

## FIGHT THE BORDER: KABYLIA AS AN EXAMPLE

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### **Abstract**

“Fight the border: the example of Kabylia” is the title of this article which examines a question rarely dealt with in the academic field of political science because it involves exploring the region (Kabylia) as being a revealer of state thinking. Thus, fighting for community identity appears for the common sense, as an ambiguous desire to achieve a regionalist and /or nationalist affirmation. The purpose of this article is to highlight the nature, conditions and social, geographical, historical and political specificities of Kabylia as a distinct region. It is a way to clarify the cause-and-effect relationship that permanently links with “the Kabyle myth”. Also, it is a question of showing, through the example of Kabylia, how the regional peculiarity can contribute to discover the importance of the internal territorial limits in the collective unconscious of the group and to understand their impact in the political field.

**Keywords:** region, border, countryside/city, common identity, myth, Kabylia, Berber, minority

### **Résumé**

« Lutter la frontière: l'exemple de la Kabylie » tel est l'intitulé de cet article qui s'interroge sur une question rarement traitée dans le champs académique des sciences politiques du fait qu'il s'agit d'explorer la région (la Kabylie) comme étant un révélateur de la pensée d'Etat. Ainsi, lutter pour l'identité communautaire parait au vu du sens commun, une volonté ambiguë de réaliser une affirmation régionaliste et/ou nationaliste. L'objectif de cet article est de souligner la nature, les conditions et les spécificités sociales, géographiques, historiques et politiques de la Kabylie en tant que région distincte, et d'éclaircir la relation de cause à effet qui la rattache en permanence et jusqu'à nos jours avec « le mythe kabyle ». Aussi, il s'agit de montrer, à travers l'exemple de la Kabylie, comment la particularité régionale peut contribuer à découvrir l'importance des limites territoriales internes dans l'inconscient collectif du groupe et de comprendre par la suite leur impact dans le champ politique.

**Mots-clés:** région, frontière, campagne/ville, identité commune, mythe, Kabylie, Berbère, minorité

### **Rezumat**

“Lupta cu frontiera: exemplul lui Kabylia” este titlul acestui articol care examinează o problemă rar abordată în domeniul academic, deoarece implică explorarea regiunii (Kabylia) ca fiind un dezvăluitor al gândirii de stat. Astfel, lupta pentru identitatea comunității apare pentru bunul simț, ca o dorință ambiguă de a realiza o afirmare regionalistă și/sau naționalistă. Scopul acestui articol este de a evidenția natura, condițiile și particularitățile sociale, geografice, istorice și politice ale regiunii Kabylia ca regiune distinctă.

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Este o modalitate de a clarifica relația cauză-efect care se leagă permanent de “mitul Kabyle”. De asemenea, este vorba de a arăta, prin exemplul Kabylia, cum particularitatea regională poate contribui la descoperirea importanței limitelor teritoriale interne în inconștientul colectiv al grupului și la înțelegerea impactului lor în domeniul politic.

**Cuvinte cheie:** regiune, graniță, rural/oraș, identitate comună, mit, Kabylia, Berber, minoritate

## **Introduction**

Kabylia has been, even today, known and recognized throughout Algeria and beyond, as an effervescence political area. Its political history perfectly reflects its constancy since the colonization, illustrated especially by “the Kabylia myth” which is the product and the reproducer of this political use of this region.

To this, Kabylia holds a significant share as a distinct region in the social and political national imagination, as well as in the political history of the Algerian National Movement.

After the independence of Algeria, Kabylia was also distinguished by some political events such as those of 1963, 1980 and 2001, it continues to be considered religiously warm and historically democratic, which reminds us its relation to the imagery of the “Kabylia myth” of the 19th century.

Despite all these political, dramatic and emblematic facts at the same time, the bibliography on Kabylia shows us that Kabylia remains in the field of scientific studies, and it is very invested by anthropological, ethnological and literary disciplines including a literature of political activism but it has been a very little research subject in political sciences and even to a lesser degree in sociology.

