ASJP Algerian Scientific Journal Platform

Afak For Sciences Journal
Issn: 2507-7228 – Eissn: 2602-5345
https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/PresentationRevue/351



Volume: 10/ N°: 04 (2025), P 548-565

Possession Conflict over Aarch Lands in the Context of Social Change in the Djelfa Region

Chelali Mohamed Lamine*
Djelfa University , (Algeria)
Mohamedchelali376@gmail.com

BEN ALARBI M'hamed
Djelfa University , (Algeria)
Belarbi76@gmail.com

Abstract ;

Land ownership in Djelfa has long been a symbolic source of power among families, tribes, and Aarch groups, dating back to before colonial times. This ownership often leads to conflicts marked by violence and revenge. Disputes are resolved through tribal customs or formal legal systems. Despite social and economic shifts from rural to urban life, conflicts over Aarch lands persist. This study explores the social and tribal dimensions of these disputes. It highlights how traditional practices continue alongside modern laws. The article reveals the ongoing struggle between heritage and modernization in land ownership conflicts.

Article info

Received
August 12:2025
Accepted
September 17;2025

Keyword:
- ✓ Aarch lands;
- ✓ social change;
- ✓ conflict;
- ✓ possession.

* *Corresponding author

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Introduction

Aarch lands have historically represented a symbolic form of ownership and geographical belonging for the Arab individual, and particularly for Algerians. In the Djelfa region, known for its Bedouin character, the attachment to land emerges as one of the most fundamental elements passed down through generations. For the individual, land is not merely a place of livelihood; it is a hidden force that unites members of the same family and, eventually, the same **Aarch**.

Aarch lands constitute one of the most prominent historical and social features of Algeria's rural structure. They represent a form of collective ownership managed according to tribal customs and based on the principle of shared usufruct among members of the group or **Aarch**. Throughout history, these lands have played a central role in shaping the social and economic relations between different **Aarch** groups, and they have been closely tied to identity and a sense of place.

In Djelfa, with its diverse tribal composition and extensive pastoral domain, **Aarch** lands serve as a cornerstone of traditional economic activity, particularly in agriculture and livestock breeding. However, the political, economic, and legal transformations Algeria has experienced—especially after independence—have brought about profound changes in patterns of possession and use. These changes have led to the emergence of disputes and conflicts between different **Aarch** groups, or even among members of the same **Aarch**, concerning the boundaries of these lands and the rights to benefit from them. Such disputes are not merely material disagreements over property; they fundamentally reflect a struggle over social power and symbolic space. Economic considerations intertwine with customary bonds and tribal traditions, and tensions are exacerbated by the absence of effective settlement mechanisms that reconcile customary authority with the modern legal framework. Therefore, studying the ongoing conflict over **Aarch** lands in Djelfa is of particular importance for understanding the dynamics of social change in Algeria's rural areas and for tracing transformations in patterns of coexistence and the management of shared resources.

Despite the dominance of urban life in Djelfa today, conflicts over land possession persist, albeit in varying forms. In some cases, disputes are resolved within the community through elders and notable figures of the **Aarch**; in others, they escalate to more intense confrontations in the courts. This study, therefore, will analyze the dimensions of this conflict in the following sections: the first section addresses the historical and conceptual dimensions of **Aarch** lands; the second examines the legal framework and possession issues related to **Aarch** lands; the third discusses social change; and the final section presents sociological approaches to the tribal conflict over **Aarch** lands in Djelfa.

Research Problem

In the Djelfa region, **Aarch** lands represent one of the most prominent forms of collective ownership with deep-rooted customary foundations, historically tied to tribal identity and traditional modes of life based on pastoralism and agriculture. However, in recent decades, profound social and economic transformations have altered the nature of the relationship with these lands, as well as the mechanisms of their possession and use. Demographic growth, urban expansion,

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and the accelerated shift from rural lifestyles to urban patterns have reshaped the structure of local society, giving rise to new forms of ownership and conflict.

In addition, the spread of technology and modern means of communication has redefined methods of mobilization and influence in these disputes—whether by raising awareness of rights or by amplifying conflicts and projecting them beyond the local sphere. The generational conflict has also emerged as a key factor deepening these disputes, as older generations—firmly attached to customs and traditions—hold different perceptions from younger generations, who adopt new values linked to urbanization and economic openness.

The interplay of these factors with customary heritage and the modern legal framework has turned the conflict over the possession of **Aarch** lands into a complex social phenomenon, reflecting the challenges of reconciling past and present, as well as tribal affiliation and the requirements of the modern state. This raises the central research question:

What are the dimensions of the tribal conflict over land possession among the Aarch in the context of social change in the Djelfa region?

Research Objectives

- To analyze the historical context of **Aarch** lands in the Djelfa region and their role in shaping tribal identity and social relations.
- To identify the social and economic factors that have contributed to the emergence and exacerbation of conflicts over possession, particularly in the shift from rural to urban life.
- To examine the impact of technology and modern means of communication in transmitting and either reinforcing or mitigating disputes.
- To study the influence of generational conflict on approaches to land-related disputes, between adherence to traditional customs and the adoption of modern values.
- To extract the social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions resulting from these disputes within the local community.

