

Adaptation Patterns of the Berbers in Morocco and Algeria: Julian Steward's Cultural Ecological Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the environment and humans is not one-way. How humans adapt to their environment affects the culture and environment that will be formed in the region. Berber which is one of the largest ethnic groups in the Middle East, especially North Africa, has a unique and diverse pattern of adaptation. This paper focuses on research on the adaptation pattern of the Berbers in the two regions with the largest populations, namely Algeria and Morocco. Viewed from the perspective of Julian Steward's cultural ecology, the Berber tribe which is synonymous with nomadic and herding habits is a form of environmental adaptation in the Sahara desert, while trading and farming is a form of adaptation of the Berber tribes who live and settle in the Rifs mountains in Morocco and some hilly valleys such as Kabylie , Aures, and M'azb in Algeria. The results showed that herding, nomads, exploring water holes in the desert, navigating the stars, making tents and clothes from wool and sheepskin were the result of the adaptation of the Berbers to the environment they inhabited.

Keywords: *Adaptation Pattern, Berber Tribe, Cultural Ecology*

ABSTRAK

Hubungan antara lingkungan dan manusia tidak satu arah. Bagaimana manusia beradaptasi dengan lingkungannya mempengaruhi budaya dan lingkungan yang akan terbentuk di wilayah tersebut. Berber yang merupakan salah satu kelompok etnis terbesar di Timur Tengah, khususnya Afrika Utara, memiliki pola adaptasi yang unik dan beragam. Tulisan ini berfokus pada penelitian pola adaptasi berber di dua wilayah dengan populasi terbesar, yaitu Aljazair dan Maroko. Dilihat dari perspektif ekologi budaya Julian Steward, suku Berber identik dengan kebiasaan nomaden dan menggembalakan adalah bentuk adaptasi lingkungan di gurun Sahara, sedangkan perdagangan dan pertanian adalah bentuk adaptasi dari suku-suku Berber yang tinggal dan menetap di pegunungan Rifs di Maroko dan beberapa lembah berbukit seperti Kabylie , Aures, dan M'azb di Aljazair. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa penggembalaan, pengembara, menjelajahi lubang air di padang pasir, menavigasi bintang-bintang, membuat tenda dan pakaian dari wol dan kulit domba adalah hasil dari adaptasi berber terhadap lingkungan yang mereka huni.

Kata Kunci: *Pola Adaptasi, Suku Berber, Ekologi Budaya*

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INTRODUCTION

Berbers are an ethnic group native to North Africa whose existence predates modern Arab society. Today, many Berbers live in communities scattered throughout North Africa, especially in Morocco and Algeria. Although both countries have large Berber demographics, there are big differences between the respective political frameworks and the amalgamation of Berber identities (MacDonald, 2021). Berbers call their community the Amazigh Community which are scattered throughout the Maghrib. The Imazighen people (plural of Amazigh) are known as Berbers in North Africa and Tuaregs in the Sahara and Sahel. Some Amazigh activists reject the term Berber as a derogatory label rooted in the word “barbarian” meaning “outsiders”. They prefer the term Amazigh which means “free people” (Becker, 2009).

The Berbers range from the oasis of Shiva near the borders of Egypt and Libya to the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean and from the southern coast of the Mediterranean to areas north of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The two largest Berber populations are found in Algeria and Morocco. Roughly a quarter of the population in Algeria is estimated to be Berbers, while Berbers are estimated to make up more than three-fifths of the population in Morocco. In the Sahara of southern Algeria and Libya, Mali, and Niger, Berber Tuaregs number more than two million (Michael, 2019). Most cite the Berber population at around 25% in Algeria, particularly in mountainous areas such as Kabylia, the mountains of Aures (Chaouia) and M'zab which are the areas with the largest Berber population. Then about 45% in Morocco with the highest concentrations in the Rif area, the Atla Mountains, and the Souss Valley (El Aissati, 2005).

Morocco is located at the tip of Northwest Africa, not far from the European continent. Morocco's landscape is varied: rugged mountains lead to desert oases; the cobblestone streets of the medina anchor city centers; mud houses filled the countryside. Behind the walls of the Imperial cities and among village olive grove trails lies the rich and diverse Moroccan Amazigh culture and language. (Fishcher). While in Algeria, one of the largest Berber groups in Africa, the Kabylie have inhabited the mountainous landscape of Northern Algeria for centuries. Despite the significance of Kabylia and the mountainous region, during the French occupation and the struggle for Berber independence, many Kabyle communities migrated south to cities such as Algiers, where Berbers are estimated to make up more than 50 percent of the population. Apart from the

Kabylie, Berber populations are mostly found in the hill valleys of M'azb and Aures (MacDonald, 2021).