So, the question arises; if the particularity of Kabylia is important to the point of marking the political history of Algeria, how can the kabyle example contribute to discover the importance of the territorial boundaries (regional borders) inside the same country, and in what can it be useful to understand the socio-cultural impact of the borders in the collective unconscious and its effects in the political field?

### **1. A symbolic border: Kabylia “isolated”**

It seems easy to think about the region while talking about Kabylia, but in the collective unconscious it would be more obvious to situate Kabylia in the dark heights of this region (Bourdieu 1980, 63-72) known by the Djurdjura massif; almost all the scientific production on Kabylia actually

explores its deepest, most mountainous, most rural, most distant, and most traditional part, in a word; its purest part.

In this case, to evoke Kabylia is to summon the part of the periphery closest to the center of the country, that practices the least exchange of symbolic resources possible with the Arabs.

This geographical isolate of Kabylia has nourished over time and continues to nurture a model of social conduct qualified as a minority. A self-contained model, solidified by the preservation of language, rites and social practices, and by the faithful transmission of customs and traditions, an involuntary desire to penetrate even more into singularity.

In this context, Mireille Meyer has shown in her analysis of the regional culture, the importance of the historical dimension in the process of capitalization of local particularism which favors over time the perpetuation of the regional cultures, by nourishing continuously the regional consciousness which will develop the regionalist movements (Meyer 2003, 409-416).

## **2. The bibliographic history of Kabylia**

This article is in part about the genesis of Kabylia as a distinct region, both in the writings of observers, travelers or scientists and those of scientists inside and/or outside of Kabylia.

Kabylia represents a massif of mountains that extends from “Cap Djennat” to “Yemma Gourraya” in Bejaia, and Djurdura to the south of the “Sebaou Valley”.

The traces of human presence and activity in this Berber mountains range date back to prehistory, as historians and linguists attest, based on various archaeological discoveries and several Libyan inscriptions (Chaker, Hachi 2000, 95-111).

The Kabyle’s contact with other people’s remains marked throughout history by terminology; the Berbers was the appellation given to them by the Greeks and Romans then inherited later by the Arabs to designate the other, the different to “us” the civilized, ethically and aesthetically.

In addition, the Berbers have ended up not using this term to designate themselves, because it excludes them from the concept of sharing, and opt for the name “Amazigh”, which means the freemen.

This new self-designation represents for some the basis of a political strategy for the identity claim of a “closed” social group in order to define others according to its desires and interests. A group already determined by

real historical, social, linguistic or other facts. A thesis that will be pushed and supported later by a colonial or a pseudo-scientific speech.

For historical reasons related to the world of publishing and writing in the Maghreb society, Ibn Khaldoun represents the first and the principal author who had given an incomparable scientific description of the history of the Maghreb.

Ibn Khaldoun inspired De Slane with the idea of the translation of his monumental work (Ibn Khaldoun, 1852-1856), a founding question in the political ideological orientation, interested by the colonial political science, animated throughout the colonial period by the writings of French soldiers whose the work of Hanoteau and Letourneux on the customary law of the Kabyle people, or the historical study of the great Kabylia of Daumas and Fabar, or even Emile Masqueray, a travel enthusiast, who describes the Kabylia of Djurdjura during his career as a teacher in Algeria and who memorized the impressions of his trip to the Kabyle land, “discovered” with the recommendations of his friend General Wolff.

The studies of French military about Kabylia had constituted a beginning of a wide margin of the French literature on this region and the North African Berber world in general as clearly asserts by the example of Camille Lacoste Dujardin; “the ethnologist specialist of Berber culture (Kabyle one), collected, translated and realized a great number of Kabyle tales, produced more than 150 scientific articles and about fifteen books on this theme, and published a dictionary of Berber culture in Kabylia” (Lacoste-Dujardin 2005).

These writings undoubtedly respond to “scientific” and / or political concerns, in any case an ideological instrumentalization of science in favor of the implementation of policy colonization.

### **3. The Kabyle myth and colonial politics**

If the Kabyle myth (Barthes 1957, Ageron 1976, 331-348) spread during the colonial period, it would be very interesting to wonder if France really was capable of such a creation.