1.The Historical and Conceptual Dimension of Aarch Lands

Aarch lands are one of the foundational pillars of the social and economic structure of tribal communities in Algeria, particularly in regions with pastoral and agricultural characteristics, such as the Wilaya of Djelfa. They represent inherited collective ownership in which rights are linked more to genealogical affiliation with the **Aarch** than to modern individual property ownership. For centuries, these lands have provided the framework for organizing economic life, a source of social solidarity, and the stage for both internal and external conflicts throughout history.

1.1. The Historical Dimension of Aarch Lands

The origins of the **Aarch** lands concept predate the colonial period, when land in Algerian tribal culture was regarded as a sacred component of identity. It was not merely seen as a means of subsistence but as a symbol of honor, authority, and status within the community (Haji, 2018). The management of such lands was governed by agreed-upon customs and traditions, supervised by a council of elders or sheikhs, ensuring fairness in distribution and sustainability of resources.

With the French colonial invasion in 1830, the land ownership structure was radically

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transformed. Colonial authorities implemented policies to confiscate communal lands and convert them into private properties or place them under the control of European settlers, through decrees such as the Sénatus-Consulte of 1863 and 1873. Lamboub (2021) described this period as a moment of dismantling the solidarity structure of the **Aarch**, as land dispossession undermined the system of values that ensured the cohesion of the group.

Following independence in 1962, the Algerian state partially re-recognized the specificity of certain forms of collective ownership, while seeking to integrate them into the modern legal framework. However, the issue persisted due to the ambiguity of legal texts and their incomplete alignment with local customs, keeping disputes over **Aarch** lands alive to this day—particularly in areas such as Djelfa, where historical legacies intersect with a changing social reality.

From a conceptual standpoint, **Aarch** lands are defined as joint property that cannot be individually transferred, with all members of the **Aarch** considered partners in their use according to customary rules. This characteristic distinguishes them from private properties governed by civil law and gives them a deep identity-related dimension—turning any dispute over them into more than just a material conflict, but a challenge to the collective symbolism of the community.

1.2. Definition of Aarch Lands

It is noteworthy that the term **Aarch** lands is unique to Algeria, unlike Morocco, where the equivalent is called *collective lands* (*Aradi al-Jomoua* or *Slaali lands*), or Tunisia, where they were historically referred to as *Arab lands* before becoming *socialist lands*. Despite the different names, the three share the same historical origins. This makes it important to explore the source of the term and its legal meaning.

The terms *Aarch*, *Jomoua*, and *Arab* are all of Arabic origin, indicating that Arab conquerors likely applied these names to lands inhabited by Berber tribes. The diversity of names in Algeria—such as *Aarch* and *Sabiqa*—may be attributed to dialectal variations or the succession of Islamic states, which at times established capitals in the eastern regions (e.g., the Hammadid state) and at other times in the west (e.g., the Zayyanid state). This historical fluidity likely explains the regional differences in terminology for such lands.

1.2.1. Linguistic Definition

In central and eastern Algeria, this type of land is referred to as **Aarch** lands, while in the west, it is called *Aradi al-Sabiqa* (precedent lands), the plural being *Sawabiq* or *Sabiqat*. The term *Sabiqa*—feminine of *Sabiq*—means "progressive" or "first in an endeavor." In linguistic terms, *Sabiqa* denotes precedence in an activity or achievement (Jerjes, 1996; Na'meh, Madour & Ajeel, 2000). Thus, the *Sabiqa* lands refer to the lands of the first possessor—whether an individual family or a group of families—that settled in a certain territory before others, eventually expanding into a clan (*A'ashira*) or tribe (*Qabila*).

Professor Youssef Jabari defines the term as follows:

Les terres Arch ce sont les terres des tribus, ou des premiers occupants

Translation: **Aarch** lands are the lands of the tribe, or the lands of the first occupants.

The expression **Aarch** lands consists of two words—"lands" (*Aradi*) and "Aarch"—each of which requires clarification of its linguistic and terminological connotations.

- **Land**: In Arabic, "Ard" (plural "Aradi") refers to the surface soil layer

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tilled by agricultural tools (Dar al-Mashreq, 2018).

- **Aarch**: This term appears in various forms in the Qur'an, such as *al-'Arsh*, *ya'rishuha*, and *ma'rushat*, carrying meanings including built structures, raised vine trellises, or roofs. In linguistic usage, *Aarch* also refers to a royal throne—symbolizing authority and dignity.

1.2.2. Terminological Definition

Despite the persistence of tribal systems in the Maghreb and Algeria, the structure and terminology remain of Arabic origin, raising doubts about their exact historical authenticity even among Arab tribes themselves (Bouziyani, 2013). The **Aarch** is embedded within a multi-tiered structure, including tribes (*Qabila*), clans (*A'ashira*), lineages (*Fakhdh*), and families, all linked by kinship and geographic proximity.

In this sense, **Aarch** lands are territories occupied by the clan or tribe as a socio-cultural entity, allowing it to engage in livelihood activities aligned with its customs and traditions.

1.2.3. Legal Definition

Legally, **Aarch** lands are communal properties exploited collectively, where each member has a share according to need, with management entrusted to the sheikh or tribal leader, or to the communal council (Saidouni, n.d.). They are used in two ways:

-Collective exploitation by the entire **Aarch** as common property.

