without soil deserves to be encouraged (small livestock).

### **Water Resources**

They exist in abundance but deserve to be rationalized in its organization and use.

### **Breeding**

It cannot be separated from agricultural activity, as the two economic matters are interdependent. The first practice, agriculture needs animal waste to maintain its fertility. The second feeds on agricultural residues and weeds that compete with cultivated plants. But this practice must fit into the ecosystem in question in a harmonious way, i.e. respecting the balance of the mountain particularity.

### **Forest Resources**

Has largely its place in this socio-economic system; but they remain subject to predation, degradation of all sorts, it has not been able to benefit from adequate measures to offer the environment all its benefits: stabilize the soil, soften the local climate, participate in the financing of the local economy.

## Other Resources

Whatever their economic importance and necessity, they must be exploited reasonably in order to avoid any disturbance of this fragile environment.

## EPILOGUE

Due to its ecological particularity, Jebel GUERIOUN will have to continue Hic and NUNC to ensure the survival of its basic social units. It must therefore continue to develop its potential to meet this societal requirement. But development means change in many directions. And the latter is sometimes the bearer, beyond the satisfaction in situ, of risks in the tent; hence this equivocal problem inherent in the mountain environment: change to preserve.

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