While colonization politicized the differences between Arabs and Kabyles, the myth needed to refer to a real basis. This is how France drew on the visible characteristics of the Kabyle people (white skin, blue eyes, indigenous, hard-working, non-practicing...) to oppose them to the Arabs (dull skin, black eyes, invaders, lazy, practicing... etc.) (Ageron 1976, 331-348).

Appealing to the history of the ancient Maghreb seemed at the time of great utility; the process of Islamization, especially of Arabization, had favored the isolation of the Berbers called by the French “kbaili” in other words, isolated tribes in the mountains. This name eventually turned in time to an ethnic sense, to designate the ethical and aesthetic opposition between Kabyle and Arab people instead of opposition periphery (countryside) / center (city) (Lalmi 2004, 507-531).

In his article published in the historical review in 1960 (Ageron 1960, 311-352), Charles-Robert Ageron had clearly underlined the various actions of the colonial power in Kabylia in his military management at the beginning, then civil thereafter in terms of finances (tax), education (the French school), religion (actions of Jesuits and white fathers) and agriculture (dispossession of land).

The analysis provided by Ageron on all these actions in particular in terms of education and the French school (Colonna 1975), does not exclude the idea of a French political will towards Kabylia, but at the same time does not affirm any aspect that could qualify it as a regional policy. At the time, France did not develop the need for a local policy in Algeria but rather needed a colonial policy.

#### **4. For a reinvention of a common identity**

What is nowadays referred to the Kabyle myth is not a scientific or a political continuation of Ibn Khaldun’s mind and theory. It is the product of a colonial political will aimed at creating a diversion around indigenous Islamic and national unity, more than the exposure of a supposed diversity and ethnic, linguistic and geographical plurality.

This particularity is conceived not as a cultural richness, but rather as an index of division, scattering and national fragmentation. It is the desire to create a sub-border in the border, a new “We” in the “indigenous us”.

Knowing that identity is built by rules of conduct between members of the closed group (but in interaction with other groups), the elements that animate the identity phenomenon showcase the cultural heritage of the group, customs and traditions, the values and the principles transmitted in history from a generation to another inside the same symbolic borders (Barth 1995, 205-248).

This is how Kabyle society (oral, rural, mountain, and traditional) process; it expresses itself much more orally with poetry generally. In this case, poetry represents the voice of the community and allows the community to

think and recall constantly in what unifies it, that's why the speech about the community (the group) has generally legitimacy. This way gives more legitimacy to the speech of on the collective and draws its arguments in all areas: religious, linguistic, historical, ethnic, and aesthetic.

However, this image and this ideological use of Kabylia, as a distinct entity, although it can be perceived as a political and scientific fiction, it remains nonetheless that it was able to know a beginning of realization and of "involuntary all" concretization on the ground, from the beginning of the post-World War II period.

The colonial instrumentalization of the Kabyle specificity gave birth to a duo but also to a political duel resulting from a magical and quite successful transformation of a stigma in an emblem, a shame in a pride in order to realize a double affirmation; regionalist and nationalist one. Showcase the "good wild", aims to enhance the collective speech and revive the speech of Berber autochthony in the French Algeria of that time.

This long-term work has left its mark in the history of the Algerian national movement conceived at the heart of the French immigration to fight against the French colonialism.

The Berber crisis of 1949 within the PPA-MTLD, badly perceived by the Algerian public opinion, represents until today the memory of a divergence between "Berberists" and Arabs.

These two groups constitute each one a current opposite to the other at the moment when the identity stakes of the future Algeria were ideologized favoring moreover the emergence of the thesis minority / majority between Kabyles and Arabs.

This thesis resurfaced almost every decade after the independence (this was the case in the spring of 1980 and 2001). This is how Kabyle sensitivity is born and developed in Algeria.

All the political complexity that the common sense, as well as most of the Kabylia essays, often uses a "di-vision" (a dual vision and a divided vision) between region and nation and between center and periphery (Sayad 1992, 135-181).

It is often not known that the problem cannot be summed as an opposition between a party and a totality or a minority and a majority. The difficulty remains to perceive at the same time the regional and the national belonging, not by opposition but rather by complementarity; it is hardly a handicap but more than anything, an important capital for a profitable cohabitation for all.