-Individual exploitation regulated and distributed according to customary rules.

Their current legal status can be summarized as:

- Classified as state-owned private domain.
- Used in common (shared tenure).
- Agricultural and pastoral in nature—though portions have been converted into municipal lands or private ownership under colonial-era legislation.

Thus, a comprehensive definition would be:

Aarch lands are agricultural and pastoral lands belonging to the state's private domain, possessed in common by members of an **Aarch** for perpetual use under local customs. Portions may also be exploited through agricultural concessions or reclamation projects, while significant areas have been transformed into municipal or privately owned lands.

Got it — I'll translate your **entire Section 2** into English, keeping:

- The numbering **(2.)** exactly as in the original.
- The internal subdivisions (as natural paragraph breaks, since they're not numbered).
- All **citations** preserved in parentheses exactly as they appear.
- Terms like أراضي العرش left as **Aradi al-'Arsh** (transliterated) to preserve their cultural/legal specificity.
- Footnote-like references embedded as in your Arabic.

2. The Nature of Co-ownership and Possession in Aradi alArsh

To begin with, *co-ownership* (*shuyu'*) is a legal term linguistically derived from the verb *sha'a* (*shuyu'an*, *mushā'an*), meaning "shared" or "common." For example, *mushā' al-dār* refers to property that is jointly owned by several people and has not been divided, containing undivided shares.

In co-ownership, each partner is considered the owner of all the powers over every atom of the

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jointly owned property, in proportion to their share in the asset. Thus, each has the authority to use, exploit, and dispose of any part of it, with the others enjoying exactly the same rights within the limits of their respective shares (ʿAbd al-Bārī, n.d.).

The sources of co-ownership are multiple and varied, the most important being inheritance, bequest, contract (LARROUMET), appropriation, prescription, pre-emption, accession, and so on. The principal source of co-ownership in Aradi al-'Arsh is inheritance. Since their inception, the right of perpetual usufruct has been transferred through successive generations by inheritance. Thus, the holder of an Aradi al-'Arsh parcel typically inherits the right of usufruct from his father, who inherited it from his grandfather, and so forth. It should be noted that inheritance rights are traditionally reserved for the male line, excluding females. Consequently, male siblings within the same family are co-owners of the land inherited from their deceased father, who in turn inherited it from their grandfather along with his brothers, and so on. At present, however, there are occasional cases where the right of inheritance in Aradi al-'Arsh passes to daughters, though such instances are rare. In all cases, if the daughter's husband is an outsider to the ʿarsh, he is allowed to exploit the land—thereby breaching the social exclusivity of this collective entity.

As for the possibility of dividing Aradi al-'Arsh, there is a discrepancy between what is stipulated by law and what is practiced in reality. The legal prohibition of physical division—which would entail dividing the ownership right of Aradi al-'Arsh—is logical, since the state retains ownership of the *raqaba* (bare title), while members of the ʿarsh have only possession and usufruct. Therefore, they are not entitled to divide what does not form part of their patrimonial assets, as division constitutes an act of disposal over patrimonial rights.

With regard to the right of perpetual usufruct exercised over these lands, there is no legal provision granting their holders the right to divide it. The Algerian Civil Code addresses the division of common property in Articles 720 to 740, but these articles focus entirely on the division of common property subject to ownership rights, without addressing the division of other *real rights*, including usufruct.

In terms of possession, the absence of a legal framework regulating co-ownership in Aradi al-'Arsh creates numerous legal difficulties—such as determining the genuine possessor of an Aradi al-'Arsh parcel during investigations carried out by specialized committees under the Agricultural Concession Law, or establishing the precise boundaries for exercising usufruct rights between members of the same ʿarsh or family. These issues often escalate into violent disputes. Indeed, there have been recorded bloody clashes between families within the same ʿarsh—brothers, cousins, and other relatives—particularly within a single extended family, where the problem of dividing land inherited from a father or grandfather erupts. Such conflicts often lead to long-standing hostilities that persist for decades and are inherited by subsequent generations of the disputants' descendants.

Disagreements typically arise over the rotation of land use or over the physical division of land—whether due to disputes about the area (e.g., one party claiming to have received a smaller share than another) or about land quality (e.g., one party asserting they were given less fertile or less productive land than their counterpart(s)). This is especially

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contentious since the fertility of Aradi al-'Arsh can vary even within the same locality: some plots are suitable for agriculture, while others—due to excessive stones or the *bouri* (rain-fed) nature of the soil—are fit only for grazing. For instance, a given *ṭaba* (a subdivision of Aradi al-'Arsh belonging to one family, divided into *ṭabā'ib*, plural of *ṭaba*, through *arsām*, plural of *rasm*) may have been cleared of stones and cultivated, while another adjacent parcel belonging to the same ʿarsh remains uncultivated. Such disparities can trigger disputes that escalate to violence or sow long-lasting enmity within a single family.

3. The Legal System and Possession of Aradi al-ʿArsh

Aradi al-ʿArsh, as a form of collective ownership, occupy a problematic position within the Algerian legal framework. On one hand, legislation recognizes certain forms of communal ownership; on the other hand, the state seeks to integrate them into the system of individual or public property.

