

## **The Touat (Adrar) society and socio-cultural change**

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### **Abstract:**

In this article, we discussed the Touat society (Adrar) in the past and how the population of the region lived according to cultural and social frameworks regarding social relations, family structure, and the role of the tribe and the religious school (zawiya) in exercising authority and education. We explored the factors and causes of changes and transformations in these relationships that prevailed for centuries and were replaced by cultural and social frameworks in line with the modernisation of society through modern bureaucratic organisations, education and technological development.

**Keywords:** Society, Touat, change, social, cultural

### **Introduction:**

When we talk about the society of the Adrar, we are referring to the regions that make up this southern province (Touat, Tidikelt), which are

characterised by their socio-cultural peculiarities that have created a mosaic that has fused into what is known as Touat society. The region is located in the south of Algeria, 1600 km from the capital Algiers, bordering the Gourara region to the north and the Tidikelt region to the south.

The Adrar society, like other societies, has undergone profound changes affecting all aspects of social and cultural life. This transformation, or change in relationships and roles, as well as the structure of authority, has evolved from the family, the tribe and the religious school to several social institutions, leading to a new reality characterised by its own peculiarities. However, this does not mean that we are talking about a traditional Adrar society and a modern one; rather, these transformations have not been radical, but are in a state of labour and attempt to reshape themselves in a way that adapts to the new reality.

It is worth noting, however, that the process of modernising the Adrar society has been somewhat forced upon it by the profound changes that Algerian society in general has undergone, based on bureaucratic organisations that have replaced the traditional institutions that have existed since ancient times, such as the zaouia and the tribe, among others. This is not to ignore other factors that have contributed to social change, such as technological development and the changes it has brought about in the structure of social relations. Here we will discuss the changes that have occurred in most of the institutions that make up this society.

## **1. The Tawati Family (Adrari) and the Manifestations of Role Change**

The Tawati family has been characterised for decades by its extended family structure. “Researchers, both Orientalists and Arabs, have traditionally described the Arab family as extended and patriarchal” (Halim Barakat, 2000, p. 361). In this structure, the role of the father is central to the authoritative relationships in which sons and their families live under the authority of the father. The network of relationships and family roles for each individual is marked by clarity, as both fathers and sons work outside the home in their gardens and fields to earn a living. Meanwhile, the role of women is to prepare food, raise children and manage the household. Mahmoud Faraj notes that “women had more opportunities than men to fill their free time, as many of them worked at home spinning and weaving carpets and cotton and wool clothes. If some did not have the means, they spent their time sitting on the roofs of their houses” (Faraj Mahmoud Faraj, 1977, p. 38).

Family relationships were structured hierarchically, with the father at the top of the pyramid, acting as the real leader of the family and controlling its affairs. All decisions were his responsibility and communication within the family was typically straightforward, often vertical - from top to bottom. The father delegated some of his authority in his absence to the eldest son, who acted as the heir to his power after the father’s death.

Mustafa Boutfenoucht defines the traditional Algerian family as “a social unit in which children and grandchildren do not leave the maternal family,

but form small married families that remain attached to the extended family and live under one roof” (Mustafa Boutfenoucht, 1986, p. 30).

Halim Barakat describes the Arab family as “a social and productive unit that serves as the nucleus of social and economic organisation, characterised by relations of solidarity, cooperation, affection and total commitment due to the necessities of interdependence; It is patriarchal in terms of the concentration of power, responsibilities and privileges, as well as in terms of lineage, and hierarchical, where, despite important changes, distinctions based on gender, age and authoritative upbringing remain significant, while at the same time expanding with a clear tendency towards nuclear and tribal forms” (Halim Barakat, 2000, p. 362).

One of the manifestations of family cohesion is the practice of many Tuareg families of living together under one roof after the death of the breadwinner, sharing efforts in honouring the deceased and caring for the mother. Many siblings in such situations live under the guardianship of their eldest brother, who manages the finances and distributes any inheritance left by their father. This arrangement clarifies his role, and the eldest brother often assumes the role of the father in managing family affairs and caring for younger orphans while protecting their rights (Ahmed Bousaid, 2012, p. 86).

