The Sociological History of Tribal Formation in the Algerian Countryside

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Abstract

This study explores the tribal and social structure of the Algerian countryside and its historical transformations from the colonial period to the post-independence era. It analyzes the relationship between the tribe and the state, as well as the impact of economic and social changes on rural consciousness. Adopting a historical-sociological approach, the research draws on academic texts and references (including works by Frantz Fanon, Mostafa Al-Achraf, Mohamed Essouidi, and Al-Houari Addi) to understand the dynamics of the transition from the traditional tribal system to a modern national society. The study aims to highlight the historical, economic, and political factors that reshaped rural Algeria, demonstrating how the agrarian revolution and rural-to-urban migration contributed to the disintegration of traditional tribal structures. It also examines the effects of these transformations on the family, political awareness, and social relations. The study concludes that Algerian rural society has undergone a gradual shift from tribal loyalty to national belonging; however, patriarchal legacies and economic imbalance continue to shape the course of social modernization.

Keywords: tribe; rural society; Algerian countryside; tribal formation; rural culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tribal classification in Maghreb societies generally represents just one facet of broader social hierarchies and categorizations. The tribal social structure is intersected by other social dynamics whose prominence varies depending on historical periods and the specific features of each group. These

encompass security, religion, social class, and occupation classifications. Conquests, invasions, migrations, and trade have significantly influenced the ethnic diversity of a society marked by geographic mobility. This mobility is reflected in the continuous movement and migration of groups within the Maghreb region and has facilitated social mobility pathways through education, migration, and trade. Nevertheless, social stratification in rural areas and regions dominated by tribal structures tends to be rigid and resistant to change (Boutaleb, 2001, p. 111). Consequently, agrarian society often presents stagnation, maintained by landowning elites who had integrated into administrative circles and tribal leadership. Hence, the countryside generally remained calm during times of political unrest, except in instances of regional demands, such as those witnessed in the Kabylie region.

The development of political awareness and nationalism among the rural class in Algeria and the origins and formation of this political consciousness can be traced back to the early colonial era. The reaction of the rural class was intense, and the 1871 uprising is considered a symbol of the peasants ' resistance. Mustapha Al-Achraf states: "Collective solidarity was the result of an implicit national sentiment though not explicitly articulated, it was nonetheless deeply rooted in people's hearts. It also stemmed from a shared condition: that of the peasant in a country with deep-rooted rural traditions, harsh living conditions, and strong communal cooperation in times of hardship and crisis." It became apparent that the nationalism of Algerian peasants during the early period of colonization was widespread, permeating the entire country and profoundly affecting the people's consciousness. "Although this phenomenon did not crystallize into a clearly defined ideological doctrine, it undoubtedly possessed national dimensions"(Al-Achraf, 1983, p. 135).

These rural traditions persisted in Algerian rural society even after independence. For example, the peasants of the Aurès Mountains, who had inherited a legacy of opposition to authority, experienced a state of unrest. They repeatedly expressed their refusal to submit their fragmented

communities to centralized authority. Their demands, directed at the government of independent Algeria, were almost the opposite of rebellion; they protested against local administration and the slow spread of modernization and its symbols in their region. They took action to fulfill these goals through traditional political mechanisms, seeking to pressure the political authorities into narrowing the gap between their desire for progress and the limited means available. Some villages severed their ties with the administration, and some dissenters, driven by a sense of faith, resorted to violence as the only tool they had available to draw the attention of the state. In such cases, tradition was reborn in the service of goals opposed to tradition. Similarly, in the Kabylie region during the early months following independence, rural communities expressed political demands that embodied regional and tribal aspirations and the Berber democratic spirit. “Peasants, unable to understand how they belonged to a state lacking historical legitimacy, enabled their political elites to organize armed resistance and defy the decisions of the Algerian regime.” (Balandier, 2007, p. 21).