## 5. Towards an awakening of a trans-border Berber sensibility

The scientific interest that can be drawn from a research on the theme of Kabylia, is brought to the region as a revealer of what Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad have designated by the concept of the “thought of State” (Sayad 1996, 11-29).

In fact, it turned out that talking about the region and the minority is first and foremost talking about the State. This is why the subject of Kabylia seems to be more about the political sociology of the state than about anthropology or a regional ethnology.

If the Kabyle myth resurfaces on the political scene with force after the independence of Algeria, it is because it must be considered as a reality, not in its object but in its objective. It is therefore necessary to study the link that revives it permanently.

A. Sayad, in an article rarely quoted by anthropologists and still less by sociologists and political scientists, evokes this historical and “scientific” myth in a “Bourdieu” context and links it to the nature, social conditions and the geographical, historical and political Algerian emigration specificities of the Kabyles to France. This is how Sayad linked the Kabyle myth to the phenomenon of emigration by a cause-and-effect relationship (Sayad 1994, 6-11).

This summary painting allows us to understand both the accusing theses of France for the political instrumentalization of Kabyle specificity in independent Algeria, and the mechanisms of the reproduction of the myth described by some as colonial even after fifty years of independence, taking into account the tolerance of the French political power that favored free expression and sheltered Berber activity in all its dimensions, starting with the oral heritage of the Kabyle song (Khellil 1979, 149-155) from “Taos Amrouche”, “Sheikh el Hassnaoui”, “Idir”, “Ait Menguelat”, to “Maatoub Lounes”, but also the development of Berber literary and Berber academic literary works, favored among others by the teaching of the Amazigh from January 1973 at the University of Paris VIII (Guenoun 1999, 34).

Added to this, the associative activity played a role of important sensitization in the medium of the immigration Kabyle in France (Khacer 2009).

So, the presence and the echo of the Berber fact expanded by the developed technology of the media, has produced a significant effect even outside the Algerian national political field. Thus the Berber community in Morocco did not escape the Kabyle cultural effervescence of the spring of

1980 and ended up drafting the Agadir charter in 1991, following an associative coordination demanding in turn the official recognition of the Berber language on the royal territory.

The strike of the 1994 schoolbag in Algeria which led to the creation of the HCA (High Comity of Amazight, linked directly to the presidency of the republic), the assassination of the singer “Maatoub” in 1998 and the death of “Massinissa Germah” in 2001 only widened the field of action and reaction of the Berber belonging.

The feeling of belonging to the Berber community around the language and symbolic culture as the main vectors of any identity struggle, will know a new intensification with the events of the Arab uprisings of 2010. Events proceeded in April of the same year by the self-proclamation of a provisional government of Kabylie since Paris, formed by the MAK (movement of the autonomy of Kabylie).

Indeed, the Berber echo in Libya has alerted the world through an intense wave of media coverage. The image of Libyans revolted in battle dress with the Berber flag in hand, on the newspapers, insinuated the idea of the political identity struggle that the Berber sphere decided to lead in Libya after “Gaddafi”.

It also intensely reflected the image of the political and military struggle against a totalitarian regime which prohibited from its reign any Berber emblem or slogan.

These great moments of history obviously represent, perhaps involuntarily, a very good media opportunity to revive the Berber myth and remind the memories of the old ideological couple (Arab/Berber).

One of the journalists interested in the issue, supported the thesis of the new fight of the Libyans by quoting the words of a Libyan militant for the Berber cause:

we Berbers, we have suffered more than the Arabs of Gaddafi, we always have been designated as criminals...agents of the CIA, or secret services of France. Seif El Islam (son of the dictator) has just said on TV that Berbers want to come to Tripoli to kill Arabs ... (Portes, *Le Figaro* 2011).

Admittedly, the recognition of the culture and Berber language knows only one way, that of democracy, diversity and the guaranteeing opposition able to keep a national political field animated by the variety of visions that it can create in time alternately. The only downside is the constant reappearance of the myth each time it is a Berber fact. Has it in turn become a mandatory path for the transition to plurality in the Arab Maghreb countries?