However, the changes and transformations that have affected the Adrar family, as well as Algerian and even Arab families, have led to significant shifts in family structures, particularly in terms of power dynamics,

relationships and roles. “The image of the father, who used to make decisions unilaterally, is gradually receding within the contemporary social framework as the winds of liberation blow through social and family relations” (Mustafa Boutfnocht, 1986, p. 242). This has resulted in a division of roles between men and women, as well as in the distribution of authority and its manifestations.

This change is largely due to women’s education, which has opened up new horizons for them. In addition, families have become more exposed to the outside world, and globalisation has affected various aspects of life, including the family, by allowing its members to learn about other cultures. As a result, the Adrar family has changed in terms of the roles and relationships between its members, leading to a shift in the power structure. The father has become an advisor rather than an absolute authority, and women have gained varying degrees of power depending on their level of education and employment status.

Where once decisions were made solely for the children, they are now part of the decision-making process in this new context. The process of transformation has thus given a new shape to the Adrar family, with most families becoming nuclear households and thus achieving a degree of independence from the extended family.

## **2. Social relations in the Adrar community**

Islam played an important role in the lives of the inhabitants of the Adrar community, instilling in them values and teachings that fostered brotherhood and cohesion, despite the existing class divisions within society. In this context, Faraj Mahmoud Faraj noted the class structure of this community, stating: “Although the Tuareg community is class-based in its structure, the spirit of brotherhood and sympathy prevails among its members, along with their hospitality towards strangers and peaceful relations with their neighbours. This is due to the fact that the Tuareg community is a religious one in which Islam has instilled love and compassion in the hearts of its people, which is evident to anyone who visits the region or interacts with its inhabitants’ (Mahmoud Faraj, 1977, p. 35). He adds: “Because of the communal attitude and the traditions and customs they practise, which reflect all these characteristics, it often happened that poor families would run out of dates before the new harvest season. Wealthy families would rush to provide dates for the poor families. At the same time, the tribal chief would quickly collect additional donations to distribute to needy families, and this solidarity was not limited to the people of the same town, but extended to neighbouring areas” (Faraj Mahmoud Faraj, 1977, pp. 35-36).

This reflects the social solidarity within the Adrar community, which manifested itself in various forms of mutual support among its members. Individuals would express their joy and happiness when their date palms bore fruit by sharing their harvest with their neighbours, thereby

strengthening their social networks, which were characterised by a spirit of community. In such a close-knit environment, it was often difficult to distinguish between relatives and friends due to the abundance of affection and goodwill among them. Neighbourly relations were characterised by warmth, companionship and good neighbourliness.

The education of children was not the sole responsibility of the family provider; it extended beyond the walls of the home into the surrounding community. Socialisation often took place through interaction with other members of the community. In winter, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood or farm would gather around a fire, also known as a communal table, where they would bring all the necessary items to cook food and share it with all present, taking some home.

When disputes arose between individuals, they would be taken to the mosque hall where a reconciliation meeting would take place in the presence of a gathering of regular attendees. Conflicts would be resolved and grievances would be returned to their rightful owners without animosity or hatred. The mosque and its imam acted as the judge of the town, addressing and resolving grievances. This community was brought up to be hospitable to guests and to take care of their needs until they left the city. A well-known practice among them is “their hospitality to guests” (Faraj Mahmoud Faraj, 1977, p. 36), a fact noted by travellers passing through the region.

### **3. The Adrar community (pre-modern) and its class components**

This community was formed by the migration and trade routes between the North and the South. It experienced the settlement of incoming tribes, leading to the formation of a community that carried within itself customs, traditions and norms that distinguished it. Dr Faraj Mahmoud Faraj points out that from the Islamic conquest of the Maghreb until the 18th century, the Touat community began to form slowly and intermittently: Berbers, Arabs and Blacks. These three elements blended over time to form a unified group with common customs and traditions, as well as stable social and moral values derived from their purely Islamic origins (Faraj Mahmoud Faraj, 1977, p. 12).