Algerian law defines several categories of property, including private property, public property, and *"amwāl jamāʿiyya"* (collective property). In principle, Aradi al-ʿArsh fall into this latter category; however, their precise legal status remains ambiguous due to variations in local customs from one region to another (Belkacem, 2019).

Since independence, a number of legislative instruments have been enacted to regulate land, most notably the 1971 Agrarian Revolution Law, which aimed to redistribute land to farmers. Yet, it faced major difficulties in implementation on Aradi al-ʿArsh due to local communities' refusal to abandon their customary system. In subsequent decades, laws such as the 1990 Land Orientation Law attempted to establish a clearer framework for land possession, but these efforts ran up against a complex social reality.

In the Djelfa region, conflicts over possession of Aradi al-ʿArsh take multiple forms, ranging from court disputes to on-the-ground confrontations between different *ʿurūsh*. Administrative and judicial authorities often fail to settle these disputes definitively, since a legal ruling does not erase the customary considerations that shape local perceptions of land. Lamboub (2021) notes that the absence of precise cadastral maps and the contradiction between possession certificates exacerbate the situation, leading to protracted conflicts.

Moreover, the Algerian legal system does not grant full recognition to tribal customs in land management, instead treating them as a secondary source compared to written legal texts. This tension between modern legal references and traditional customary references creates a legal vacuum that some exploit to seize large tracts of land illegally, thereby intensifying disputes.

It should be noted that although Aradi al-ʿArsh fall under the category of private property of the state, they are differentiated according to their characteristics: agricultural Aradi al-ʿArsh, pastoral Aradi al-ʿArsh, and Aradi al-ʿArsh belonging to municipalities. The latter two types are subject to specific regulations enacted in accordance with their respective functions; however, this has not altered their nature, as all three are classified as state property. At the same time, many tracts of Aradi al-ʿArsh were transformed into individual property, with ownership deeds granted to holders by the French colonial authorities. As a result, their legal nature differs, as they fall under the private property of *ʿarsh* members who benefited from partial or comprehensive land investigations. In cadastral offices and surveying

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administrations, these lands are referred to as *terres titrées*.

The law grants special protection to state property in both its forms—civil protection in particular is guaranteed by the State Property Law, reinforced by judicial precedent. The rationale lies in the role the state plays, through its land assets, in driving development and employing them whenever the public interest so requires. Furthermore, the state, as owner, enjoys exceptional intervention measures to protect its property and remove encroachments, including the ability to intervene immediately, by force if necessary, to recover possession without waiting for a judicial ruling (Babbaʿ, 2007, p. 5).

– Legal basis for protection

One of the key consequences of classifying Aradi al-ʿArsh as private property of the state is their subjection to the provisions of Law No. 30/90 on national property. It is worth examining the extent to which these lands benefit—by virtue of being state private property—from the protection granted to national property under both the Civil Code and the State Property Law.

Under the Civil Code, Article 689 states: "State property may not be disposed of, seized, or acquired by prescription" (Ben Shaʿbān, 1996). The phrase "State property" in the wording of the article is broadly inclusive, covering both public and private state property, as well as both immovable and movable assets belonging to the state. Since Aradi al-ʿArsh are part of the state's private national property, they are therefore inalienable, imprescriptible, and immune from seizure.

Under Law No. 30/90 on national property, Article 4 (before amendment) provided:

"Public national property is inalienable, imprescriptible, and immune from seizure. The management and disposal of movable and immovable property belonging to the state's private national property are subject to this law and to applicable legislative provisions."

From the text of Article 4, it is understood that public national property enjoys absolute legal protection, whereas such absolute protection does not apply to private national property (Yahyāwī, 2004, p. 71). Notably, the provision contains no explicit prohibition on acquiring private national property, nor on seizing it; indeed, it expressly allows its disposal under the terms of the law.

Article 4 was subsequently subject to a minor amendment. As amended by Law No. 14/08 supplementing and amending Law No. 30/90, the article now reads:

"Public national property is inalienable, imprescriptible, and immune from seizure, and is managed in accordance with this law, taking into account the provisions of specific legislative texts. Private national property is imprescriptible and immune from seizure, except for contributions allocated to public economic institutions, in which case such protection is lifted. The management and disposal of movable and immovable property belonging to the state's private national property are subject to this law, taking into account the provisions of other legislative texts."

This amendment brought no substantive change regarding the full protection of public property, but it did reinforce protection of private national property by prohibiting its acquisition through prescription and shielding it from seizure—except in the single case where such property is allocated to public economic enterprises, in which event protection is lifted and both acquisition by prescription and seizure are permitted. The amendment also reaffirmed the permissibility

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of disposing of such property under the terms of the State Property Law and other applicable legislation.

4. Social Change and Its Impact on the Conflict

In recent decades, the Djelfa region has experienced profound social and economic transformations that have directly affected the nature of the conflict over *Ard al-'Arsh* (tribal lands).

The first of these transformations is the shift from rural to urban living. Djelfa has witnessed waves of internal migration from pastoral areas toward urban centers, in search of opportunities for education, employment, and services. This shift has altered lifestyles and reduced the direct connection to the land for certain groups. At the same time, however, it has turned the land into an attractive source of investment income, especially with urban expansion and the rising value of real estate (Ben Massoud, 2020).