The environment is understood as the total network of life in which all species of plants and animals interact with each other and with certain characteristics. Humans are present in their environment not only as organisms related to other organisms in terms of their physical characteristics. Instead they introduce super-organic cultural factors, which also influence and are influenced by the entire network of life around them (Steward, 1969). Berbers (Amazigh) have cultural roots in the North African Maghreb (Forstag, 2008). Some survive by nomadic in desert areas, and the rest live and settle in hilly valleys and mountains.

So far, there is a lot of literature that discusses the Berber tribe from the perspective of socio-cultural, historical, and political identity because Berbers are very synonymous with matriarchal nomads and tribal freedom fighters. On the other hand, living with a desert landscape where there is no fertile soil, the Berber people have to adapt and initiate their adaptation pattern. This paper discusses the adaptation pattern of the Berbers in the two regions with the largest Berber populations, namely Algeria and Morocco from the perspective of Julian Stewart's cultural ecology. The purpose of this study is to find out how the Berbers adapt to their environment, which then forms the culture of the Berbers themselves.

METHODS

In this paper, research data are taken from several literatures on culture, history, lifestyle, and matters related to the Berber tribe in Algeria and Morocco. The collected data is then sorted to match the title and theme of this paper. Furthermore, the main data were analyzed using a descriptive analytical method which was viewed from the perspective of Julian Stewart's cultural ecology. The data obtained are not only described, but also analyzed, so this paper will explain how the Berber tribes in Algeria and Morocco adapt to their environment and how these adaptation patterns can shape Berber cultural identity.

Cultural ecology is defined as a methodological tool for ascertaining how environmental adaptation to its culture might create certain changes. In the concept, the environment not only allows or prohibits the technology used by the local community,

but the characteristics of certain communities may require social adaptation that has a wider impact. According to Julian Stewart, the three basic procedures for cultural ecology are, first; the relationship between technology and the environment. Second; patterns of behavior involved in the exploitation of a particular area through a particular technology. The third procedure is to ascertain the extent to which the behavioral patterns embodied in exploiting the environment affect other aspects of culture (Haenn & Richard, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Berbers as a recognized ethnic group have been around for more than 3,000 years. This long history has prompted many—Berbers and outsiders alike—to theorize about the primordial basis for Amazigh culture. There are several theories of Berber origin: 8th-century Arab conquerors believed that the local population were immigrants from ancient Palestine; Berbers themselves claim a common and direct lineage from the biblical prophet Noah (Forstag, 2008).

The Sahara was once a grassy forest which later human activities and climate change turned it into the vast desert we know today. The dry environment of the Sahara desert makes it impossible for the Berbers to create conservation in agriculture because plants are very difficult to take root there. Therefore, the Berbers chose to live as nomads rather than sedentary farmers. This lifestyle is at the core of their culture, and perhaps the real reason why they call themselves “free people” (Redd, 2019).

Adaptation Patterns of The Berbers in Algeria and Morocco

Berbers survive by raising herds of grazing animals and herding them from place to place. Herding is traditionally done by men, while women handle tasks such as weaving their trademark blue robes. Although they use many different animals including horses, the main animal for the Berbers is the camel. Unlike horses, camels can survive without water for a long time. The camel's resilience allowed nomadic Berbers to ride across the vast desert (Redd, 2019).

The arid environment has influenced them to create a navigation culture. Indeed, it is quite difficult to find your way through the sandy dune terrain of the Sahara Desert which has no distinctive features. Therefore, as sailors on the high seas did for thousands of years, Berbers navigated by the stars. In addition, the Berbers have many stories and songs that describe how to find small water holes and some of the landmarks that are in

the desert (Redd, 2019).

Berbers in Algeria mostly live in the M'zab, Kabylie, and Aures regions (Brown & Bellal, 2001). The M'zab settlements each occupy conical hills whose vertical axis is emphasized by the spiers that are high at the peaks. Whereas in the Aures valley, the construction of houses was a major event. Everyone is called upon and becomes thus involved in the mutual cooperation effort known as 'tuiza'.

The people of Kabylie village, which was built on top of a hill, separated by a well-ordered habitat, language, and social life, have a very developed sense of independence and group solidarity. To the north they were sedentary farmers, growing wheat in the highlands and fruit trees in the valleys. In the arid south, with its oasis of date palms, they are seminomadic, herding herds to the highlands during the summer. However, the differences between the two groups were limited, as the peasants in the north also worked as herders, and the seminomads in the south tended plots of land.