About that, it appears that this formula is not totally true or completely false, as long as mythical ideas feed public debates as much as the political sphere speeches. This leads to the conclusion that the magical idea of the Arab/Berber opposition has been transmitted by moral heritage in the national collective unconscious, which, on the contrary, until the Arab uprisings of 2010, has sufficiently demonstrated that it was not a part of the social reality.

The example of the militant cited above by the journalist of the Figaro newspaper, illustrates this idea explicitly, concluding his remarks by saying: “But we are all fighting, Berbers and Arabs, for a free Libya.”

It is true that the ethnographic exploration has been the excellent way to colonize the North of Africa, but in the same time it has provided explanations not totally true, but have been studied enough about the traditional nature, the behavior and the social conduct of the individuals who formed an ordered, coherent and homogeneous whole (Gellner 2003).

The actors of the historical opposition supposed between Arabs and Berbers weave a “magic” link and solidarity automatically triggered in front of the danger which could threaten its union.

The union was ensured since the birth of the colonial Berber myth, by the common destiny, the feeling of wanting to live together and to safeguard the notion of sharing under the same known and recognized borders in the national political field and by the international one.

Even if that idea may seem ambiguous, contradictory or even illogical, because it is about a social and political reality that allows two opposing ideas to coexist in harmony, a single explanation could satisfy the curious of this mystery: This is the pure nature of the myth, which makes it a creation, procreation and an eternal resurrection in time (Bourdieu 1980, 333-439).

From this general vision, to reach a reasonable explanation of the Berber specificity in the revolt of the Libyan people becomes possible. If Benghazi had located his political fight against Tripoli in a regional perspective, it is that to register in the advent of the history of the country by the Berber emblem has imposed *de facto*: it is the return to the equation of the local and the global.

The state weakened by events, amplified by the negative media image of Libya diffused around the world, has pushed back the feeling of belonging to the nation-state (The weakening of the state leads to its absence on its territory-(lack of electricity, schools, roads, security-, which is at the origin of the success of any opposition to power) (Moussaoui 2000, 28-37) and revitalized the elements of “retribalisation”, a concept used by ethnologists) (Amselle, M'bokolo 1985, 41).

This general rule will undoubtedly be valid in the opposite case, with the reinforcement of the State which owes itself first of all to itself and to whom one owes the mission and the duty to be strong (Durkheim 1991).

The scenario of Libya is not the same and does not differ too much from that of Algeria (Kabylia) or even that of Mali, upset by the coup d'état of Azawad (Touareg) in April 2012, although the trend Salafist movement of Malian Berber rebels premium on its ethnic component. This is revealed by the reading of political reactions on the international scene which, since September 2001, has developed certain sensitivity towards extremist Islamic political movements and is more interested in everything that comes under the religious.

## **Conclusion**

Having taken the lead in the Maghreb political path, the experience of Kabylia in Algeria represents a model of the magical combination of local and global, center and periphery, regional and national. Its deep history, derived from the Kabyle myth and the genesis of its colonial political instrumentalization, succeeded in reproducing it under the reign of the post-colonial state, which until the beginning of the 21st century could not (or don't want to) decipher the code of its destruction.

If it is customary to say that the resurrection is a new birth, we wonder until what point and how long will the resurrection of the Kabyle myth, be solidified and nourished by the emigration to France, compared at his first birth?

In any case, it is clear that the rise in the rate at which the world is changing and opening up on itself is accelerating the decline of the role of the state within its own borders. Something that fully supports the action of civil society that will undoubtedly take over, which will push to draw the borders again to better distinguish oneself from others, and enhance by expanding its own internal borders in a climate of competitiveness. It is a way of fighting to keep the group's interests for the group only but in a national context.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the emergence of other Berber factions in the Arab Maghreb after the Arab uprisings, probably help the Kabyles to realize that they are not the only ones concerned by the Amazigh in the Maghreb.

Freedom and democracy will in any case favor the opening of the group and will destroy regionalist membership in favor of a national identity with various constituents, or even probably for the benefit of an enlarged Maghreb identity.

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