The second transformation lies in the spread of technology and modern means of communication, which have played a dual role in the conflict. On one hand, they have provided platforms for mobilization and incitement in tribal disputes, with documents, photos, and videos being circulated to prove or disprove ownership claims. On the other hand, they have facilitated access to legal information and maps, enabling some individuals to defend their rights more effectively.

The third transformation is the generational conflict within the *'Arsh* itself. The older generations cling to traditional customs in managing the land, while younger generations tend to adopt modern legal or investment solutions, such as dividing the land and selling it, or exploiting it for new economic projects. This difference in vision sometimes leads to internal divisions that weaken the collective position of the *'Arsh* in confronting external parties.

These three transformations, along with other factors such as urban expansion and demographic pressure, have reshaped the landscape of the conflict over *Ard al-'Arsh* in Djelfa, making it more complex and intertwined than ever before.

1.4. Theoretical Approaches to Social Change

The theoretical approaches addressing social change have been diverse since the classical phase of sociology's development up to the present day. Each approach is grounded in its own conceptual basis for defining social change and analyzing related phenomena. Among the most prominent are:

First: Classical Theories

The theory of social progress views social change as proceeding along an upward trajectory, meaning that change is evolutionary and that society advances through specific stages. Each new stage reached by society is considered better than the one before, implying that societies are in constant progress. Notably, this theory generalizes such progress to all societies (Al-Daqqas, 1996). Among its most prominent proponents are Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Condorcet, and Auguste Comte.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Rousseau's main ideas on the theory of social progress are presented in his well-known work *The Social Contract* (*Contrat social*), in which he explains human life as passing through four stages (Al-Daqqas, 1996):

1. **The stage of natural life** – a period during which humans were subject to nature and enjoyed freedom.
2. **The stage of private property** – marked by manual agricultural

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production, settlement, and the formation of families. Customs and traditions began to crystallize into essential and binding values in individual life.

3. **The stage of inequality** – characterized by increased competition and conflict among individuals and groups, with power shifting to the strongest. This led to changes in agreements and the formation of a political society under a supreme authority — the state.
4. **The contractual stage** – the establishment of a political system, selection of rulers, and the formation of the state, which plays a key role in driving social change.

Condorcet (1743–1794)

Condorcet is considered one of the leading advocates of the theory of social progress, asserting that humanity advances in a straight, upward line toward improvement and refinement. He believed that culture and education are fundamental determinants for achieving progress, prosperity, and societal advancement. Condorcet attempted to outline nine stages of social change forming a straight line toward progress (Ali, 2001):

- The stage of hunting
- The stage of herding
- The stage of agriculture
- The stage of Greek science and philosophy
- The stage of Roman civilization
- The stage of scientific stagnation
- The stage of printing invention
- The stage of intellectual liberation and religious reform
- The stage of the French Revolution

Auguste Comte (1779–1857)

Comte was among the founders and genuine proponents of this theory. His perspective centered on the idea that social change occurs continuously along an upward path. He argued that the principles of social change lie in *social statics* — which include social nature (religion, art, family, property, social organization) and human nature (instincts, emotions, intellect) — and in *social dynamics*, which encompass the laws of social change and associated factors such as levels of discontent, lifestyle, population growth, and the degree of social and intellectual development (Abu Tahaoun, n.d.).

His evolutionary vision of society is expressed through the transition across three major stages, known as the *Law of the Three Stages*, whereby society necessarily progresses toward an ideal state (R. Bouricahd, 1990, p. 70):

- The theological and military stage
- The metaphysical stage
- The scientific and industrial stage

Second: Theories of the Social Cycle

All proponents of cyclical theory agree that the process of social change follows a circular pattern, ending where it began. According to this view, social life moves in a regular motion, and social change resembles the growth and eventual end of a living organism (Al-Daqqas, 1996). Proponents believe that all living beings follow a regular cyclical form, which applies equally to social phenomena such as the emergence of educational, economic, and political systems, followed by their disappearance and replacement according to societal needs. Notable figures in this approach include Ibn Khaldun, Oswald Spengler, and Vico Toynbee.

Ibn Khaldun

In his seminal work *Al-Muqaddimah*, the renowned scholar ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun presents his perspective on change as it affects the state, describing the stages that distinguish it and showing how state

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institutions evolve from one generation to the next. He writes:

"We have said that the lifespan of a state usually does not exceed three generations, because the first generation retains the qualities of desert life — its toughness, austerity, alienation, and solidarity. Thus, the spirit of tribal cohesion is preserved, their determination is sharp, they are feared, and they dominate others. The second generation, however, shifts from desert life to civilization, from austerity to affluence, and from collective glory to individual pride, with the rest growing lazy in its pursuit... As for the third generation, they forget the era of desert toughness as if it never existed, lose the sweetness of glory and solidarity, and neglect protection, advocacy, and claims... so the state collapses with all it holds" (Ibn Khaldun, 1984, p. 221).

He further asserts:

"In general, the lifespan of a state does not exceed three generations, and a generation is the average lifespan of a single individual" (*Muqaddimah*, 1983).

For Ibn Khaldun, social change is a continuous, uninterrupted process, and he generalized his theory to all societies. He developed numerous laws of change, emphasizing its mechanisms and outcomes, reflecting the social realities of his time. This progression of society through its stages reflects the historical laws of societal evolution since antiquity (Al-Khouli, 1985, p. 28).