2-1. The Socioeconomic Framework of Rural Life:

The rural agricultural lifestyle pattern dominated the Arab society for a long time, with rural life closely tied to the land. It revolved around the land, the home, the family, the shrines of saints, and places of worship. Rural inhabitants experienced class disparities due to unequal distribution of property, where the society was divided into a minority who owned without working, and a majority who worked without owing. However, the Arab economic system in general is marked by constant change, due to the building of modern state institutions, agricultural reform policies, “migration of labor, increased access to education at different phases, and the spread of political and class awareness(Barakat, 2011, p. 139)

The agricultural revolution that started to be applied in the Algerian countryside on July 17, 1972, is regarded as a significant development process aimed at developing and modernizing the Algerian rural areas in agricultural and pastoral sectors, offering services to the population where they live, and working to reduce the gap between rural and urban areas. As stated in the Charter and Law of the Agricultural Revolution: "The political

and social importance of the agricultural revolution and the effort made to accelerate development impose the implementation of the agricultural revolution. It seeks to eliminate the prevailing economic and cultural backwardness in rural areas".(Al-Suwaidi, 1990, p. 40). The agricultural revolution policy attempted to produce a new logic grounded in distribution justice and adopted the slogan "land for those who cultivate it." From the political regime's perspective, this policy was an extension of the liberation revolution. It aimed to modernize the Algerian countryside and free production from the traditionalism that characterized it during the colonial period, striving to fulfill rapid economic growth. It also sought to extract rural people from the mentality of tribalism by implementing the socialist villages project, which endeavored to bring about social and cultural change, controlling demographic growth, reducing rural migration, and moving away from tradition and family groupings to become productive organizations and socialist communities. However, many viewed this policy as a reproduction of colonial policies, which involved concentrating the population in specific centers. This strategy, aimed at eliminating the peasant's traditionalism, resulted in puzzling and sometimes painful experiences for the peasants. At the beginning of the 1980s, the private sector regained its position in the Algerian countryside by encouraging individual ownership. It was not part of the Algerian peasant's culture but a product of settlers owning vast agricultural lands. The Algerian rural population represented the hard-working labor force. This economic transition impacted the structure and function of the Algerian family, which had to adapt to new realities imposed by economic and social conditions. As individuals gradually ceased to rely on large families in villages and rural areas due to material or economic dependence and shared activities such as farming and livestock raising, small, independent families emerged, separate from the extended family. This shift even influenced decision-making by the head of the large family, as economic independence was accompanied by intellectual and cultural freedom. "In some families, authority shifted from the father, who controlled and dominated important family decisions because he provided the income, to another active family member who assumed responsibility for decision-making and family organization, resulting in the father's loss of role or authority." (Addi, 1999, p. 99).

2-2. The Socio-Cultural Framework of Rural Life:

The Algerian countryside was targeted by French colonialism from the earliest days of occupation. Due to the economic needs of the colonial regime, particularly in agriculture, its authorities aimed to dismantle the tribal system and replace it with a tightly controlled administrative network. Therefore, the Algerian tribe was in a state of decline, "as the French authorities sought to disrupt the traditional economic fabric and replace the system of values and relationships in the Algerian countryside" (Ben Salem et al., n.d., p. 90)**.**

In their study of the Algerian people's struggle, some historians, particularly the peasant class against colonial rule, tend to interpret it as a conflict between agricultural society and capitalist industrial society. They analyze it through a Marxist approach and emphasize its class dimension. According to Frantz Fanon, the peasant class in colonized countries is the only truly revolutionary class since it has no stake in the existing system and stands to gain everything through revolution. "The hungry, marginalized, and exploited peasant is the one who discovers before others that violence is the most effective means and that power determines the survival or demise of colonialism."(Fanon, 2014, p. 64).

Thus, using force or violence to fulfill individual or collective interests is a rural tradition inherited from the colonial period. Violence in rural society is regarded as a primary means of obtaining or maintaining gains, particularly since security coverage was very weak in the Algerian countryside during the 1970s and 1980s. The rural family is characterized by various features:

- The rural family is patriarchal, with the father holding supreme authority over its members and serving as the source of guidance for all family matters.
- The rural family is marked by collective cooperation and the participation of all members in production and agricultural work.
- The rural family is large and has many children, as rural people tend to marry off their children early and to have numerous offspring to strengthen their household, considering children more as a source of income than as a burden.