Berber housing suggests that environmental conditions may be more influential than socio-cultural factors. The traditional "thaddart" house in Aures is the result of human adaptation to climatic and social conditions as well as the availability of construction materials and knowledge of the techniques. The traditional Berber house is the product of a collective effort: the house is a shared story (Saada, 2019). Berber housing is generally made of clay, stone or brick. For nomadic Berbers, the tents used are made of wool and goat hair. Often large families have multiple residences on the property with walls around them so that they have areas for gardening, raising goats, and so on. But more families are living in separate homes more than ever.

While in Morocco, two-thirds of Berbers live in rural and mountainous areas, the vast majority being farmers. Berbers from Morocco today belong to three main communities; The northern Berbers live in the Rif mountains, the central Berbers live in the Atlas, and the southern Berbers live in the Anti-Atlas and Souss valleys (Mazas, 2000). Before independence in 1956, half of Morocco was Berber. Morocco's racial and cultural mix includes Berbers marrying Arabs and other African tribes. Many people wear Berber-style blue robes and sell carpets in Ourzazate, in the heart of the Morocco & Berber region.

Berber Relations, Environment and Culture

Berber herding culture with nomadic life can not be separated. This suggests that

the arid environment is perfect for camels (in particular), horses and goats. Therefore, the Berbers used to live by herding these animals. Viewed from the perspective of Julian Stewart's cultural ecology, herding which later became the distinctive culture of the Berbers was formed from the adaptation pattern of the Berber tribe in the desert area. In addition, the environment in the form of a desert with arid land makes the Berbers unable to settle there. Because the environment is not suitable as a place to live, the Berbers choose to be nomads. Thus, the Berber tribe is often known for its characteristic kabs, which is nomadic.

The nomadic Berbers made tents for shelter and rest out of wool and goat hair. According to Stewart's perspective, the Berbers tried to adapt to an arid environment and were suitable for goats. So, the materials that can be used from goats and several other animals are processed into tents, clothes, and equipment for survival. In addition, the desert region whose soil structure cannot be predicted, makes the Berber tribe unable to know the direction with certainty. Therefore, the Berbers initiated to navigate through the stars at night. Because they are used to living in the desert, another culture is formed from the Berbers, namely the culture of star navigation to determine the direction of the road. Berber culture influenced by their adaptation to the environment next is the discovery of water holes in the desert. The Berbers have their own way of finding them.

In Algeria, specifically the Kabylie, Aures, and M'azb areas, the people are known to have high solidarity so that in building houses they always prioritize the element of gotong royong. This culture of building a common house is formed on the basis of unity. According to the perspective of cultural ecology, this solidarity is formed from the adaptation of the Berbers to their environment, namely on top of the hills which are separated from other Algerian communities so that solidarity and independence can be formed properly. In addition, houses built using existing materials such as clay and bricks are also a form of adaptation of the Berber tribe. After the houses were erected, the Berber settlements were formed.

The Berber settlement as a whole is perched on a hillside, and can be found on an almost inaccessible peak. An important factor determining the location of the Shawia settlement in Aures was the lack of water and fertile soil. This forced the locals to build their villages on hills and cliffs to save land for agriculture, as well as to protect themselves from river flooding. In the Aures region houses are generally grouped in

hamlets and villages high in the mountains, erected there for defense purposes such as the Mena community (Saada, 2019).

Furthermore, the Berber tribes in Morocco, which are spread over several types of regions, have different customs. One of them is the northern Berbers who live in the mountains tend to choose to farm, some others are traders of carpets made from animal skins and wool. Viewed from the perspective of cultural ecology, the way the Berbers adapt to the mountainous environment by utilizing agricultural and herding products forms a distinctive Berber culture in the Moroccan region, namely farming and trading.

CONCLUSION

The Magrib region, which is the heart of North Africa, is mostly inhabited by Berbers, with the highest populations in Morocco and Algeria. Berbers, known as nomads and herders, are not only found in desert areas. Some of them lived and settled in the valleys of the hills of Kabylie, Aures, and M'azb. Several others lived and settled in the Rif Mountains, and the Souss Valley. With a desert environment, mountains, and hill valleys, the Berbers have their own way of adapting, including herding, nomadic, exploring water holes in the desert, navigating the stars, making tents and clothes from wool and sheepskin, and building houses together from existing materials, namely clay and bricks. This pattern of adaptation of the Berbers to their environment then forms the culture of the Berbers themselves. Thus, it can be concluded that the relationship between the Berber tribes in Algeria and Morocco with animals, plants, and the surrounding environment is not only one-way.

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