It was essential to understand the prevailing class system that defined the network of social and authority relationships within the Adrar community, as well as the social roles that shaped the direction followed by all members of the community. Faraj Mahmoud Faraj also explained this class system in his work, highlighting the specific characteristics of each class, namely: the class of the Ashraf (nobles), who are linked to the Prophet's family, who protect religion, who own gardens and orchards, and whose approval is sought by all. There is also the class of the free people, descended from pure Berber and Arab parents; most of them work in trade and have concubines, from whom half of the free people are born. The third class is called the "Harthaniyin", who worked in trades and jobs that the free people refused to do. At the bottom of the class hierarchy

were the slaves, both men and women, who performed hard labour such as digging wells, farming and herding (Faraj Mahmoud Faraj, 1977, p. 13).

This class structure is formally present, but its practices have changed due to education, class consciousness and bureaucratic organisations that have transformed the prevailing social structures.

#### **4. The structure of power in the Adrar community before modernisation**

##### **4.1 The tribe and authority:**

Because the tribes and individuals settled in a single geographical area, the Touat developed an administrative system based on their ancient tribal structure. Tribal chiefs became the leaders of towns, palaces and districts, and the tribal council evolved into a town council. Here we present the key positions and figures that contribute to the administration of the region. These positions include

- Chief of the District: Considered the chief of the region, the chiefs of the Timantit district held this position until the early 18th century, when the chiefs of the Timmy district took control as it became the strongest of the Touat districts. The chief's powers included receiving delegations and he had considerable influence as he represented the most powerful Touat tribes.

- Community council: Composed of prominent individuals and aides to the chief, its responsibilities included judging the accused and imposing punishments.
- The Waqf: This individual served as the town's police and intelligence officer.
- Water Distributor: This role was similar to that of a town engineer and was responsible for allocating water shares from the qanat system.
- Herald: The town's announcer, who informed the inhabitants of all events in the town.
- Mosque Steward: Responsible for conducting religious rituals, overseeing and managing the Waqf's property and funds.
- Imam of the mosque: Conducts religious ceremonies, leads prayers five times a day, and educates the city's children.
- Muezzin: Called for prayers and maintained the cleanliness of the mosque, among other duties (Faraj Mahmoud Faraj, 1977, pp. 28-31).

The Touat region had an organisational structure that corresponded to the administrative possibilities available at the time and facilitated the division of labour among its members. The tribe always played a prominent role, with its leaders occupying various positions. The strength of the tribe gave legitimacy to the exercise of power. The tribe was instrumental in bringing other tribes under its authority, either voluntarily or by force, as Ibn

Khaldun noted in his introduction. However, the authority of the tribal chiefs has diminished in modern Adrar society, becoming a nominal authority that occasionally appears during specific events, with its influence no longer exerting the strong control it once did.

#### **4.2 The Zawiyas and Authority:**

In this context, the educational and intellectual role played by the zawiyas (Islamic religious schools) cannot be overlooked. Touat is regarded as a scientific beacon whose influence extended as far as sub-Saharan Africa. Mahmoud Faraj emphasises this in his research, noting that Touat was a centre of knowledge in the middle of the vast desert, and that Touat merchants were instrumental in providing knowledge and education to the desert cities, in addition to their commercial activities. Faraj adds that most of the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya zawiyas established in Sudanese cities were related to the activities of Touat merchants and their efforts to spread their religious teachings there (Faraj Mahmoud Faraj, 1977, p. 15).

The 12th century Hijri period (18th century AD) was characterised by a proliferation of zawiyas and public Qur'anic schools throughout the region, along with private libraries, teaching circles and the movement of writing, copying, commentaries and scholarly licences. It is impossible to isolate this temporal aspect from its links with the scientific centres of the northern Maghreb and the southern Sahara, such as Tlemcen, Fez, Sijilmasa, Tunis, Kairouan, Tripoli, Bejaia, Algiers, Timbuktu, and others (Ahmed Bousaid, 2012, p. T).