- The rural family is a complex unit that encompasses two or more generations living together under one roof, where the grandfather, father, and children share a common lifestyle.

Therefore, social relations in rural society, whether based on cooperation or conflict, exist exclusively among men, and every activity practiced is carried out by males. Women are excluded from playing any role within rural society; they lack any status within this community. This patriarchal system defines social bonds and produces the norms and rules that guide individuals' behaviors. It places the individual within a paternal lineage sought to reproduce itself throughout life. Society is regarded as a group of men who exchange women to reproduce themselves and pass on their names and prestige to their children, who ensure the continuation of their legacy. To reinforce patriarchal culture, traditional society employs religious norms and casts a sacred character on social bonds so that they remain centered around paternal kinship, preventing individuals from forming private lives that would liberate them from the group as independent legal personalities (Addi A.-H. , 1983, p. 14).In traditional or rural Algerian families, spiritual and moral values are significant compared to material values. The value system of Algerian families revolves around honor or sanctity, in addition to chivalry, which is considered sacred and forbidden in the world of men. These values are reproduced from generation to generation and represent the roots of the Arab-Islamic identity.

2-3. The Sociopolitical Framework of the Countryside

There is a duality represented by the tribe and the state, giving rise to various types of relationships, including loyalty, rupture, and conflict. The modern state and modern society are considered extensions of traditional society, where the modern state attempted to eliminate the traditions of tribal loyalties. In Algeria, to avoid conflict with traditional society and to secure the loyalty of the rural population, which until recently remained a significant political base and electoral constituency for the ruling party under the one-party system, the regime realized the necessity of directing

greater political awareness toward the rural base. To ensure that rural development policies entirely fulfilled their objectives, particularly after the implementation of the agricultural revolution at the beginning of the 1970s, it was necessary to establish a strong organization to secure development and mitigate setbacks and negative consequences. This necessitated the establishment of the Algerian National Peasant Unions alongside the party's national organizations to develop the political awareness of deprived peasants so they could consciously achieve their role and help shape the political and social vision of the Algerian nation within the peasants' mindset. "It also sought to foster the scattered efforts of peasants so that they transform into an effective force in the process of economic and social development, embraced and supported by the National Liberation Front Party." (Al-Suwaidi, 1990, p. 142).

The individual inherits his religion, social class, and family position. It is clear that individuals neither change nor abandon their religion, just as they do not change their family, since religion is regarded as a part of their familial heritage. To prevent the appearance of independent elites in Algeria, the ruling elite played a crucial role by establishing the National Liberation Front (FLN) as the sole political party. The FLN served as a vessel into which multiple social organizations were integrated, not to represent the interests of its members independently but to defend state policy. Because of this role, the FLN remained, during most of Algeria's decisive historical moments, a full and complementary partner to the ruling elite, which was deeply rooted in the military and bureaucracy. However, the party failed to articulate a modern social vision of building a state founded on the separation of powers and democratic principles. Furthermore, it could not establish a political structure that could transcend the traditional divisions of Algerian society, whether based on class or region. Maintaining control over the rural class was equated with ensuring political stability for the regime. This rural heritage promoted a culture where violence, even against authority, was viewed as legitimate. Emir Abdelkader, who embodied the tribal and religious aristocracy of deep Algeria, was "educated in Arab-Islamic culture and chose the path of armed

resistance, unlike the urban bourgeoisie."(Zayed, 2005, p. 72).With the birth of the independent state, characterized by nationalism, the traditional social structure began to disintegrate. National identity grew stronger than tribal or clan affiliation, and belief in the state's cultural and symbolic system became more powerful than faith in tribal culture and symbols. In traditional society, religion served as a source of collective awareness, whereas modern society is grounded in the principle of national belonging. To ensure that the national state could implement its policy of neutralizing traditional and conservative forces and freezing the related institutions, such as zawiyas and kuttabs, it focused on fostering new institutions, especially educational establishments. The national state project considered the school a key tool for reshaping society. The state also imposed control over all institutions linked to the traditional social mindset, encompassing zawiyas, mosques, and kuttabs. It managed to dismantle the economic base of the zawiyas, which became increasingly marginalized due to the confiscation of their properties, including religious endowments such as (Al-Awqaf and Al-Ahbas). "Especially with the implementation of the agricultural revolution law and the nationalization of large properties in favor of the state and their redistribution."(Jouiero, 2007, p. 85).The elimination of traditional institutions and their replacement by formal educational institutions such as schools and universities likely led to the decline of popular traditional Islam and the appearance of Salafi and radical movements, which have taken these new institutions as strongholds both in rural areas and cities, as previously mentioned.