Oswald Spengler

Spengler, another prominent figure in this school, likened civilizations to living organisms that pass through cyclical stages: childhood, youth, maturity, old age, and finally death. These successive stages form part of the general process of social change, with each requiring specific needs to be met in various domains.

This theory comprises two interrelated strands: the *partial cyclical theory*, which studies a specific social phenomenon within a society to demonstrate its circular trajectory ending at its starting point; and the *general cyclical theory*, which applies the same logic to broader societal structures (Al-Khouli, 1985, p. 29).

Cyclical theories emphasize that societies pass through alternating phases — decline and deterioration, followed by phases of glory and prosperity — a framework often referred to as the theories of rise and fall (Maryam et al., 1993, p. 13).

Third: Evolutionary Theories

The evolutionary theory begins with a basic premise indicating that human societies progress along an upward trajectory toward gradual development and complexity. The initial stage is characterized by primitivism, simplicity, cooperation among individuals, and homogeneity. These features gradually disappear until society reaches a more complex stage, marked by diversity, heterogeneity, division of labor, and specialization.

Proponents of the idea of evolution, since the nineteenth century, have argued for the spontaneity of transformations in societies, which always occur through the law of progress — from primitivity to modernity — in specific, predictable steps (Magdy, 2005, p. 115).

Among the pioneers of this theory is Charles Darwin, whose work *On the Origin of Species* had a significant influence on the emergence of this perspective, as well as the English scholar Herbert Spencer, one of the most prominent representatives of the evolutionary approach in sociology. Spencer likens the development of society to that of an organic organism, considering that in both cases,

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evolution proceeds from homogeneity to heterogeneity.

Fourth: Functional Theory

The functional theory attaches great importance to understanding the phenomenon of social change. It explains this by stating that social change occurs within a society as a result of two types of factors:

- **Internal factors within the system**: arising from individual differences, as each generation differs from the one that follows it, due to transformations and changes occurring within society.
- **External factors**: resulting from contact between members of one society and those of another.

Among the leading figures in functional theory is Émile Durkheim, who sought to explain social life by emphasizing that function is what ensures the maintenance of social order as a system. For example, religion has the function of establishing a set of values that enhance the unity and cohesion of its believers, while education functions to transmit culture from one generation to the next.

Fifth: Structural Functional Theories

Core idea: Society is viewed as an integrated system composed of interrelated parts (institutions, roles, values) that work together to maintain stability and balance. Social change occurs when the balance of one part is disrupted, prompting the system to react in order to restore equilibrium.

Key concepts:

- **Social structure**: the organized framework that defines relationships between individuals and institutions.
- **Function**: the role each institution or element plays in maintaining the stability of society.
- **Social integration**: the degree of interconnectedness among the components of society.
- **Equilibrium**: a state of harmony among the elements of the social structure.
- **Disequilibrium**: a state that prompts changes aimed at restoring harmony.
- **Adaptation**: the system's response to internal and external changes.

Social change according to this theory: Change occurs gradually and slowly, and is viewed as a necessary response to fix dysfunction and maintain the continuity of the system.

Example: In the case of the conflict of the العرشover land, if the dispute disrupts the institution of governance, the other institutions (such as tribal leadership or economic structures) will act to restore equilibrium through reforms or settlements that preserve the continuity of the social system.

Sixth: Cultural Theories

Core idea: Culture (values, beliefs, language, symbols) is the main driver of social change. Change occurs when cultural elements shift or are transmitted from one society to another.

Key concepts:

- **Culture:** The symbolic and normative framework that guides individual behavior.
- **Cultural Change:** A transformation in values, beliefs, or behavioral patterns.
- **Cultural Borrowing:** Adoption of cultural elements from other societies.
- **Cultural Diffusion:** The spread of innovations or ideas from one society to another.
- **Cultural Lag:** The unequal pace of change between material and non-material cultural elements.

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- **Innovation:** The introduction of a new idea or practice into culture.

Social change according to these theories: Often begins as a cultural change that spreads to other components of society. The pace may be fast or slow, depending on the society's acceptance of the change. *Example:* In the العرش land conflict, change might begin when values and beliefs about ownership and legitimacy shift — for instance, if military power replaces lineage or customary law as the source of legitimacy, thus altering the course of the conflict and the structure of authority in society.

Seventh: The Historical Approach

Core idea: This approach studies social change through the sequence and accumulation of historical events over time. It also involves understanding the present in light of the past, with a focus on the continuity or transformation of social and political structures.

Mechanism of change:

- Change occurs as a result of the accumulation of historical factors (wars, alliances, crises, economic or political transformations).
- Previous decisions and events leave a long-term impact reflected in current realities.

Example from the العرش land conflict:

- The current dispute between two العرش over a particular piece of land is an extension of a long series of historical conflicts and alliances over the same area.
- Events such as old unhonored treaties, colonial-era divisions, or ancestral conflicts have formed the backdrop that explains the ignition of today's conflict.

2.4. Factors of Social Change

Many scholars, particularly in anthropology and sociology, have sought to unify the concept of social change. This has also led to identifying the most important factors that interact to cause change in societies. Below, we present the key factors of social change:

- **Environmental and Geographical Factor:**

The environmental and geographical setting of any society significantly affects its development and growth, since nature itself is a necessary element for human life and social development.