The role of the zawiyas was evident both locally and regionally; they represented scientific and educational centres and points of spiritual enlightenment. They served as places of learning, hospitality, sources of religious rulings and judgments, conflict resolution, marriage contracts, and the strengthening of community ties. They clearly supervised the lifestyle of the inhabitants of the kasbah in all social, economic and cultural aspects (Mohamed Abdel Karim, 2016, p. 28).

The term ‘zawiya’ is derived from the verb ‘inzawa’, which means to go to a secluded place to avoid mingling with people, or to limit such mingling so as not to be distracted by anything other than what one is contemplating - such as prayer, remembrance, supplication, recitation of the Qur’an and reading of religious texts (Saleh Bouslim, 2010, pp. 98-120).

Some historical studies, particularly those carried out by French officers who worked in Algeria in the so-called Arab offices, highlight the religious, social, political and military role played by the zawiyas. In particular, their primary role in education and the regulation of society according to Islamic principles stands out. Among these historians is the officer Louis Rein, who describes the zawiyas as a religious structure endowed with power, serving as an instrument of social action that exerts its influence on the communities that accept it. The zawiyas serve as a space for the religious leaders of Islam in Algeria and are characterised by their independence from the centres of authority, even before the arrival of the French occupation. They have social authority on various issues and

are the nucleus or structure that links tribal and rural life. In his book entitled *\*Marabouts et Khouanes\**, which deals mainly with the zawiyas, he shows their subordination to the authority of the marabout, who inherits the religious prestige and status he calls *\*le prestige religieux\** of a sheikh or influential saint in the region (Rajem Mohamed El-Kamal, 2015, p. 20).

In the traditional Adrar community, after the settlement and bonding of the tribes, there was a need for a power structure capable of imposing social regulation on its members. These traditional authoritative practices dominated the Adrar community for many decades, making it difficult to replace or change them in a short period of time.

The community's and its leaders' perspectives on modern bureaucratic organisations and their associated behaviours were met with suspicion and mistrust, leading to an unspoken struggle against anything new within the community.

Traditional organisations perceive modern bureaucratic structures as having usurped the authority they once enjoyed. As a result, fear of the encroachment of these new entities and the imposition of their logic on society has entered the minds of their adherents, leading to a loss of confidence in traditional organisations among community members. Individuals have begun to declare their loyalty to modern organisations, seeing them as the basis of rationality and solidity in their classification. This shift attempts to exclude the old cultural frameworks that gave

authority to some on the basis of various affiliations such as tribe, lineage or other considerations.

Thus, traditional organisations have sought to regain their authoritative and leading roles, even by infiltrating modern organisations, particularly in terms of decision-making power. Here we highlight the most significant bureaucratic organisation that has emerged in the Adrar community in the last decade: Ahmed Draia University. This institution was set up with the aim of bringing the university closer to the Adrar students, saving them the trouble of travelling elsewhere in search of academic knowledge. However, the establishment of this university inevitably led to a different social reality. Its creation changed many concepts within Adrar families, such as the participation of women in university education, which had previously been a challenge for many. This change also led to new behaviours associated with this newfound opportunity. Traditional institutions such as the *zawiyas* were faced with the challenges of educational and social control that they had previously exercised, in contrast to a modern educational institution with similar roles and practices.

### **Conclusion:**

Sociocultural change is a necessity driven by the demands of life. Social structures and cultural frameworks are subject to changes in political, economic, technological and educational systems. The Touat community, like others, is evolving in response to these factors, moving from a

traditional society with its distinctive cultural and social frameworks to an emerging modern society. Social, family and class relations have changed, as has social and occupational mobility, and even education, which used to be the sole preserve of the Zawiyas. This process is now being shared with modern organisations that perform similar functions using contemporary methods.

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