3. Sociology of Migration from the Countryside to the City:

Abdelatif Benachenhou defines the phenomenon of rural-to-urban migration as: "a complete abandonment of all agricultural activities, in addition to workers changing their environment" (Benachenhou, n,d,, p. 40). Rural-to-urban migration is the most common type of social change experienced by society, offering individuals an opportunity to escape their deprivation. In the Algerian countryside, people lived in deprivation in multiple areas despite the political regime's efforts and policies to develop the countryside starting from the early years of independence, as mentioned previously. This may be due to the state's greater significance to the

industrial sector than the agricultural sector. This policy created a pull factor for the rural Algerian population and agricultural laborers, hoping for social advancement provided by the new community environment - the city. The phenomenon also extended to the migration of the petite bourgeoisie from the countryside to the city, taking advantage of the vacancies made by the migration of settler capitalism and occupying its place in the more profitable productive sectors in the city compared to agricultural activity. The spread of industry resulted in the attraction of many agricultural workers and unskilled migrants. Given the industry's need for labor, it initially attracted everyone willing to work. This led to new relationships within the industrial sector, with the working class emerging as a rising political force. These rapid changes, which impacted the structural levels of Algerian society, profoundly transformed the social fabric (Al-Riyachi et al., 2001, p. 323).

3-1. History of Migration from the Countryside to the City:

Before independence, migration was primarily marked by external migration, particularly to France. Internal migration from the countryside to the city intensified in 1948, when the urban population exceeded 1.3 million, representing 20% of the total population. Before this date, the urban population percentage did not exceed 16% and rose to 30% by 1960. After independence, the period from 1962 to 1977 was characterized by considerable rural migration due to the mass departure of European settlers in 1962 and the resulting vacuum in the activities they used to perform at all levels. As a result, the urban population increased during that period due to migration from rural areas. According to the general population census data of 1966, there was an increase of 600,000 people, representing internal migration growth over four years, averaging 150,000 people per year.(Al-Suwaidi, 1990, p. 78).

Rural migration developed in relation to overall population growth, as indicated in the following table:

Table No. (01) demonstrates the development of rural migration in Algeria:

Year	Urban Population	Percentage	Rural Population	Percentage	Total Population
1966	3900000	%33	7900000	%67	11800000
1973	5700000	%39	9000000	%61	14700000

1977	7100000	%42	9800000	%58	16900000

Source : (Al-Suwaidi, 1990, p. 78)

It is observed from the table that the population of cities is continuously increasing, while the rural population is gradually decreasing, despite the efforts of the political regime after independence to maintain the social structure of Algerian society. In 1963, Algerian socialism aspired mainly to be a peasant revolution, and Ben Bella, who came from a rural farming background, considered the countryside highly important. He was suspicious of the demands and attitudes of the urban working class. In contrast, the National Liberation Front, influenced by theorists like Frantz Fanon, embraced the idea that revolutions against colonizers primarily originate in rural areas (Agueron, 1982, p. 193). The state has endeavored to balance the countryside and the city through the fair distribution of projects encouraging stability. The following table presents the distribution of housing projects between rural and urban areas.

3-3. The Sociopolitical Effects of Rural Migration to Cities:

After independence, Algerian cities gradually adopted a Western lifestyle. This may be attributed to the reproduction of European cultural heritage in administrative and social practices, despite the clear presence of Bedouin and rural heritage in Algerian society socially and politically. Algerian society resisted colonialism and rejected the modernization values imposed by the colonizers. However, after years of independence, considerable changes occurred in Algerian society, reflected in political organization and cultural structure.