Human life change is a continuous process of interaction between individuals and their environment. Through this interaction, the environmental context influences social life changes in all domains. Mechanisms of integration and interaction between social system patterns and the relationships, values, ideas, principles, customs, and traditions are thus defined. Rural nature has its specific influence and contribution to social change, which differs from urban settings.

Similarly, the nature of rural society—largely dependent on agriculture as a primary source of livelihood, especially local and subsistence farming—is influenced by the geographical nature of the countryside, whether mountainous, plain, desert, or hilly. This influences how rural people think about living and earning a living, which in turn relates to social change.

Among scholars focusing on natural environment, the renowned thinker Ibn Khaldun emphasized the impact of climate on the social and psychological phenomena of populations. He regarded the natural environment as the fundamental factor shaping human activity, making him a representative of the ecological theory of social change (Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 1983).

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- **Economic Factor:**

The economic aspect is considered one of the fundamental pillars of the progress of peoples and societies. Without it, the desired change cannot be achieved even if other change elements exist.

Marx viewed the economic structure as the foundational base upon which law, politics, and other social phenomena rest. He asserted that economic change leads to social change—that is, changes in the means of production lead to changes in the social structure.

According to Bottomore, Marxist theory attributes a special place to two key elements in social life: the growth of technology, the productive forces, and the relations between social classes.

Each stage in the development of productive forces corresponds to a specific mode of production, and a particular system that the ruling class works to establish and support to maintain class relations (Bottomore, 1981).

- **Cultural Factor:**

Human development in any society involves cultural factors playing a crucial and significant role. Changes in customs, traditions, values, and certain perceptions act as facilitating factors for development, change, and modernization across all sectors. Contemporary societies are measured by their level of development, prosperity, and positive change through the social structures and behaviors of individuals, as manifested through family, school, media, and other social institutions. Christopher argued that the dynamic influence of culture appears in its driving force leading social change movements (Dawsori, 1961, p.14).

- **Technological Factor:**

Technological change has broad effects in defining societal problems and the functions of society from economic, social, and urban perspectives. The industrial city led to the emergence of mechanical technology, market economy, and an industrial society. The industrial mode of production also resulted in an economic organization affecting all parts of society, which in turn caused technological-material change to influence social institutions such as the household, family, and school.

5. Sociological Approaches to the Dimensions of the Tribal Conflict over Throne Lands

The conflict over the throne lands in Djelfa can be approached from multiple sociological perspectives, each revealing different dimensions of the issue.

From the **structural-functional perspective**, the conflict represents a disruption in the social system, where customary rules clash with modern legislation, threatening social cohesion. From the **conflict theory** perspective, the dispute can be seen as a struggle over resources between groups with divergent interests, employing force, influence, or law to achieve their gains (Karim, 2017).

The **cultural approach** reveals that land is not merely an economic resource, but a bearer of symbols and meanings that shape the identity of individuals and groups. Therefore, the loss of land signifies the loss of part of the collective self, which explains the intensity and persistence of these conflicts over time.

The **historical-comparative approach** can also be applied by comparing the case of Djelfa with other regions such as Aurès or Hoggar, where similarities in the relationship between land and identity appear, yet the nature of solutions adopted to resolve disputes differs.

The tribal conflict over land is considered one of the most prominent social and political phenomena in both traditional and

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contemporary societies. It transcends being merely a dispute over material resources to become a field where factors of social structure, cultural values, historical memory, and political and economic influence intersect. In this context, sociological approaches provide a theoretical framework to understand this phenomenon by analyzing it from various angles including: the structural-functional approach, the cultural approach, the historical approach, the conflict/political-economic approach, and the symbolic interactionist approach.

We will examine these in detail as follows:

1.5. Structural-Functional Approach

This approach starts from viewing society as an integrated system composed of interconnected institutions and roles, where each element performs a specific function ensuring the stability of the whole. In tribal societies, land is not merely a livelihood resource but also performs economic functions (agriculture and pastoralism), social functions (reproduction of ties among the members of the tribe), and symbolic functions (legitimacy of leadership and social status).

When a dispute arises over land ownership or boundaries, this structural balance is disrupted, prompting other institutions—such as the tribal council of elders, traditional arbitration mechanisms, or state authorities—to intervene to restore harmony. Such intervention is usually gradual and aims to maintain the continuity of the social system rather than radically changing it.

This can be observed in practice, for example, in a conflict between two clans over a grazing land plot, which might be resolved through mediation by local elders, leading to a redefinition of usage rules without undermining the existing tribal hierarchy.

2.5. The Cultural Approach

This approach focuses on the symbolic and meaningful dimension of the conflict, where land is understood as part of the collective identity of the tribe and a repository of values and traditions. In some contexts, the value of land may transcend its economic return to become a symbol of dignity or independence.

Changes in the conflict may arise from cultural transformations, such as when the criteria for legitimacy shift from lineage and inheritance to the ability to impose control by force, or to the legitimacy of the modern state's law. Collective memory also plays a role in fueling the dispute, as history and myths are invoked to justify positions. For example, in the ongoing conflict between two tribes, stories of ancestors and past battles are recalled in popular discourse to affirm the "historical right" to the land, reinforcing persistence in demands even when the economic cost is high.