Political organization plays a crucial role in driving social change. It reaches its lowest level in hunting and gathering societies, where political authorities capable of mobilizing groups and directing their efforts are absent. In other types of societies, actors such as leaders, kings, and governments assume a crucial role in shaping the developmental paths that society may follow. Political systems are not merely reflections or expressions of underlying economic structures; different political systems may arise in societies with similar modes of production. For example, some industrial capitalist societies have produced authoritarian political systems, while democracy has appeared in others. Military power has constituted a fundamental force in most traditional states. However, the relationship between military power and the production level is not straightforward;

rulers may choose to allocate resources toward building military strength even at the expense of impoverishing the population.

The second key factor in social change consists of cultural factors, encompassing religious beliefs, communication systems, and leadership. Religion may act as a conservative force and a catalyst for innovation in social life. Some religious beliefs and practices have played a restraining role in change by mainly highlighting the necessity of adhering to traditional values and rituals. However, as Max Weber stated, certain religious beliefs often mobilize energies and enhance pressures toward social change, under the guidance of religious leaders who play a central function in this transformative process.

Urban life, or city life, affects the family in terms of structure, authority, marriage, childbirth, and traditional family roles such as upbringing and social control. Concerning structure and size, the city includes industrial and commercial institutions that employ migrants based on their skills and abilities, regardless of gender or lineage, unlike rural areas. Furthermore, the city enables families to move up or down the social and economic ladder. It encourages individuals to move horizontally (geographically), changing their residence according to job opportunities, in contrast to rural areas, where individuals are tied to a specific piece of land and a particular social environment. This dynamic pushes family relationships toward individualism, leading to smaller family sizes. Members of families who migrate to the city may live in dispersed neighborhoods influenced by work, housing, and education or in neighboring cities. As a result, family size tends to shrink despite some members' efforts to maintain their traditional kinship bonds. This is particularly noticeable in underdeveloped areas surrounding large cities, especially in shantytowns where extended families of rural origin still exist. These families maintain their original character and relationships for a certain period but gradually adopt a more individualistic nature over time.(Al-Suwaidi, 1990, p. 90).

What reinforced this tendency was that Algeria witnessed a rapid and significant economic and social structure shift since the mid-1980s. It moved from a socialist economic model marked by a developmental social organization establishing large institutions, particularly heavy industrial bases. These institutions offered many job opportunities, absorbed unemployment, and satisfied the basic needs of society under the slogan

"for a better life." During this period, a social logic of equality emerged, viewing any form of social discrimination negatively. As part of economic policy changes, the state gradually began withdrawing its support from public economic and social institutions while fostering the private sector and significant domestic and foreign investments. Due to local and international circumstances, Algeria quickly adopted a market economy policy known as the free economy. These economic choices led to dependence on a group of technocrats to oversee the implementation of the ambitious development project used by the ruling elite. However, the elite interests of the technocratic groups allied with the bureaucracy resulted in a reversal of developmental priorities; instead of building a modern and advanced state, a system known as state capitalism emerged. As a result, the development project was stripped of its true purpose: to serve society instead of benefiting the ruling political elite, who gained control over oil revenues. This situation justified the elite's insistence on utilizing repression against any opposing social movement or force that suggested a political, social, or economic project competing with or threatening their economic interests.

Regarding the authority within rural families that have migrated to the city, in rural society, authority was traditionally tied to values, customs, and traditions, where power often centered on the elders. In urban society, however, authority is linked to economic status and social, political, and educational standing, among other factors. Moreover, the status of women has changed, as authority within the family is no longer focused solely on the husband's hands due to women entering the workforce.

Some studies in Arab societies have demonstrated that transformations in political, economic, and other domains have had considerable social effects. Modernization and development have led to the decline of the extended family model in pastoral and agricultural societies due to industrial environments and urban life. The nuclear family has appeared as the dominant pattern in industrial societies, where maintaining extended families is difficult, if not impossible, under the new circumstances. For instance, a study by Kenza Al-Alawi Al-Marani on the Moroccan family states that the Moroccan family is evolving and diverse, encompassing extended families, nuclear families, "others representing remnants of extended and nuclear families, democratic nuclear families, and other forms that are difficult to categorize."(Al-Marrani, 1987, p. 387).Social transformation has several causes, as political, economic, and security

fluctuations directly impact social structure and organization. Among the most impactful drivers of social change are wars and security disturbances, which create a new social reality where relationships are disrupted, roles and statuses become unstable, organizational structures weaken, and the overall social fabric is changed. Migration also affects demographic composition, influencing development, social activity, and stability. Algeria witnessed this phenomenon by migrating rural and village populations to overcrowded cities, which led to changes in development programs tailored to the new urban reality. Depending on circumstances and available resources, social transformation may impact specific sectors, such as education, employment, or social services. Following independence, Algeria experienced considerable transitions, especially in employment and education.

Therefore, an individual originating from a traditional society undergoes profound changes affecting rural beliefs, such as the status of women, whether as sisters or wives, who had a different role and were under male authority in rural areas. However, the urban environment has opened new opportunities for women to work and study. This new situation is unlikely to be accepted easily by those deeply rooted in rural traditions and who find adapting to the new society difficult. Consequently, individuals may withdraw and find refuge in religious references, utilizing them as justification to oppose first the family situation and later the broader social situation.

Conclusion

This study on the sociology and historical evolution of tribal structures in rural Algeria demonstrates a long and complex social trajectory characterized by the interaction between traditional tribal organization and the requirements of the modern state. The Algerian countryside, as the broadest arena for shaping national identity, has undergone profound economic, social, political, and cultural transformations that have reshaped the consciousness of peasants and local communities and redefined the relationship between the individual, the tribe, and the state.

The research paper reveals that the tribal structure was never a closed or static system, as often assumed, but rather a flexible one penetrated by multidimensional relations, religious, security-related, class-based, and cultural that evolved according to historical and political contexts. French

colonialism endeavored to dismantle the tribal fabric through systematic administrative and economic policies aimed at controlling both land and people. However, these policies did not entirely eradicate tribal ties; instead, they reemerged in new forms adapted to the conditions of occupation and resistance. Thus, the countryside became a center of early national consciousness, as illustrated by major rural uprisings such as the Mokrani Revolt of 1871.

In the post-independence period, rural Algeria witnessed a different stage with the Agrarian Revolution of 1972, an ambitious project intended to modernize the rural economic and social structure. It sought to eliminate backwardness and ensure a fair distribution of wealth under the slogan "Land to those who work it." Yet, despite its reformist intent, this policy carried internal contradictions, as in some areas it reproduced old patterns of domination through local elites and party bureaucracies. As a result, the countryside remained caught between administrative centralization and traditional loyalties.

The study further indicates that the economic and political transformations Algeria underwent since the 1980s, with the collapse of socialism and the rise of the market economy, produced fractures within rural society. Migration to cities redrew the social map, leading to the breakdown of extended families in favor of nuclear ones and to the decline of paternal authority in favor of economically independent individuals. These transitions generated a new consciousness rooted in individualism and self-interest, but also deepened the sense of marginalization in rural areas, reviving forms of protest and both symbolic and physical violence as means of expressing social demands.

Culturally, the study concludes that patriarchal norms remain dominant in rural Algeria, where women continue to occupy subordinate positions and men retain control over decision-making and authority. Religious and customary values play a crucial role in reproducing this social order, as religion has often been employed to justify and perpetuate existing hierarchies across generations. However, signs of change have begun to appear with the spread of education and employment opportunities in rural areas, opening space for a redefinition of gender roles within families and communities.

At the political level, the analysis shows that the post-independence state aimed to integrate the countryside into its political project through agricultural and party organizations, considering rural loyalty necessary to regime stability. Nonetheless, such loyalty was not always consistent; the rural population maintained a dual relationship with the state, one of formal allegiance and another of cautious distance, rooted in a historical memory of conflict with centralized power.

Finally, the study asserts that rural Algeria is no longer the marginal space it was once perceived to be. It constitutes a basic element in understanding social and political transformations in modern Algeria. Migration, education, agrarian reform, and development policies have all contributed to shaping a new countryside oscillating between continuity and change, tradition and modernity. Therefore, any comprehensive understanding of contemporary Algerian society remains incomplete without analyzing the dynamics of the countryside as the foundation of its social, cultural, and political development.

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