3.5. The Historical Approach

The historical approach views the conflict as the product of long-term accumulations, where prior political, economic, and social events form the structural basis of the current dispute. Colonial powers' territorial divisions, old treaties, or environmental crises that led to migration are all elements influencing the contemporary conflict map.

An example is the resurgence of the current conflict between two tribes, tracing back to a boundary demarcation treaty signed during the colonial era that was subsequently violated, creating divergent interpretations of legitimate borders.

4.5. The Conflict / Political-Economic Approach

This approach situates the conflict within the framework of the unequal distribution of resources and power. From a Marxist perspective, land is a strategic economic

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resource, and control over it grants political and social influence to its holders.

The land dispute between tribes is seen here as a result of competition over wealth accumulation and extending dominance, constituting part of the reproduction of relations of hegemony and inequality. As a practical example: a tribe owning fertile lands uses them to bolster its political position at the expense of another tribe dependent on marginal lands, generating recurring tensions that escalate into open conflict.

5.5. The Symbolic Interactionist Approach

This approach emphasizes the meanings formed through the daily interactions between the conflicting parties. Symbols, discourses, and social rituals contribute to constructing the image of the "other" and defining attitudes towards them.

Often, negotiated formulas or celebrations play a role in reshaping relations and creating opportunities for resolution. For instance, during truces between tribes, joint feasts or ceremonies symbolizing goodwill may be organized, helping to rebuild trust despite the persistence of fundamental disagreements.

5. Conclusion

The conflict over land among tribes in the city of Djelfa is not merely a material dispute over a limited economic resource; rather, it reflects a complex social structure in which multiple historical, cultural, economic, and political dimensions intersect, alongside the symbols and meanings that grant the land a value far beyond its material worth. Sociological analysis of this phenomenon reveals that it carries deep roots embedded in local and regional history, as land has long been linked to the tribe's identity and status, the concept of sovereignty within the tribal domain, and the capacity for continuity and inheritance across generations.

From the structural-functional perspective, land can be seen as a central pillar of the social system in Djelfa, performing multiple functions including agricultural and pastoral production, resource redistribution, and ensuring cohesion among tribe members. Any disruption in land ownership or usage directly impacts the broader social structure, prompting various actors—from tribal elders and dignitaries to local authorities—to seek mechanisms for restoring balance. These mechanisms are often traditional in nature, relying more on customs and mediation than on written law.

The cultural approach highlights the symbolic dimension of land in the collective imagination of Djelfa's inhabitants. Land is not merely property; it is part of identity and collective memory, viewed as an ancestral heritage and an embodiment of dignity and existence. In this context, claiming or defending land becomes a matter of honor no less significant than economic necessity. This dimension contributes to intensifying land disputes, as folk tales, genealogies, and myths are employed to solidify alleged rights and bolster the legitimacy of positions.

Similarly, the historical approach reveals that many current disputes in Djelfa are extensions of earlier conflicts rooted in the colonial era, when administrative borders were redrawn and lands redistributed in ways that ignored traditional social structures. Post-independence economic and political transformations also played a role in reproducing these disputes, whether through agricultural reclamation projects that failed to consider tribal balances or land policies that sometimes rekindled rather than resolved conflicts. This underscores that understanding the present is impossible without revisiting the

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past and tracing the sequence of events that shaped land ownership patterns.

The conflict/political-economic approach clearly explains this phenomenon by viewing land as a strategic resource that confers economic influence and political status to those who control it. Within this framework, disputes turn into quintessential power struggles, with each party striving to enhance its position within the local power hierarchy through control of the most valuable resources. This leads to the emergence of alliances and divisions, where economic considerations intertwine with political ambitions, creating a complex landscape of competition for influence.

The symbolic interactionist approach provides deeper insight into the daily dynamics of the conflict. Stereotypes, discourses, and rituals accompanying each round of dispute play a fundamental role in shaping and entrenching attitudes. Negotiations and symbolic initiatives such as joint feasts or temporary truces are sometimes used as mechanisms for building trust, but such efforts may be fragile if not supported by radical solutions to the core problem.

Taken together, these approaches demonstrate that the land conflict in Djelfa is multidimensional, representing a complex interaction between a deep historical heritage, a cohesive yet sensitive social structure, deeply rooted cultural values, and volatile political and economic balances. Therefore, any attempt to resolve these disputes must consider this multiplicity and adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates sociological, historical, and legal analyses, alongside recognition of the symbolic values that grant land its profound meaning in the collective consciousness of the population.

The success of any mediation or reform initiative requires building genuine trust bridges between parties, enhancing transparency in land documentation and distribution procedures, and involving local community representatives in decision-making processes. Solutions imposed from outside Djelfa's social and cultural context often fail because they overlook the intricate structure of inter-tribal relationships. Conversely, solutions based on a comprehensive understanding of this structure and that leverage traditional arbitration mechanisms—updated in accordance with modern law—may represent a genuine step toward sustainable stability.

Thus, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of tribal land conflict in Djelfa constitutes a living laboratory for understanding social change in traditionally structured societies and confirms the need for concerted research, fieldwork, and political efforts to formulate solutions that respect local particularities, history, and identity, without neglecting the demands of development and social justice.

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